

**The Picture of Dorian Gray
by Oscar Wilde**

Publication

- Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was published simultaneously in Philadelphia's *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* and by Ward, Lock and Company in England, in July, 1890. In England, the novella was condemned by many reviewers as shocking and immoral.
- Wilde tried to address some of these criticisms as he worked on an expanded version of the story, which was published as a full-length novel in 1891, along with a preface in which Wilde stated his artistic credo.

Aesthetic Movement

- The novel is sometimes viewed as an autobiography of Wilde's life or as gothic melodrama.
- The ethics of the aesthetic doctrines clarify the books themes.
- Wilde was an outspoken proponent of the Aesthetic Movement, adopting the words of Walter Pater, “to burn with this hard gem-like flame to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life.”
- The French symbolists' ideas were more sympathetic to the Aesthetic Movement. Wilde borrowed the phrase “art for art's sake” from a French author of the time.
- Did Wilde reject the aesthetic doctrines himself? He added a preface to the 1891 book which stated the aesthetic principles in epigrammatic form, opposite to what the novel itself demonstrates.
- Extreme aestheticism cannot be lived, but neither can one live solely in reality.

The Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The artist is the creator of beautiful things. To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim. The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things. The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography.

Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault. Those who find beautiful meaning in beautiful things are the cultivated.

For these there is hope. They are the elect to whom beautiful things mean only Beauty.

There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book.

Books are well written, or badly written. That is all. The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.

The moral life of man forms part of the subject-matter of the artist, but the morality of art consists in the perfect use of an imperfect medium. No artist desires to prove anything. Even things that are true can be proved.

No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.

No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything.

Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art.

Vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art.

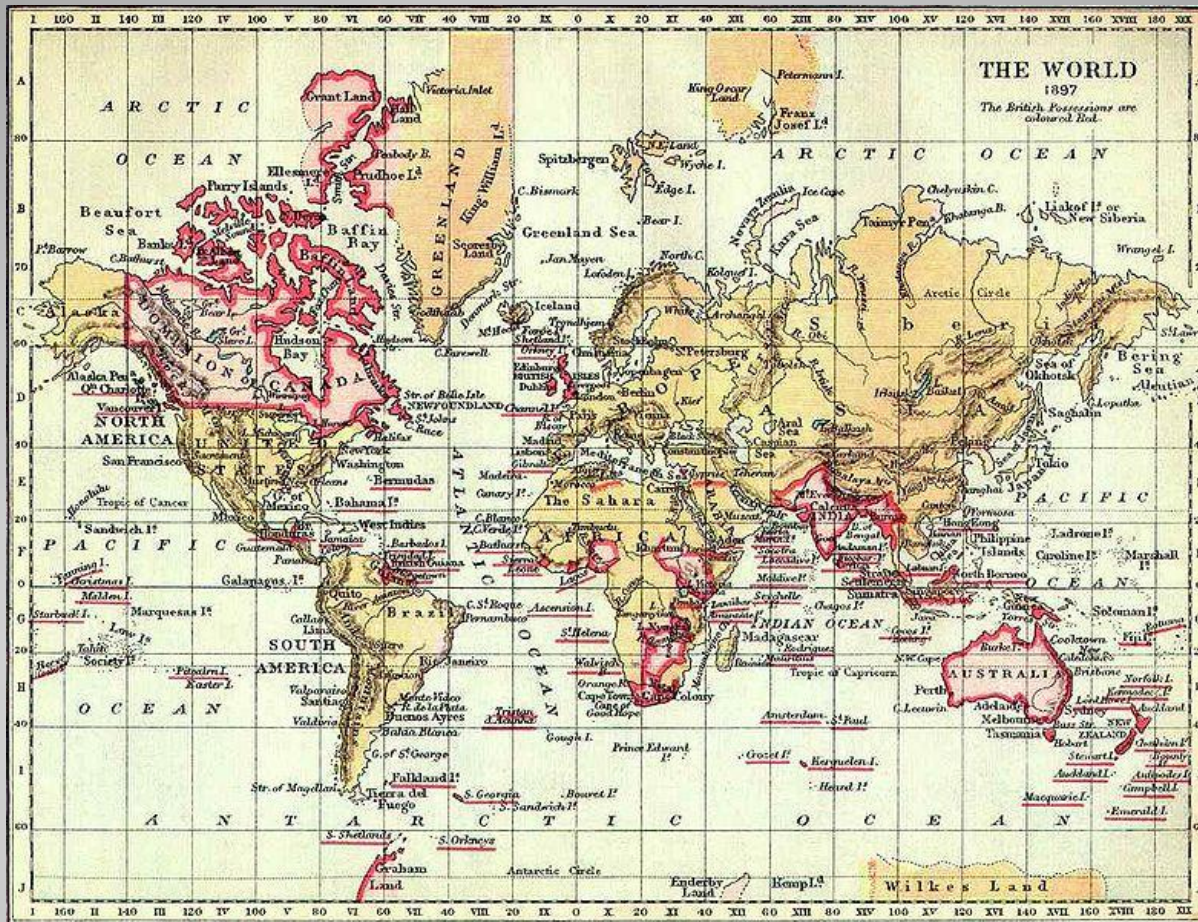
From the point of view of form, the type of all the arts is the art of the musician. From the point of view of feeling, the actor's craft is the type. All art is at once surface and symbol.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.

It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors. Diversity of opinion about a work of art shows that the work is new, complex, and vital.

When critics disagree, the artist is in accord with himself. We can forgive a man for making a useful thing as long as he does not admire it. The only excuse for making a useless thing is that one admires it intensely. All art is quite useless.



Historical Context: British Empire Colonialism (1897)

“In chapter 11 of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian's compulsive collecting of exotic artifacts from all over the world parallels the empire building that was taking place in Great Britain and being questioned by some during the late Victorian period.”

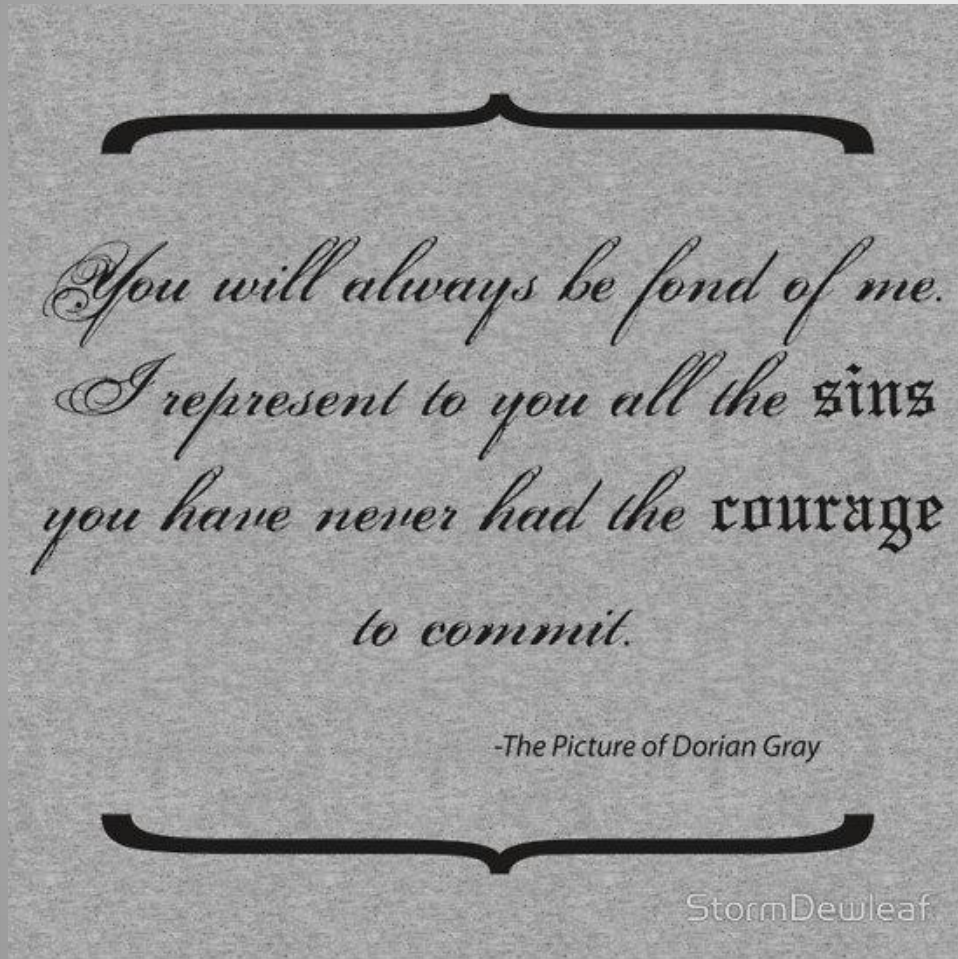
Quote: Platizky, Roger. "Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*." *The Explicator* 60.4 (2002): 202+. Literature Resource Center. Web. 12 Sep. 2012.

Photo: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:British_Empire_1897.jpg

Écrire un roman français / Writing a French novel

- England has a traditional novel-form with which even the greatest students of human comedy and tragedy square their work. In France there is no such tradition, with the result that the novel is a plastic form, molded in the most various ways by the most various minds. Wilde, always perfectly self-conscious, was not unaware of this difference between his own writing and that of most of his contemporaries.
- When *Dorian Gray* was attacked for immorality, Wilde wrote, in a letter to a paper: “My story is an essay on decorative art. It reacts against the brutality of plain realism.”
- *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was written for publication in a magazine. Seven chapters were added to it to make it long enough for publication as a novel.
- The preface was written to answer assailants of the morality of the story in its first form, and included only when it was printed as a book.
- These circumstances partly explain the lack of proportion, and of cohesion, that mars, though it does not spoil, the first French novel to be written in the English language.

The Picture of Dorian Gray in popular culture



- **Dorian Gray Syndrome (DGS)**
- denotes a cultural and societal phenomenon characterized by extreme pride in one's own appearance accompanied by difficulties coping with the aging process and with the requirements of maturation.
- Sufferers of Dorian Gray syndrome may be heavy users of cosmetic medical procedures and products in an attempt to preserve their youth.
- Dorian Gray syndrome is not recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV).
- Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dorian_Gray_syndrome

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Key Elements of Storytelling in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

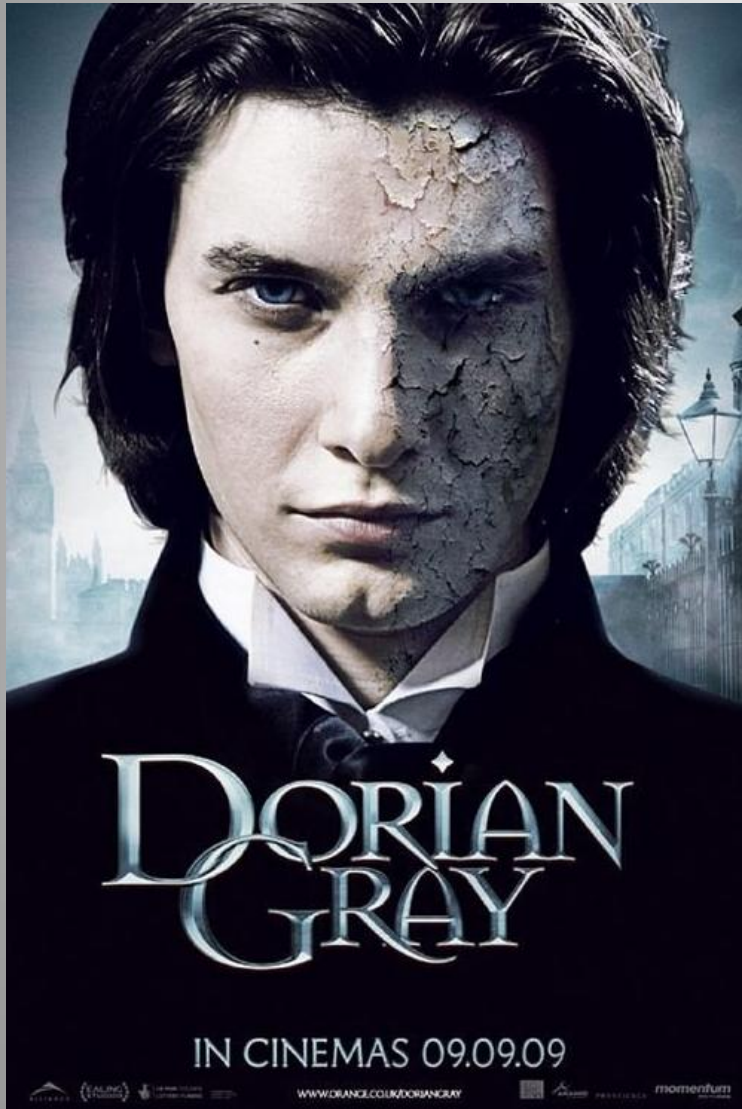
- Sybil's Fall
- Dorian's Arc
- Hedonism
- The Portrait
- Lord Henry as the Devil
- Opportunity for Salvation

1945's *Picture of Dorian Gray*



- Starring:
- Dorian: Hurd Hatfield
Lord Henry: George Sanders
Sybil: Angela Lansbury
- “I much prefer Albert Lewin's undervalued, black-and-white 1945 MGM version, with Hurd Hatfield's hypnotic, mask-like Dorian, and the portrait rendered in colour by the American hyper realist, Ivan Le Lorraine Albright.”
- Quote: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/sep/13/dorian-gray-film-review>
- Photo: <http://elizabethditty.com/2010/01/18/bringing-dorian-gray-to-film/>

2009 Film Adaptation

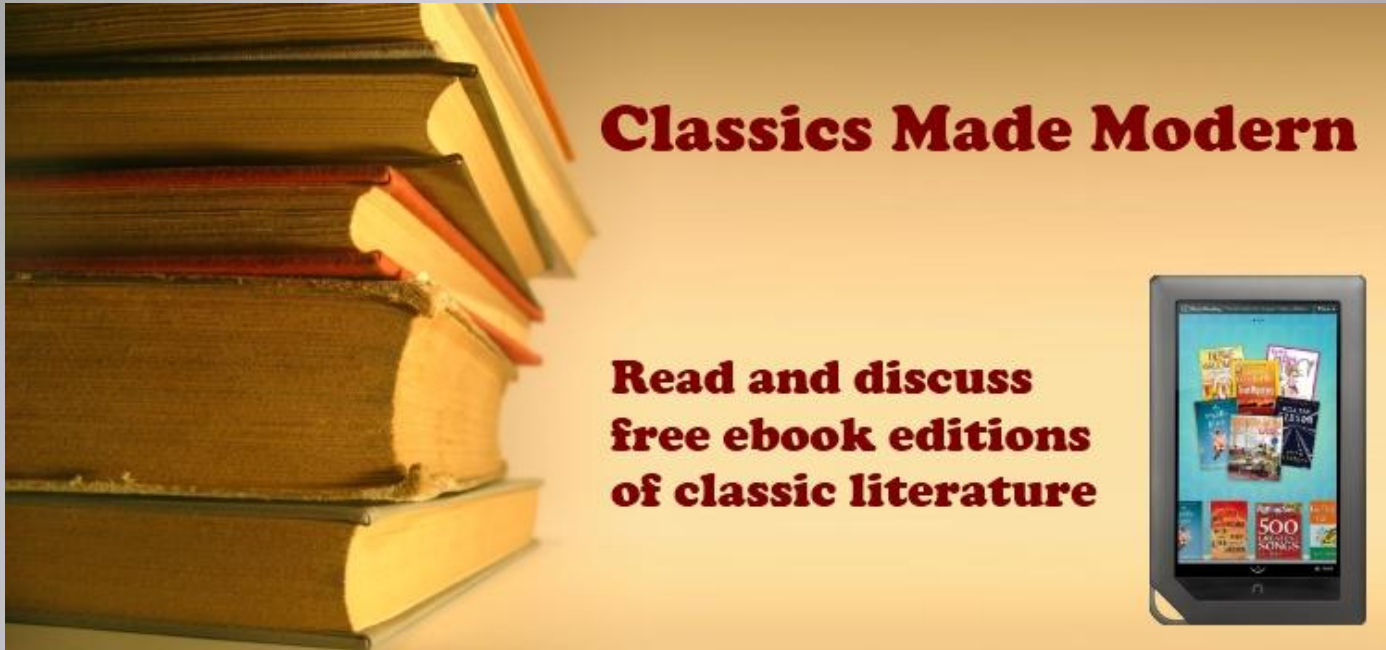


- Starring:
- Ben Barnes – Dorian Gray
- Colin Firth – Lord Henry Wotton
- “An impressive character piece that explores important themes ... as well as embellishing aspects of the original story that have never been fleshed out so elaborately.”
<http://www.comingsoon.net/news/torontonews.php?id=59218#2>
- “Depravity is better suggested than made explicit when it becomes vulgar, pornographic or comic, and possibly all three.”
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/sep/13/dorian-gray-film-review>
- “For me, 2009’s DORIAN GRAY has surpassed 1945’s THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY as the pre-eminent film version of Wilde’s novel. While the 1945 take is perhaps more faithful to the events of the novel, the 2009 version is a far more effective take on the heart of the novel. In the places where the 2009 version fails, it does so because it attempts to do more.”
<http://elizabethditty.com/2010/01/18/bringing-dorian-gray-to-film/>
- Photo: <http://www.imdb.com/media/rm44665088/tt1235124>

Relationship of the artist to his work



Actor Ben Barnes as Dorian Gray in the 2009 film adaptation



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