

## **Beauty; an Insidious Obsession**

What more can be said about *The Picture of Dorian Gray* than the fact it is a marvelous book? Although this is the only novel Oscar Wilde had ever written, I think by far this is one of the finest and most enchanting classic novels there are. I was completely in awe after reading it the first time and still too in awe to even start a review now.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* begins with an unusual look of a man –from another man’s eyes (Basil Hallward). I’ve never thought homosexual issues could be let out so openly into the world like how Oscar Wilde let it out. The fighting over Dorian between Basil and Lord Henry, Basil’s marks about Gray, and even the words of the story which are edited and put into the endnotes. All were shockingly wonderful. Also related to the endnotes, we can see that Wilde was a man of much knowledge. He retracted and inserted other people’s intellectual works in the book. What’s more is that I think the ingenious mind of Oscar Wilde is really reflected on the character of Lord Henry though he pictured Lord Henry as someone as empty as a barrel.

If a song once said, “if a picture paints a thousand words then why can’t I paint you? The words could never show the you I’ve come to know,” this really does not count the book along. Why? Because as we can read, Dorian Gray’s picture, literally, gives out millions and millions of words about him. The first day Basil paints it, the first day Gray brings it home, the first day people take their glances at it; it speaks to them as if it has a mouth telling them how great of a creature Dorian Gray is. At that time, there is no single person

that would not call him 'Prince charming' since his self-portrait was so beautifully enchanting.

As time goes by, the first-innocent mind of Gray is inflected by Lord Henry's views towards life –towards beauty. He said that beauty is the only thing that matters, and Gray eventually agrees with it and realizes that the portrait will live forever, and retain its beauty while he himself is left to age. This is the turning point of the story, the part when we realize that wishes are stronger than life. So Dorian Gray wishes to trade his soul for everlasting youth, and to always retain his beauty, just like the portrait. Of course, when there's an action, there will always be a *reaction*. Every time Dorian Gray commits a sin, the picture miraculously adjusts itself with the evil side of Dorian Gray.

As much as other things in the story are intriguing, the most fascinating part is how Wilde used 'beauty' as something harmful. Something so corrupting that a person would kill another, another, and yet another human being, before finally Dorian Gray tries to kill his picture, his guilt –his conscience, resulting in killing himself. Astonishingly enough, when Dorian dies, the painting, as if released from all the sins it bears, returns back to the old self just like when it was first shown to Dorian; painfully beautiful.

One thing that captures my mind is that Oscar Wilde had thoughts ahead of his time, and not afraid to show it either. In real life, he was charged with gross indecency as early as 1895. His works make fun of the hypocrisy of the society, damn the moralities. In short, he was leading quite a controversial life.

Nevertheless, however controversial he is, he obviously concerned deeply about life itself. That is why this particular novel offers some kind of a wake-up call to the readers...narcissist readers, that is. So if you are one, and want to be saved not by lectures...take a walk on the Wilde side, let this fantasy story take your breath away, and may morality save you from constant debauchery.