

NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION



Oscar Wilde
**The
Picture
of
Dorian Gray**

Read by

Michael Sheen

NA307412D

1	At the easel of Basil Hallward	10:41
2	Hallward recollects	9:25
3	Dorian Gray arrives	16:16
4	The portrait is finished	8:07
5	In the Albany	9:07
6	One month later – a new passion	6:46
7	Dorian Gray explains	6:59
8	An actress in love	9:40
9	A silly infatuation	5:54
10	Love and art at the theatre	12:13
11	A strange experience	5:16
12	The next day – a tragedy unfolds	13:24
13	The painter protests	7:31
14	The irrevocable deception	4:19
15	Dorian Gray's new life	6:18
16	Basil Hallward's farewell	4:49
17	A sight of horror	9:16
18	A matter of life and death	7:58
19	On to the opium den	9:55
20	Hunting in the country	12:25
21	'You are quite perfect'	10:12
22	'That is Dorian Gray'	11:36

Total time: 3:18:22

Oscar Wilde

The Picture of Dorian Gray

Murder, intrigue, decay of the body and soul – *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is far removed from the popular view of Oscar Wilde as a writer of delicate social comedy. It is also difficult to avoid the view that *Dorian Gray*, Wilde's only novel, is heavily autobiographical, in a metaphorical, if not literal, sense. While none of its male characters can be said to be Wilde himself, each occasionally reveals a mood, or expresses a thought, which feels quintessentially to be of the man himself.

The main idea for the story came from an actual episode. In 1884, Wilde often used to drop in at the studio of a painter, Basil Ward, one of whose sitters was a young man of exceptional beauty. Incidentally, Wilde must have been a godsend to many painters of the time, as his conversation kept their sitters perpetually entertained. When the portrait was done and the youth had gone, Wilde happened to say 'What a pity that such a glorious creature should ever grow old!' The artist agreed, adding 'How delightful it would be if he could remain exactly as he is,

while the portrait aged and withered in his stead!' Wilde expressed his obligation by naming the painter in his story 'Basil Hallward'.

First published in Lippincott's Magazine in 1890, then revised and expanded when published in book form in 1890, *Dorian Gray* mixes elements of *Grand Guignol* with dastardly deeds in the mode of supposedly decadent, late nineteenth-century French fiction. Handfuls of epigrams are tossed in, like diamonds scattered in a coal cellar.

This tale of moral decay and social opprobrium, laced with macabre supernatural touches, is chillingly distinct from Wilde's plays, where witty glitter holds together unlikely plots. *Dorian Gray* still has the power to disturb, even though today's *bourgeoisie* is much less shockable than in Wilde's day.

Oscar Fingall O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin on October 16th, 1854. He studied at Trinity College, Dublin, and at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he won the Newdigate Prize for poetry in 1878. His espousal of the *fin de siècle* Aesthetic

movement, which preached devotion to art above all else, resulted in acclaim from some, deep hostility from others. In 1882 Wilde arrived in North America to give a lecture tour, announcing as he landed that he had ‘nothing to declare but my genius’.

Wilde insisted that art had nothing to do with morality, though paradoxically the central plot of *Dorian Gray* can be interpreted as establishing precisely the opposite – a conundrum Wilde himself would have undoubtedly have relished. The comedies *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) established his reputation as a major writer for the stage.

But in May 1895 he was sentenced to two years’ hard labour, serving the bulk of that at Reading gaol. Wilde had been found guilty of homosexual conduct, of which he had been publicly accused by the Marquess of Queensberry, father of Lord Alfred Douglas, one of Wilde’s closest friends. Wilde sued the Marquess for libel, but his action collapsed when the evidence went against him.

He served the full term of his sentence and on release in May 1897 went to France. By now bankrupt, he was joined in France by Douglas, dying in Paris on November 1900 of inflammation of the brain brought

on by an ear infection. Before he died, he was received into the Roman Catholic church.

Wilde’s reputation today, rests on his two theatrical masterpieces, but *The Picture of Dorian Gray* stands as a major contribution to the English novel; its brooding, dissolute central figure almost a perfect caricature of Wilde himself.

Notes by Gary Mead

THE PREFACE

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 meanings 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.

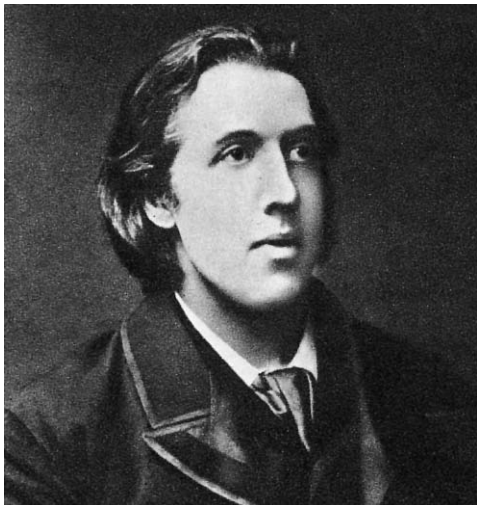
All art is at once surface and symbol.
Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.
Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.
It is the spectator and not life, that art really mirrors.
Diversity of opinion of a work of art shows that the
work is new, complex, and vital.
When critics disagree 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 useful
thing is that one admires it intensely.
All art is quite useless.

OSCAR WILDE

**The music on this recording is taken from the
NAXOS and MARCO POLO catalogues**

BOELLMANN PIANO TRIO	8.223524
Ilona Prunyi, piano. Béla Bánfalvi, violin, János Fehérvári, viola, Károly Botvay, cello	
CHABRIER PIANO WORKS VOLUME 3	8.553080
Georges Rabol, Sylvie Dugas, pianos	
SCHUMANN WALDSZENEN	8.550401
Paul Gulda, piano	

Cover picture: Portrait of a Gentleman by Sandys
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Oscar Wilde – the Aesthetic Period

Oscar Wilde

The Picture of Dorian Gray

Read by **Michael Sheen**

The beautiful young Dorian Gray has his portrait painted by society artist Basil Hallward. Admired by all, the dazzling, wealthy, handsome young man has everything anyone could wish for – or so it appears. Oscar Wilde's novel is a masterly study of moral corruption, a *tour de force* of suspense and surprise.



Michael Sheen is one of Britain's most exciting actors. Since leaving RADA, he has played Romeo for the Royal Exchange, Manchester, appeared in the world première production of Harold Pinter's *Moonlight* and taken the title role of *Peer Gynt* in Ningawa's world tour production. He has also played Jimmy Porter in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. His film credits include *Mary Reilly*. Sheen also reads Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *The Idiot*, and the role of the Vicomte de Valmont in *Dangerous Liaisons* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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