



# Oscar Wilde

‘To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all’

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**ZANICHELLI**



Oscar Wilde

# 1. Life

- Born in **Dublin** in **1854**.
- He became a disciple of **Walter Pater**, the theorist of Aestheticism.
- He became a fashionable **dandy**.
- He was one of the most successful **playwrights** of late Victorian London and one of the greatest **celebrities** of his days.
- He suffered a **dramatic downfall** and was imprisoned after been convicted of ‘gross indecency’ for **homosexual acts**.
- He died in **Paris** in **1900**.



Oscar Wilde

## 2. A clever talker

### Some famous quotations of Wilde's:

- 'I have nothing to declare except my **genius**.'
- 'Experience is simply the name we give our **mistakes**.'
- 'A man can be happy with **any woman** as long as he **does not love her**.'
- 'One should **always be in love**. That is the reason why one should **never marry**.'
- 'Art is the most intense form of **individualism** that the world has known'.



Oscar Wilde , 1889



Oscar Wilde

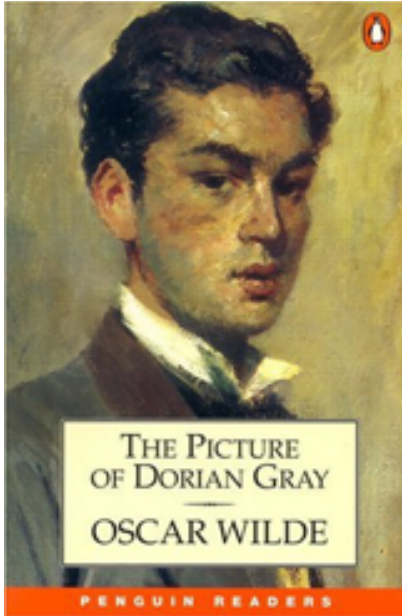
## 3. Works

- **Poetry:** *Poems* (1891), *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898).
- **Fairy tales:** *The Happy Prince and other Tales* (1888), *The House of Pomegranates* (1891).
- **Novel:** *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891).
- **Plays:** *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of no Importance* (1893), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), *Salomé* (1893).



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## 4. Wilde's Aestheticism



Oscar Wilde adopted the **aesthetical ideal**: he affirmed 'my life is like a work of art'. His **AESTHETICISM** clashed with the **didacticism** of Victorian novels.

- The artist → the creator of **beautiful things**
- Art → used only to celebrate **beauty** and the **sensorial pleasures**
- Virtue and vice → employed by the artist as raw material in his art:  
*'No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style'*

'The Preface' to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*



Oscar Wilde

## 5. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

1890 → first appeared in a magazine.

1891 → revised and extended.

- It reflects Oscar Wilde's personality.
- It was considered immoral by the Victorian public.





Oscar Wilde

## 5. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

### Plot

- Set in **London** at the end of the 19th century.
- The painter **Basil Hallward** makes a **portrait** of a beautiful young man, Dorian Gray.
- Dorian's desires of **eternal youth** are satisfied.
- **Experience** and **vices** appear on the portrait.







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## 5. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*



### Plot

- Dorian lives only for pleasures.
- The painter discovers Dorian's secret and he is killed by the young man.
- Later Dorian wants to get free from the portrait; he stabs it but in so doing he kills himself.
- At the very moment of death the portrait returns to its original purity and Dorian turns into a withered, wrinkled and loathsome man.





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## 6. A modern version of Dr. Faust

- A **temptation** is placed before Dorian: a potential **ageless beauty**.
- Lord Henry's **cynical attitude** is in keeping with the devil's role in Faust.
- Lord Henry acts as the '**Devil's advocate**'.
- The picture stands for the dark side of **Dorian's personality**.





## 7. The moral of the novel

- Every **excess** must **be punished** and reality cannot be escaped.
- When Dorian destroys the picture, he cannot avoid the **punishment** for all his sins → **death**.
- The horrible, corrupting picture could be seen as a symbol of the immorality and **bad conscience** of the Victorian middle class.
- The picture, restored to its original beauty, illustrates Wilde's theories of art: **art survives people**, art is eternal.



Oscar Wilde

## 8. *The Importance of Being Earnest*

Wilde's most enduringly popular play.





Oscar Wilde

## 8. *The Importance of Being Earnest*

### Plot

- Set in England during the late Victorian era.
- The protagonists: two young aristocratic men, **Ernest Worthing** and **Algernon Moncrieff**.
- Ernest, actually called **Jack**, was adopted at an early age by a **Mr Thomas Cardew**.
- **Jack** has invented an **alter ego**, a younger brother called **Ernest** who lives in the City.
- Humour comes from the characters' **false identities**.
- Witty dialogues and **satire** of Victorian **hypocrisy**.



Oscar Wilde

## 8. *The Importance of Being Earnest*

### Characters

- They belong to aristocratic society.
- They are typical Victorian snobs.
- They are arrogant, formal and concerned with money.
- They are interested only in a materialistic world.
- Lady Bracknell embodies the stereotype of the Victorian English aristocrat woman.







Oscar Wilde

## 8. *The Importance of Being Earnest*

### Wilde's new comedy of manners



Alana Brophy and Luke Barats in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, April 2005

- A new sort of the Restoration comedy of manners.
- The problems of Wilde's age are reflected in witty remarks.
- This comedy is a mirror of the fashionable and corrupted world of the Victorian fashionable audiences.



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## 8. *The Importance of Being Earnest*

### The nature of marriage

- **Marriage** is one of the main concerns of the characters in the play.
- Wilde **makes fun** of the institution of marriage.
- Marriage is seen as a **hypocritical** and **absurd** practice, a tool for achieving social stature.



IDA VERNON, WILLIAM FAVERSHAM, VIOLA ALLEN, E. Y. BACKUS,  
HENRY MILLER in "THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST"  
(1895)





Oscar Wilde

## 8. *The Importance of Being Earnest*

### Irony and Victorian morality

- The play central plot – the man who is both and isn't Ernest / earnest – presents a **moral paradox**.
- **Earnest**, misspelling for 'Ernest', means earnest, honest.
- **None** of the characters are really **truthful**.
- Characters are used to criticise **Victorian prudery**.
- What Wilde wants us to see as truly moral is really the opposite of **earnestness: irreverence**.



Oscar Wilde

## 9. *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*

- The author's name  
→ C33, Wilde's prison reference number.
- Plot: the dramatic story of an **outcast**.
- Poetic form: **a ballad**.
- Themes: the **alienating life** in prison, **death penalty**, the problem of **collective and social guilt**.



Reading Gaol in 2007