

The picture of dorian gray essay sample



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Wilde's most famous novel is the Picture of Dorian Gray. It's the story of a young man, Dorian Gray. He is so beautiful that a painter, his friend Basil Hallward, decides to paint his portrait. After seeing his picture, Dorian manages to remain young and beautiful, while the signs of the passing years and dissipation appear on his portrait. So Dorian only lives to satisfy his desires, he devotes his life to pleasure-seeking, letting people die for his insensitivity. Later when Dorian sees that his portrait gradually takes on all the traces of his vice and corruption, he wants to free himself and stabs the picture but he kills himself.

At the moment of death, while the painting regains its original beauty, all the hidden evil is revealed on Dorian's wrinkled and ugly face. This novel can be linked to the myth of Faust, the hero who gives up his soul for knowledge. Also the novel is characterized by the theme of a double life based on the contrast between appearance and reality. Though deeply corrupted, Dorian remains unchanged while the portrait is made ugly by vice and crime. Dorian meets his punishment in self-inflicted death because he cannot escape God's judgment.

The novel has also been read as a criticism of the Victorian middle-class, which hides its moral responsibilities under a face of hypocrisy and as a description of Wilde's theories of art because art is eternal and it is more important and truer than life. Shaw always conceived of drama as a vehicle of idea, that is why the drama is called the theatre of ideas where the stage is used as a means to attack institutions or expose hypocrisy. The latter element is found in Ibsen's plays.

Indeed he writes stories set in the respectable world of the middle class, where individuals struggle to shake off the suffocating chains of social ties and conventions in order to find their personal freedom and identity. The characters created by Shaw are typical intellectuals and are identified with certain aspects of society. His plays deal with contemporary issues, for example in *Pygmalion* he deals with women's equality. The central theme of the play is the social importance of language, Shaw says that differences in English pronunciation formed a barrier between the classes.

He advocated the creation of an easy phonetic system and also attacked English State education for not teaching a suitable English which would have equalized people. Shaw was a misogynist but he believed in the presence of a greater vital force in women. So *Pygmalion* is very different from its two main sources: the myth of *Pygmalion* and the tale of *Cinderella*. In fact the two women in both themes depend on men. Instead Eliza has the courage to react against man's power and arrogance and she prefers to be master of her own life. Shaw refuses any romantic and sentimental solutions, because he considers them boring and unrealistic.

In this way the play can be read as a criticism of the Victorian idea of women's role in society who could become only respectable wives and mothers. Henry Higgins is a distinguished and highly educated professor of phonetics. When he meets a flower girl, Eliza, he notices her terrible cockney accent. He challenges his friend, colonel Pickering, betting that it will take him three months to teach her perfect English pronunciation and good manners. Eliza goes to Higgins's house and learns to speak and behave like

an aristocratic. Higgins's teaching is so successful that she is turned into a real lady.

Higgins wins his bet but Eliza, who in the meantime has fallen in love with Higgins but isn't returned, leaves because she doesn't want to be exploited for Higgins's experiments. The play revolves around Eliza's transformation from a flower -seller into a duchess. But this experiment is not a true success, because this is a real transformation for Eliza, she is now a true lady but having no money, nor the right family or social background, she cannot go back to her old life either. Now she is deprived of the little independence she had. The other character is Mr. Higgins, he remains practically unaltered from the beginning to the end.

He has a poor opinion of women in general and he is completely incapable of understanding or responding to Eliza's real needs. Both figures have intelligence and strong personalities, but while Eliza shows great sensitivity, Higgins walks over the human beings and pays no attention to feelings. It's exactly this difference that causes a sharp conflict between them. The Aesthetic movement reflects the sense of frustration of the artists and their reaction against the materialism of society. The theorist of Aestheticism is Walter Pater, he considers art as the most important thing in his life. Art for Art's sake" means that a work of art must only be judged in terms of aesthetical criteria, so it can be beautiful or ugly, it can't be good or bad according to moral standards or social conventions. Only art could stop time and so people must spend their life as a " work of art" living any moment with happiness and pleasure. These ideas influenced a lot of writers, especially Oscar Wilde, the most important writer of this period in England.

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As a matter of fact, in the Preface to the Picture of Dorian Gray, Wilde wrote that “ there is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written or badly written, that is all”.