The Picture of Dorian Gray

By Oscar Wilde

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.

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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.

CHAPTER I.

The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn.

451 From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was
461 lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry
474 Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured
485 blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to
500 bear the burden of a beauty so flamelike as theirs; and now and then the
512 fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk
526 curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of
538 momentary Japanese effect, and making him think of those pallid, jade-faced
551 painters of Tokyo who, through the medium of an art that is necessarily
563 immobile, seek to convey the sense of swiftness and motion. The sullen
575 murmur of the bees shouldering their way through the long unmown grass,
587 or circling with monotonous insistence round the dusty gilt horns of the
598 straggling woodbine, seemed to make the stillness more oppressive. The dim
610 roar of London was like the bourdon note of a distant organ.

625 In the centre of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length
639 portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty, and in front of it,
650 some little distance away, was sitting the artist himself, Basil Hallward,
662 whose sudden disappearance some years ago caused, at the time, such public
671 excitement and gave rise to so many strange conjectures.

685 As the painter looked at the gracious and comely form he had so skillfully
699 mirrored in his art, a smile of pleasure passed across his face, and seemed
712 about to linger there. But he suddenly started up, and closing his eyes,
726 placed his fingers upon the lids, as though he sought to imprison within his
737 brain some curious dream from which he feared he might awake.

752 "It is your best work, Basil, the best thing you have ever done," said Lord
764 Henry languidly. "You must certainly send it next year to the Grosvenor.
778 The Academy is too large and too vulgar. Whenever I have gone there, there
794 have been either so many people that I have not been able to see the pictures,
810 which was dreadful, or so many pictures that I have not been able to see the
821 people, which was worse. The Grosvenor is really the only place."

834 "I don't think I shall send it anywhere," he answered, tossing his head
850 back in that odd way that used to make his friends laugh at him at Oxford.
856 "No, I won't send it anywhere."

867 Lord Henry elevated his eyebrows and looked at him in amazement
881 through the thin blue wreaths of smoke that curled up in such fanciful whorls
893 from his heavy, opium-tainted cigarette. "Not send it anywhere? My dear
906 fellow, why? Have you any reason? What odd chaps you painters are! You
922 do anything in the world to gain a reputation. As soon as you have one, you
941 seem to want to throw it away. It is silly of you, for there is only one thing in

the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about. A portrait like this would set you far above all the young men in England, and make the old men quite jealous, if old men are ever capable of any emotion."

"I know you will laugh at me," he replied, "but I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it."

Lord Henry stretched himself out on the divan and laughed.

"Yes, I knew you would; but it is quite true, all the same."