THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY by Oscar Wilde

BIOGRAPHY

- Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin in 1854.
- He graduated from Trinity College in 1874 and continued his studies at Magdalene College in Oxford.
- Wilde moved to London in 1881.
- In 1882 he travelled to the USA and met Walt Whitman.
- In 1883 he visited Paris and came into contact with important writers, such as Victor Hugo and Paul Verlaine.
- In 1884 he married Constance Lloyd.
- The first volume of his poetry was published in 1881
- In 1891 he published a novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but his greatest talent was for writing plays.
- Between 1890 and 1895 Wilde produced very popular comedies including *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). *Salomé* was performed in Paris in 1896.
- 1895-1897: Wilde was arrested and tried for gross indecency and sentenced to two years of hard labour. During this time he wrote *De Profundis*.
- In 1898 he published *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*.
- In 1900 Wilde died in Paris aged 46.

SUMMARY

The artist, Basil Hallward, paints a portrait of a beautiful young man, Dorian Gray. Basil introduces Dorian to Lord Henry Wotton, who tells him that his beauty will fade with age. Shocked by his words and excited by the beauty of the painting, Dorian wishes to be young forever; he would give up his soul for this.

Dorian falls in love with the actress Sibyl Vane. But one night she acts so badly that he decides to break up with her. When he gets home, Dorian notices that the picture has changed; the expression on his face has become cruel. He understands that the picture will show the ugliness of his soul. When he finds out that Sibyl has killed herself, Dorian decides to start a life of pleasure. His portrait will carry his shame. Afraid that somebody might see it, Dorian hides the picture in a locked room.

Almost twenty years pass and one evening Dorian meets Basil. After showing him the portrait and sharing his secret with him, Dorian kills Basil. He then starts to feel guilty and decides that the only way he can feel better is to destroy the painting. So Dorian stabs the man in the portrait, but in doing so, he kills himself.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

- Aestheticism: the amorality of art
- Art for art's sake
- The mortality of beauty and youth
- Art and the imitation of life
- Appearance and beauty as the ultimate values
- Hedonism vs Victorian energy and values
- Truth and beauty