

MATURSKI RAD

Nastavni predmet: Engleski jezik

Nastavna tema: **Life and Works of Oscar Wilde**

Školska godina: 2008/2009.

Ispitni rok: juni

Učenik – kandidat:

Una Erdeljan, IV-3

Profesor - mentor:

Prof. Dragana Bursać Ivetić

Kikinda, 19. maj 2009. god.

Contents

1 Introduction	1
2 The Life of Oscar Wilde	3
The roots	3
Education	4
The Aesthetic Movement	4
Back in Europe	5
The Beginning of the End	6
Death in Paris	8
3 The Works of Oscar Wilde	11
Plays.....	11
The Importance of Being Earnest	12
Lady Bracknell	15
John Worthing	16
Short Stories	17
The Happy Prince and Other Tales	17
The Happy Prince	18
Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories	19
The model millionaire	20
A Novel	22
The Picture of Dorian Gray	22
Poems	28
Essays	29
4 Conclusion	30
5 Appendix	32
6 Literature	33

Introduction

"The public is so wonderfully tolerant. It forgives everything except genius"¹, these are the words of a man who is considered to be one of the greatest writers known worldwide and whose life attracts equal attention as his works - Oscar Wilde.

Oscar Wilde (1854 - 1900) was a famous poet, novelist and playwright.

Although he was Irish, he belongs to English literature. Wilde had his greatest success in the theatre with his amusing comedies from which *"The Importance of Being Earnest"* is considered to be his masterpiece. His life turned upside down when his homosexuality was discovered. He was sentenced to two years hard labour. After serving his time, Wilde became demoralized, terribly sick and eventually died three years later.



In the nineteenth century, drama was used only as a form of entertainment. It was written within conventional rules, morals and actions and it had no interest in real life problems. It was shallow and literary of no particular value. Before Wilde, the only real and truly valuable drama had been Shakespeare's drama. Wilde gave his contribution in raising the quality of drama and getting it closer to real life. He broke conventions and promoted non-conformism in

¹ Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist", 1891
<http://quotationspage.com/quote/1336.html>

literature as well as in life and tried to replace the values of the high society with the values he believed in – beauty and art. He based his life philosophy on this.

Wilde behaved strangely; he would wear unusual clothes and talk about absolute hedonism and anti - morals. His rebellion against high society's morals wasn't very successful because it had many inconsistencies. But it was precisely that attitude, the hedonism and the desire to experience "every fruit from the pleasure tree", that led him to his tragic end.

After his death, the critics were divided. The ones who were compassionate and felt sorry for him and his destiny overestimated his works, while the ones who judged him and thought of him as a disgraceful person, underestimated them. Today, from this time distance we can observe his work not relating it so much to his personality and his life. But even today, Oscar Wilde remains more popular in the rest of Europe than he is in his homeland.



The Life of Oscar Wilde

The roots

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born in Dublin on 16th October 1854. His family was an old respected Irish family. He was born as the second of three children.

His father was Sir William Wilde, a famous surgeon. He was well known for his work and also for his love affairs. Oscar was his fifth child.

His mother, beautiful Jane Francesca Elgee, was a writer herself. She wrote revolutionary poems and articles and was recognized under the pen- name "Speranza".



Oscar Wilde as a child

Education

Oscar Wilde was first homeschooled, but then continued his education in classicism in Trinity College in Dublin, where he got the scholarship for Magdalen College in Oxford. He won a Newdigate Prize for his poem "Ravenna" in 1878.

Even though he was a brilliant student, he claimed:

"Education is an admirable thing, but it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught."²

The Aesthetic Movement

In Oxford, he met Walter Pater and John Ruskin, the creators of the aesthetic movement in England. He was influenced more by Pater's theories and he left Oxford as a follower of Pater's cult "art for art's sake" and one of the movement's basic ideas that was to make art of life.



"The two great turning points in my life were when my father sent me to Oxford, and when society sent me to prison"³

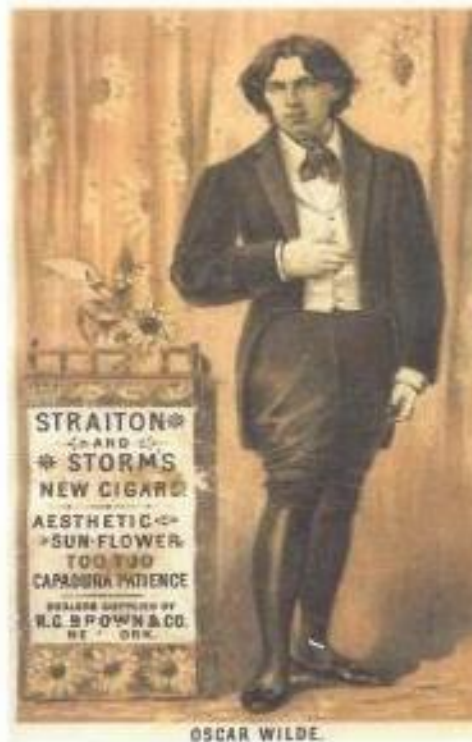
He considered sport to be useless, and collected blue china, peacock's feathers, lilies and sunflowers, decorating his rooms with these and other "artistic objects". He also started wearing his hair long. With his flamboyant appearance

² <http://wilde.thefreelibrary.com/>

³ Wilde Oscar, "The Picture of Dorian Gray", Airmont Books (Airmont Publishing Company), New York 1964, Introduction by Allan Donaldson, page 3

and unusual personality, he attracted a lot of attention - more of it negative than positive.

He quickly managed to establish himself as a celebrity and he was famous for his conversational skills more than his writing. It took him a decade to prove himself to be more than just a dandy.



After he had graduated in Oxford, he moved to London. In 1881, he published his first book of poetry "Poems". After that, it was again the aestheticism that took him on a journey to North America. He went there on a one-year-long lecture tour. He held the lectures about aesthetic values. When he arrived in New York, he said: *"I have nothing to declare but my genius"*.⁴

Back in Europe

Having returned to Europe in 1883, he lived for a short period of time in Paris, where he married Constance Lloyd. She was a daughter of a wealthy Queen's Counsel, four years younger than Wilde, a well-read girl who spoke several

⁴ Wilde Oscar, "The Picture of Dorian Gray", Penguin Books, London, 1994, the preface

European languages and had an independent mind. When they got married, they lived quite luxuriously of her allowance, which was about £250. Constance and Oscar had two sons, Cyril and VyVyan. At that time he published several books of stories for children that he had originally written for his sons, such as "The Happy Prince and Other Tales".

In the most successful period of his life, he published: "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories", the novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray", plays "Lady Windermere's fan", "A Woman of No Importance", "An Ideal Husband" and "The Importance of Being Earnest". He was also an editor of Woman's World Magazine in 1887.



Constance Lloyd



Constance and one of their sons, Cyril

The Beginning of The End

Wilde's play "Salome", which was later adapted as an opera by Richard Strauss, was written in French. It was published in English in 1894. The translation of the play was done by a young English poet, Lord Alfred "Bosie" Douglas.

Oscar Wilde and Bosie met in the summer of 1891. At that time Bosie was an undergraduate at Oxford University. He was fascinated by the novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray". Sixteen years his junior, Lord Alfred seduced Oscar and became his lover. They were inseparable for four years, until Oscar's arrest. Their relationship caused Oscar many problems, and led to his downfall.

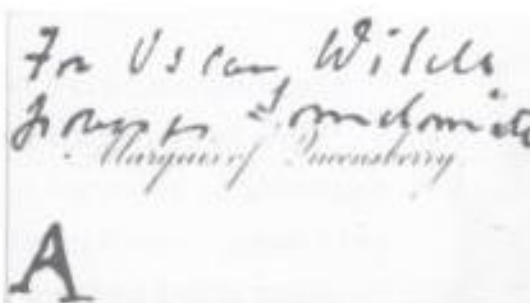


Wilde and Bosie



Lord Alfred Douglas (Bosie)

Lord Alfred had a bad relationship with his father, the Marquess of Queensberry. His father didn't approve of Bosie's lifestyle and friendship between him and Oscar Wilde. He got even more upset when he found out that his son and Oscar were living together. He showed a lot of hostility towards Wilde. The Marquess of Queensberry had a great desire to take revenge on him by publicly exposing and humiliating him. First he publicly insulted him in a theatre, on the opening night of "The Importance of Being Ernest". Later, he accused the playwright of being homosexual by leaving him a card which said so.



The card with the fatal accusation

The public and the press had already been watching Wilde's aestheticism with suspicion because there had been some rumors about his personal life. It all turned into a huge scandal at the time when Oscar took legal steps to protect his reputation and sued the Marquess of Queensberry for libel. Marquess claimed that the libel was true, and Oscar was cross-examined not only concerning his personal life, but also concerning his writings, especially "The

Picture of Dorian Gray", which was labeled as an immoral book. Although Wilde withdrew his case, he was arrested and convicted with "gross indecency" for homosexual acts. The public was satisfied with the outcome of this sensational trial.

He was sentenced to two years hard labor. He served his time at the Reading Gaol, near London, and later wrote a poem about it.

While he was in prison, his wife and sons moved to Switzerland and changed their last name to "Holland". She died some years later after a spinal surgery and was buried in Italy, their son Cyril died in World War I and VyVyvan later become an author himself, publishing his memoirs *"Son of Oscar Wilde"* and *"Oscar Wilde: A Pictorial Biography."*

Death in Paris

After he had got out of prison, he was bankrupt and weak in health from the hard life there. But there was yet another thing that was killing his spirit: he was yesterday's news. No one cared about him anymore.

***"There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about"*⁵, he said.**

He took financial support from his friends and moved to Paris, where he continued to write newspaper articles under the name of *Sebastian Melmoth*. There he wrote his famous poem "The Ballad of Reading Gaol", inspired by his prison experience.

He reunited with his friend and lover Bosie once again, but their life together in France lasted shortly. He mostly spent the last three years of his life staying with friends, living in cheap hotels



⁵ Soars John and Liz, *New Headway Advanced Student's Book*, Oxford University Press, 2003, Unit 2, page 22



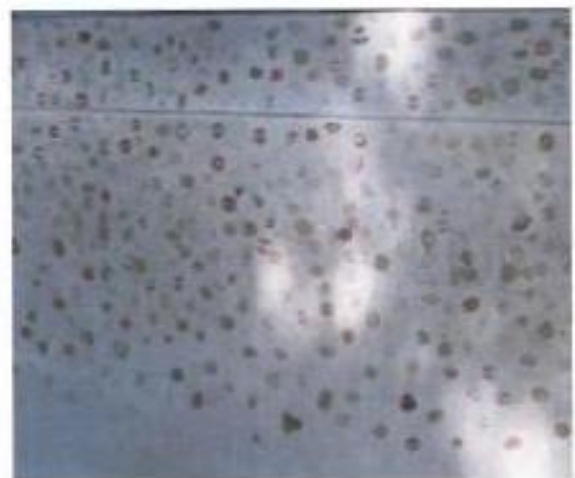
"The Ballad of Reading Gaol":

*"And alien tears will fill for him
Pity's long-broken urn,
For his mourners will be outcast men,
And outcasts always mourn."⁷*

and wandering Europe.

On 30 November, 1900, he died of meningitis in Paris, without glamour, money, or audience, in a hotel room, looking at the wallpapers he didn't like. He made a joke about it. He said: *"My wallpaper and I are fighting a duel to the death. One or other of us has got to go."*⁶ Soon after that he passed away.

Oscar Wilde was buried in Pierre Lachaise cemetery in Paris. The epitaph was a verse from his poem,



His tomb covered with kisses

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Wilde

⁷ *ibid*

His death symbolised the end of the aesthetic movement. Most of its leaders had already been dead.

The letters he had written to Lord Alfred in prison were published 5 years after his death under the title "*De Profundis*". It was his confessional letter, but also a bitter reproach to Lord Alfred.

After his death 9 biographies of Oscar Wilde were written, one of which by his grandson, Merlin Holland, Vyvyan's son, in 1997.



The Statue of Oscar Wilde in the Merion Park in Dublin

The Works of Oscar Wilde

Oscar Wilde wrote plays from which the most famous are "Lady Windermere's Fan", "The Importance of Being Earnest", "An Ideal Husband" and "A Woman of No Importance", short stories such as: "The Happy Prince", "The Model Millionaire", "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" and "The Nightingale and the Rose", poems like "Ravenna" and "The Ballade of Reading Gaol", essays (the most important "De Profundis"), and novel "The Picture of Dorian Gray."

Plays

He was best known for his plays. Wilde had had so much success with his comedies because it was far beyond anything that was being written at that time. He was incredibly charming, knew his way with words and used his natural wit. His comedy is actually more of a witty game with words than it really is a criticism of life. He claims relativity to all of life's values. He mocks the values of the high society in Britain in that time. The audience immediately loved it and still does, because his comedies are first class entertainment, although not the best of comedies. Nevertheless, he is one of the best examples of English comedy representatives.

His famous plays are:

Vera, or the Nihilists (1880)

The Duchess of Padua (1883)

Lady Windermere's Fan (1892)

A Florentine Tragedy (La Sainte Courtisane 1893)

A Woman of No Importance (1893)

Salomé (1894)

An Ideal Husband (1895)

The Importance of Being Earnest (1895)

The Importance of Being Earnest

"The Importance of Being Earnest" is Wilde's most recognizable play. It is considered to be his masterpiece.

This satirical play is based on the double meaning of the name Ernest and it mocks the people who take themselves too seriously. The main characters are Algernon Moncrieff and John Worthing (Jack), as well as Lady Bracknell, her daughter Gwendolen Fairfax and Cecily Cardew, Jack's ward.



Algernon Moncrieff – Algy on one occasion finds out that his friend, Ernest Worthing, isn't called Ernest at all....

His real name is John, or Jack, as people like to call him, and he is known by this name in the country. He pretends to have a younger brother Ernest who lives in the town. Ernest is irresponsible with finances and he enjoys life without any hesitations, so Jack has to go to the town frequently, to visit him.

In the town, he goes by the name of Ernest and acts the way Ernest would – leaves his bills unpaid and goes to social events.

Jack (Ernest) is in love with Algy's cousin, Gwendolen. He comes to the city with one idea – to ask her to marry him. Gwendolen is in love with him too (mostly because of his name), but her mother, Lady Bracknell doesn't see him as her future son-in-law and she won't let them marry so easily. She invites him for an interview after which she will decide whether or not to allow her daughter to get engaged to him. In the interview she finds out that Mr. Worthing was found in a handbag in a train station by an old gentleman and that he has no idea who his parents might be. After that, Lady Bracknell advises him to find at least one of his parents as soon as possible.

Jack tries to tell everyone that Ernest has died, but at that moment Algy takes Ernest's identity. He makes up an old friend Bunbury who's terribly ill and who he has to go and visit in the country. When he gets there, he goes to Jack's house and presents himself as Ernest. There he meets young Cecily, Jack's ward, and falls in love with her.



Gwendolen writes a letter to Ernest (Jack) telling him that his name gave her courage to stand up to what she really wants and that she's coming to country to see him. Jack has to make Algy go back to London, but he fails.

One day, a gentleman comes to the Worthing's estate. He asks to see Mr. Ernest Worthing. Naturally, the servants take him to Algy. He continues pretending to be Ernest. The gentleman tells him that the "Savoy" Hotel has pressed charges on him for his unpaid bills and that, if he doesn't pay his bills, he will be arrested for 6 months. Jack agrees to pay Ernest's bills if he immediately goes to see his dear old friend Bunbury, who's getting sicker by the minute.

Before he leaves, Algy asks Cecily to marry him. She accepts his proposal and tells him all about their engagement which was already real in her fantasy. The engagement has lasted for three months now and it was already broken off once. The real and the imaginary worlds joined in this romance... Just like

Gwendolen, Cecily also tells her fiancé how thrilled she is with his name being Ernest, that she has always dreamed of loving somebody by the name of Ernest and that she thinks she couldn't love him if his name was any other.

Gwendolen shows up in the country asking for her fiancé. She runs into Cecily. They meet and in their conversation discover that they are both engaged to Ernest Worthing. They become bitter rivals for a short period of time. Algy returns quickly and Gwendolen reveals her cousin's true identity to Cecily. When John arrives, Cecily reveals that Gwendolen's Ernest is actually no other person than her uncle Jack. The two girls become close friends from that moment, and agree not to forgive them for lying to them.



Jack and Algy both decide and arrange to be christened Ernest. After many attempts, they finally make up with their loved ones, when Lady Bracknell shows up unannounced. Once again, she tries to control the situation and make the young couples apart.

She confronts her nephew Algy about his friend Bunbury and later about Cecily. She also tries to separate Algy and Cecily, but she changes her mind after she finds out about Cecily's fortune. She gives them her approval.

Jack mentions the fact that he is Cecily's guardian and that she can't get married without his consent, which he refuses to give. Cecily's grandfather stated in his will that she wouldn't become an adult until she turned 35, and Cecily can't wait that long, she is only 18 now, so Lady Bracknell asks Jack to reconsider his decision. He tells her that he will allow Algy and Cecily to get married when she lets Gwendolen and him get married. She refuses to.

By chance, they find out that the woman who was Cecily's tutor, worked for Lady Bracknell's family many years ago and that she had lost Lady Bracknell sister's baby. By mistake she put the baby boy in a handbag and left it in a train station. That baby turns out to be Jack Worthing.

It is quite a shock for everyone present, and especially for Jack to find out that Lady Bracknell is his aunt and his friend Algernon is in fact his older brother. The play ends with all the couples staying together and Jack finding out that his real name is, in fact, Ernest.



Lady Bracknell

Lady Bracknell is a type of woman who is clever, determined and persistent. She knows exactly what she wants and she will get it in one way or another. She is used to getting everything she sets her mind to. She uses opportunities she gets, and when she doesn't get any, she creates them. She likes to have

everything under her control – events, situations, people...



We can see that first from the example of how she gained her wealth and became a respectable member of high society. In her youth, she was an entertainer. Then she met Lord Bracknell, seduced him and got pregnant. When she married Lord Bracknell, she left her past behind and never looked back. She created a new life for

herself and her child.

Now she is a lady with class and elegance, wealthy, who nourishes her position in the society. She acts and dresses by the latest fashion, attends social events and does everything she can to keep her image, which she cares so much about.

Lady Bracknell also cares a lot about material things, fashion and everything that can help her keep her reputation or take it to the next level.

She acts are aristocratic and snobbish. She is prejudiced against poor people. She is quite arrogant and tends to be very patronizing and overbearing.

In the interview with John Worthing, she shows not only her extremely demanding and sometimes merciless side, but also her wit. She says witty remarks in any conversation, no matter how serious it might be. For example, when Mr. Worthing tells her that he has lost his parents, she says: **"To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness!"**⁸

John Worthing

John or Jack Worthing leads a double life, but that doesn't make him a bad person. He is an intelligent, kind and respectable man. John is in love with



Gwendolen, and he is desperate because of this love. In order to marry the woman that he loves, he has to go through interrogations and to complete impossible tasks that her mother demands from him.

He is 35 years old and he doesn't know his true origin, who his parents are, or anything else about it. All he knows is where the old gentleman found him. All his life he hasn't been able to find answers to his own questions, and now Lady Bracknell expects him to find at least one parent as soon as possible. Jack is romantic and is ready to do anything for love. He is persistent and will

try desperately to stay with the woman he loves even though he has been curious and confused about his origin for a long time.

⁸ Soars John and Liz, *New Headway Advanced Student's Book*, Oxford University Press, 2003, tapescript 2.3, page 134

Jack is intimidated by Lady Bracknell. He wants to please her although he knows that there are bigger chances that it won't be possible.

Short stories

Oscar Wilde wrote many stories that were published in "The Happy Prince and Other Tales" (1888), "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories" (1891) and "A House of Pomegranates" (1891) collections.



The Happy Prince and Other Tales

The Happy Prince and Other Tales is a collection of children stories. It was published in 1888. The collection contains stories such as:

The Happy Prince

The Nightingale and the rose

The Selfish Giant

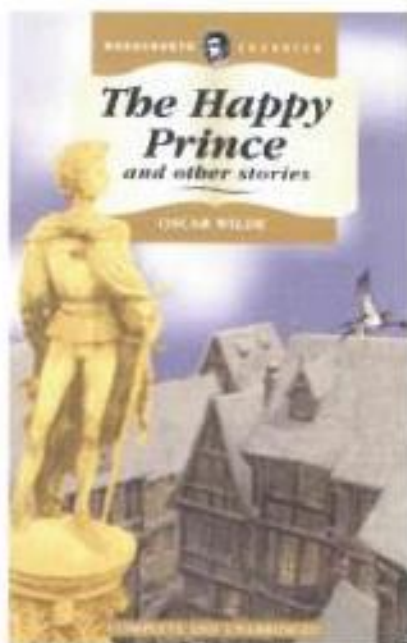
The Devoted Friend

The Remarkable Rocket

The stories from this collection belong to the genre of "Artistic Tales". This genre had many representatives in Europe, yet it is hard to find some work of this genre which is more wonderful than these stories. They are probably the most valuable pieces of art that Wilde left us.

Wilde's children stories are real jewels of their kind. They're written in the pure and simple language, so it is very easy to understand them. The subjects are universal and eternal, while their tone is soft, kind and melancholic and that is what appeals not only to children, for whom it is meant, but also to adults. They gently touch the souls of readers and get through to their deepest emotions. That's what makes them so valuable.

The Happy Prince



"The Happy Prince" is the most recognizable story and the one the whole collection was named after. It is a great story about individuals who are dedicated to good.

Plot Summary

A little swallow went on a big journey. He started his flight to the south, to Egypt. His friends had already gone, but he stayed in town longer because he fell in love with a beautiful reed. The reed didn't respond, so he was very disappointed and decided to join his friends in Egypt.

He flew and flew and at the end he stopped at city to rest. On top of the hill, above the city, stood a statue of The Happy Prince. The bird went to it, hoping to spend the night in the bottom of it, near the statue's feet. He noticed that the statue was crying. They met and statue told his life story to the little swallow, how he was a happy boy while he was growing up. He lived in a castle and he was surrounded with nothing but love, beauty and happiness. He never knew suffering, he never cried while he was still alive. When he died, people from the city put his statue on top of this little hill and now he sees all the pain and suffering of his people, so he cries because he can't do anything to help them.

The Happy Prince persuaded the little swallow to stay with him and help him help people from this town. Every night he gave a part of himself to the citizens: first a ruby from his sword, then the sapphires he had for his eyes and eventually

the gold leaves he was covered with. The swallow tried to leave for south every night, and every night the Happy Prince persuaded him to stay one night longer. The little bird was kind, so it always stayed. When The Happy Prince finally lost his other eye, the swallow made a decision to stay with his friend forever because now the Prince had gone blind.

The weather was changing fast and soon it began snowing. The little bird wasn't used to being this cold and he tried to keep himself warm in every possible way, but he failed to do so. He knew that he was going to die and still he didn't want to leave his dear friend alone. He had just enough strength to fly up to him to say his last good bye. When he said to the Happy Prince that he was going, Prince was joyful because he thought that the bird was finally going off to Egypt, but when he heard that it is actually dying, he got really sad. They really began to love each other. They said their last good byes and kissed on the lips. Then the bird fell down, in front of Prince's feet, dead. In that moment, the Prince's lead heart had been broken.

After that, the statue was moved from that place because it was no longer beautiful nor useful. They tried to melt him and make a statue of the current town mayor from the metal that The Happy Prince was made of. His poor little broken lead heart wouldn't burn in the fire, so they had to throw it away. It fell on a dusty ground where the Swallow's body has been lying.

When they passed away, God asked from one of his angels to bring him two most valuable things from that city. The angel returned with the Swallow's body and The Happy Prince's broken lead heart. God was pleased with what the angel brought him and said that both will have beautiful destiny in heaven – the Swallow will sing in the garden of Heaven, and The Happy Prince will honor God in the city of gold.

Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories

The story collection *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime and Other Stories* was published in 1891. These stories aren't children's stories, they are more of semi – comic mystery character. Some of the stories it consists of are;

Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

The Canterville Ghost

The Sphinx Without a Secret

The Model Millionaire

The model millionaire

It is a story about a young man who, against all odds succeeds in marrying the girl that he loves. He is rewarded for his good deeds. The moral of the story is that it pays to be generous and that if we do good, it will come back to us.

The main character, Hughie Erskine, was a young man who isn't very bright, but is good – looking, popular among men and women and successful in everything except making money. He had tried everything, but he couldn't find the right profession for himself. He was too delicate for hard physical labour, and other professions weren't exciting or good enough for him. So he remained a young man with perfect personality and no profession, living on the allowance that his aunt would give him.

The problems began when he fell in love and his girlfriend's father wouldn't hear about the engagement between the two of them. He's liked Hughie, but he didn't want his daughter to marry a poor man with no profession. So he asked Hughie to get ten thousand pounds before he asks his daughter to marry him. If he doesn't, then her father won't permit her to marry Hughie.

Hughie went to his friend's house and found him working on a painting. He was painting a beggar – man, and there was one beggar – man posing for him. He was wearing some old rags and Hughie pitied him. When the two of them were left alone, he gave beggar - man all the money he had in his pocket. The old man smiled and thanked Hughie. When the painter got back to the room, Hughie left.

Later, the painter and Hughie met again. The painter told Hughie that his model, the poor man, has asked him many questions about Hughie, his life and his problems with love and money that he has to get in order to propose to the woman he loves. The painter also revealed that his model, the man in the old rags posing as a beggar, is actually a millionaire. Hughie was ashamed of the way he had treated this wealthy man. He thought that Baron Hausberg (the millionaire) was offended by what he did and that he should apologize to him. But Baron had other things in mind. The next morning, Baron's servant came to Hughie offering him a sealed envelope on behalf of the millionaire. It was

written “A wedding present to Hugh Erskine and Laura Merton, from an old beggar,” on it, and there was a cheque for ten thousand pounds inside. Hughie eventually married Laura, the painter was his best – man and Baron made a speech at the wedding – breakfast. Alan stated that **“Millionaire models are rare enough; but model millionaires are rarer still!”**⁹

At the very beginning of the story, Wilde explained “the great truths of modern life” as very realistic, rational and practical ones. He claimed that poor people shouldn’t think about being interesting or fascinating, but they should be concerned about the way they could earn money, and leave charm to the rich people. **“Romance is the privilege of the rich, not the profession of the unemployed”**¹⁰, he said.

Hughie never learned these truths. He refused to believe them and lived his life as a poor, but romantic person. He thought that some other qualities are more important than wealth and fortune. Even when, one day, his happiness depended on money, he still kept his good heart and helped a man he thought needed help. He gave him some money, even though he needed money himself. Luckily for him, that man was a millionaire dressed as a poor man who was deeply touched by Hughie’s generosity. He appreciated his generosity so much that he decided to reward him with the money he desperately needed.

Even though he did not act by the rules of other people and „the great truths of modern life“, he ended up being happy. How is this possible?

We are all different. Different things make us happy, different things make us sad. We look different from one another, and we feel differently too. We all have our own, individual personalities and we do things in certain ways that are unique to us. Everyone should listen to their inner – self and follow the voice within. That means that there isn’t a path or a road that is the right one and that everyone should be on. There isn’t only one goal for all the people, there are many goals! And everyone should think of a way that is the best for them to get to their goal, and just go.

At the end of the story, everyone was happy. They all got what they wanted and needed. The Baron paid for his picture and got it, so both Baron and the

⁹ Oscar Wilde, “The Model Millionaire”, Short Stories Collection “A Tangled Web”, page 129

¹⁰ Oscar Wilde, “The Model Millionaire”, Short Stories Collection “A Tangled Web”, page 123

painter were satisfied. Hughie got the ten thousand pounds he had needed to propose to Laura, and Laura was happy because she married Hughie.

Even though Hughie didn't earn the money in traditional way, he earned it by being who he is - a good person. He proved how important it is to have a good, open and warm, friendly heart. Feeling sympathy for others and helping them generously are virtues that are very important, but aren't so appreciated.

Hughie represents an average person. He has a great personality and is a good person. He is not talented for anything particularly, isn't very smart, or rich, but is friendly and fun to be around. He is always good, but never excellent. How can he stand out in the crowd despite his flaws (or lack of money, intelligence, talent)? With his great personality, of course.

This sends a message that even if we are not so talented, beautiful, intelligent or wealthy, it doesn't mean that we are worth less than people who are. If we are good people, we are worth as much or even more than those who are smart, popular, rich, intelligent or talented (but not very nice).

One's worth cannot be measured with numbers, percentages, beauty, money or intelligence. It can only be seen through their contacts with others. As it is also in the African Ubuntu philosophy – “You can't exist as a human being in isolation.”¹¹ You can only show your human side when you're with others. You are then known for your generosity.

A NOVEL

The Picture of Dorian Gray

The picture of Dorian Gray is Wilde's only novel. More than a novel, it is a gothic melodrama. The idea for it was taken from a story from the ancient Greece. It is about a painting that is getting more old and uglier as the man who's on the painting becomes more evil, egocentric and



¹¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_\(philosophy\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_(philosophy))

careless. The picture gets old instead of him, while he stays young and good – looking.

This novel is considered one of the last works of classic gothic fiction. It caused some controversy when it was first published, but nowadays it is considered one of the modern classics of Western literature.

The critics say that this book doesn't possess some greater value, while the readers believe that it's a masterpiece! The readers love it mostly because it deals with important aspects of modern life and also sets some good questions about things we thought we already knew.

This novel is also important because, when Wilde was questioned in the court, he was cross – examined about this novel particularly! It was considered an immoral book. We can see how he defended his novel in the preface by saying **"There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all."**¹²

Plot summary

Basil Hallward was painting a picture of a young, beautiful man when his old friend, Lord Henry Wotton, asked him about this picture and the young man who was in the picture. It was his best work of art, yet Basil wasn't going to put this painting on display for everyone to see. He said that he put too much of himself into it and that he doesn't want people to see it because that way, they'll see him and his feelings.

The man in the picture was Dorian Gray, a very handsome young man who was also pure, innocent and naive. He was unaware of the power that this amount of beauty brings. Basil had great admiration for these qualities of Dorian. He was immediately drawn to Dorian, from the first moment he saw him. Dorian's presence made Basil a better artist. Basil didn't want Henry (or Harry, as friends liked to call him) to meet him. He said that Harry would only spoil him. But, Dorian unexpectedly came for a visit, so Harry



¹² Wilde Oscar, "The Picture of Dorian Gray", Airmont Books (Airmont Publishing Company), New York, 1964, the preface, page 9

and Dorian met there.

Dorian had never met anyone like Harry before. He was the kind of person that had a bad influence on others. He was older, cleverer and more experienced than Dorian and he sounded so wisely and interesting. Dorian was impressed by the way Harry would speak... He would speak about the most ordinary things and make them exciting and new, giving a totally new perspective on it. Dorian would think through everything that Harry had said to him. Harry would say things like: "Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us. The body sins once and has done with its sin, for action is a mode of purification. Nothing remains then but the recollection of a pleasure, or the luxury of a regret. The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what it's monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful"¹³ and "Always! This is a dreadful word. It makes me shudder when I hear it. Women are so fond of using it. They spoil every romance trying to make it last for ever. It is a meaningless word, too. The only difference between a caprice and a life – long passion is that caprice lasts a little longer."¹⁴ It would leave Dorian bewildered.

But that is not all that Harry talked about. He also spoke to Dorian about his beauty and youth and how it would all disappear one day. He was very persuasive: "Beauty is a form of Genius - is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation. It is of the great facts of the world, like sun – light, or spring – time, or the reflection in dark waters of that silver shell we call the moon. It cannot be questioned. It has it's divine sovereignty. It makes princes of those who have it..... People say sometimes that Beauty is only superficial. That may be so. But at least it is not so superficial as Thought is. To me, Beauty is the wonder of the wonders. It is only shallow people who don't judge by appearances. The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible..."¹⁵ and "realize your youth while you still have it..... Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing... A new Hedonism –that is what our century wants. You might be it's visible symbol. With your personality there is nothing you could not do. The world belongs to you for a season..... For there is such a little time that your youth will last – such a little time."¹⁶ Dorian thought that Harry's words had no impact on him, but he was soon to discover that he was wrong.

¹³ Wilde Oscar, "The Picture of Dorian Gray", Penguin Books, London, 1994, page 25

¹⁴ Wilde Oscar, "The Picture of Dorian Gray", Penguin Books, London, 1994, pages 31 and 32

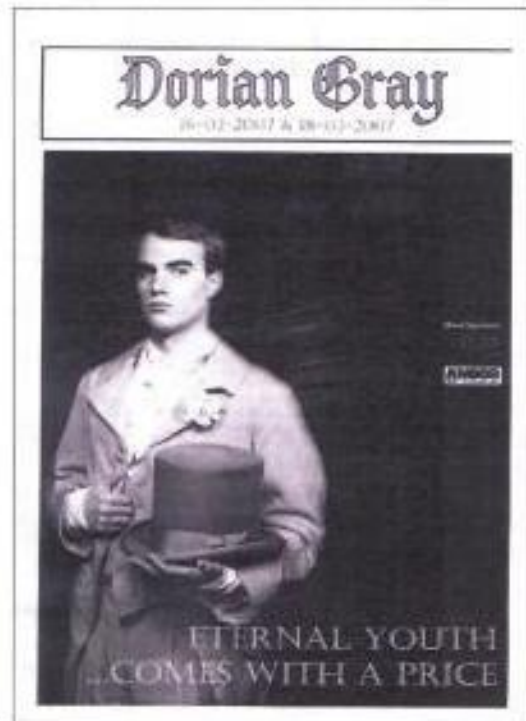
¹⁵ Wilde Oscar, "The Picture of Dorian Gray", Airmont Books (Airmont Publishing Company), page 30

¹⁶ Wilde Oscar, "The Picture of Dorian Gray", Airmont Books (Airmont Publishing Company), page 31

When the painting was nearly done, the three men stood looking at it and admiring it deeply. Its beauty dazzled them. Then, suddenly, Dorian began feeling jealousy. He was jealous of the man in the painting, the man who will always stay young while Dorian is getting older by the second. And then he said the fatal wish: "If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything! Yes, there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that!"¹⁷

Strangely, it seemed as the devil had heard his wishes. From that moment, the picture has been the one to grow old instead of Dorian. And Dorian started spending more and more time with Harry and acting like he had lost his soul indeed. Basil opposed to this. He knew that wasn't real Dorian speaking but Harry's influence and that he had already started poisoning Dorian's innocent soul.

This story is a testimony on what happens to people who find themselves in a bad company. All people in our lives have some sort of influence on us. Some have more, some less. This goes for short term as well as for long term socializing. There is even an old Assyrian proverb saying: "Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are."¹⁸ People instantly influence us; we are not the same when we spend time with different people. We respond like this to all people, but the ones that are the closest to us make a permanent impact on our lives. In time, we begin to act like those who we spend most time with. We set our limits through those people who are around us. We know what is acceptable to them, so we act in that way. We try to have as much things in common with those people and even if we are unaware of it, we are slowly turned into a "member of their club" and we are (partially) sharing thoughts and ideas with the other



¹⁷ Wilde Oscar, "The Picture of Dorian Gray", Airmont Books (Airmont Publishing Company), page 34

¹⁸ <http://proverbs.cit tepedia.com/about.php?d=Assyrian+proverbs>

becomes gray and he gets the cruel and evil look reflecting his new personality.

Unfortunately for others, they do not see these “warning signs” on him. When they look at him, all they see is a perfect face of an innocent young man who he was many years ago. They believe that he is incapable of doing any harm.

At the end of the day, Dorian Gray was, first of all the victim. He was Harry’s victim. Harry had seduced him and led him to a totally new world. His world, where there was no moral, but only pleasure... Harry had told Dorian funny things, clever things and dangerous things. He convinced him that he should explore life – the good things and the evil things that life consists of. It is truly amazing the amount of power that words possess. Words are a weapon, lethal one when used by wrong people.

When his wish becomes reality, Dorian finds out that not every wish brings happiness. Sometimes when you get what you wished for you realize that that is not what you really wanted. He becomes disappointed and loses himself even more in this strange world that he lives in. The picture was to Dorian like a mirror to his soul. He could see all the unkindness and cruelty in it. He would often run to it to see if the image had changed. It became older and uglier as Dorian was becoming more cold and heartless. Dorian learns the hard way that the only beauty that truly matters is the beauty of one’s soul. That beauty isn’t so hard to get being that we all have it, we just need to find it and nourish it.

The picture of Dorian Gray is a novel that puts our lives, values and already formed opinions to the test. It is a story about beauty, relationships that people have with themselves and others, fear and insecurity, bad influence, internal quest and bitter – sweet taste of the dark side of the life and basic instincts,

colored into flamboyance of hedonistic lifestyles and wisdoms.



The message of the novel is that we shouldn’t let ourselves be seduced by the devil and lose our soul. Nothing is worth giving your soul for. If we have our souls, everything can work out for the best. It is the greatest treasure we can have.

Poems

Wilde's poetry was smooth and elegant, but not very valuable from today's point of view. The most appreciated has been "The Ballad of the Reading Gaol" from 1898, but it had more of a biographical than literary value.

This poem was inspired by a hanging that took place in the Reading prison while Oscar Wilde was there serving his time. The man who was been hanged was Trooper Charles Thomas

Wooldrige who had been sentenced to death for killing his wife. Wilde then wrote this poem with the idea that all the people are sinners and that we all deserve forgiveness.

Wilde never denied that he had written this poem, but it was published under the name C.3.3. (Building C, floor 3, cell 3 at Reading). He did this in order to avoid his name being published on the first page of the poem.

The most famous piece of the poem:

"Yet each man kills the thing he loves

By each let this be heard,

Some do it with a bitter look,

Some with a flattering word,

The coward does it with a kiss,

The brave man with a sword!"¹⁹



¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ballad_of_Reading_Gaol

Essays

Wilde's essays are very original and once again, his wit and vivid spirit are expressed in them. Many essays and critical dialogues were published in 1891's collection "Intentions" ("The Critic as Artist", "The Decay of Lying", "The Truth of Masks", "Pen, Pencil and Poison").

The readers found it very interesting because he would make them think through and question things that they believed were already clear and set straight. In his essays he makes us wander about relativity of human values and although he would often prove himself wrong, he'd also make us laugh and wonder what he will say next.

His most recognizable essay is "De Profundis". This essay is not like his other essays. It was published posthumously in 1905 and was respected for its biographical value. It is a letter that he had written to Lord Alfred from the prison. It is sentimental, yet at times written in prose. As the Serbian professor D. Puhalo wrote, it is too personal to be a literary work and too literary to be a striking personal document.

A quotation from "De Profundis":

"All trials are trials for one's life, just as all sentences are sentences of death; and three times have I been tried. The first time I left the box to be arrested, the second time to be led back to the house of detention, the third time to pass into a prison for two years. Society, as we have constituted it, will have no place for me, has none to offer; but Nature, whose sweet rains fall on unjust and just alike, will have clefts in the rocks where I may hide, and secret valleys in whose silence I may weep undisturbed. She will hang the night with stars so that I may walk abroad in the darkness without stumbling, and send the wind over my footprints so that none may track me to my hurt: she will cleanse me in great waters, and with bitter herbs make me whole."²⁰

²⁰ <http://www.online-literature.com/wilde/>

Conclusion

Oscar Wilde was an extraordinary person in literature and also in his private life. He tried to show the importance of physical appearance and believed that people should, indeed be judged by it. He, himself was always dressed fashionably and was youthful looking even when he reached his forties. He then looked like an oversized boy. He seemed to enjoy shocking the public and being in the centre of attention.

He wrote many works that get our attention with their subjects, his clever and witty remarks, interesting tone and good arguments. He has the power to reach the readers' soul and mind and make them re-examine their life values; or to make them re-question something they have already formed an opinion about. Sometimes he is right, and sometimes he just claims something because it sounds unconventional. The important thing is that it makes us think and thinking is crucial in forming opinions and developing our personality. He said it himself: **"The aim of life is self-development. To realize one's nature perfectly – that is what each of us is here for."**²¹ And also: **"Only the shallow ones know themselves."**²²

His quotes are very interesting and recognizable. They can easily become someone's life motto. They sound good and usually have a good message, too. They are the ones that stay in your mind after a long period of time.

In some of them, he tries to sound interesting giving comments that show his wit and his skill with words ("I can believe in anything, provided that it is quite incredible"²³ or "Life's too important to be taken seriously"²⁴), while in others he gives accent to hedonism ("I can resist anything but



²¹ http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Oscar_Wilde/

²² *ibid*

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Oscar_Wilde/

temptation"²⁵, or "I have but the simplest taste – I am always satisfied with the best"²⁶).

Nevertheless, there are quotes that reveal his true, sensitive nature – "Who, being loved, is poor?"²⁷, "We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars!"²⁸ And "No great artist ever sees things as they really are. If he did, he would cease to be an artist"²⁹

Wilde was an optimist and a true dreamer. He was in love with life and was happy until his forties. He fought for his ideals and that is something that is worth admiration. Not many people, even nowadays, have the chance or the courage just to be themselves or express their opinion if it is much different from what people expect it to be.

People around the world can learn much about themselves and life through his works and life. Some of his works can bring us to becoming one step closer to the people we ought to be. In the end, it all comes down to questioning ourselves and discovering new worlds in our minds, apart from the ones that already exist in reality, becoming wiser and choosing our own ways. Wilde teaches us that everything is relative, every truth can be seen from a different point of view, that everything can be seen in a bigger perspective, we are allowed to think differently and freely. That is what Oscar Wilde, as a writer and an inspiration, is good for: to remind us to discover ourselves over and over again, have fun with it, learn along the way, and express ourselves no matter what.

²⁵ ibid

²⁶ ibid

²⁷ ibid

²⁸ http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Oscar_Wilde/

²⁹ ibid

Appendix

Oscar Wilde was an interesting, witty person in all situations, even serious ones. There are some interesting anecdotes about him and his life. Here are some of them:

- When Oscar Wilde was asked to give his opinion on a certain theatrical piece, he said: **"The play was a great success, but the audience was a disaster!"**³⁰
- He was once asked to make various changes to one of his plays. He refused saying: **"Who am I to tamper with a masterpiece?"**³¹
- In the trial, Wilde mentioned his physician. It was irrelevant to the case, so the cross-examiner replied angrily: **"Nevermind your physician!"** **"I never do,"**³² answered Wilde.
- There is often mentioned Wilde's last toast. It was when he was in his hotel room in Paris, dying of meningitis, when he was offered a glass of champagne. He then said: **"I am dying as have lived, beyond my means!"**³³
- Oscar Wilde was once asked to make a list of the world's 100 best books. He replied: **"I fear that would be impossible. I have written only five."**³⁴
- Wilde and George Bernard Shaw didn't get along very well. Oscar once made a comment about Shaw: **"He hasn't an enemy in the world, and none of his friends like him"**³⁵

He will, of course be best remembered for his epigrams. Here are a few:

- **"When one is in love, one always begins by deceiving oneself, and one always ends by deceiving others. That is what the world calls a romance."**³⁶
- **"I always pass on good advice. It is only thing to do with it. It is never of any use to myself."**³⁷
- **"In this world, there are only two tragedies. One is *not* getting what one wants, and the other is getting it!"**³⁸
- **"No man is rich enough to buy back his past"**³⁹
- **"One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry."**⁴⁰
- **"The truth is rarer pure and never simple"**⁴¹

³⁰ <http://www.anecdote.com/browse.php?category=people&who=Wilde>

³¹ *ibid*

³² *ibid*

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ Marković Gordana i Kovačević Katarina, *Engleski jezik za III razred filološke gimnazije*, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Beograd, 2001, 147 page

³⁵ *ibid*

³⁶ *ibid*, 146 page

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ <http://www.cmgww.com/historic/wilde/quotes.htm>

⁴⁰ *ibid*

Literature

- 1 Soars John and Liz, *New Headway Advanced Student's Book*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003
- 2 Drabble Margaret (editor), *The Oxford Companion to English literature*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2000, Sixed edition, revised 2006
- 3 Dr. Puhalo Dušan, „Engleska književnost XIX – XX veka“, Naučna knjiga, Beograd, 1983.
- 4 The Official website of Oscar Wilde: <http://www.cmgww.com/historic/wilde/>
5. Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oscar_Wilde/ i
http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Oscar_Wilde/
- 6 <http://www.online-literature.com/wilde/>
- 7 <http://www.oscarwilde.com/>
- 8 Oliver Parker (director), „The Importance of Being Earnest“, Miramax Films, United Kingdom, 2002
- 9 Wilde Oscar, „The Happy Prince“
- 10 Wilde Oscar, „The Model Millionaire“, Short Stories Collection „A Tangled Web“
- 11 Wilde Oscar, „The Picture of Dorian Gray“, Macmillan Heineman ELT Oxford, 2002, retold version by F. H. Cornich for Maximillian Guided Readers
- 12 Wilde Oscar, „The Picture of Dorian Gray“, Penguin Books, London, 1994
- 13 Wilde Oscar, „The Picture of Dorian Gray“, Airmont Books, New York, 1964
- 14 Vajld Oskar, „Slika Dorijana Greja“, Macura Lazar (prevodilac), Narodna knjiga, 2004
- 15 Article from the Newspaper „Pedagoška praksa“ on Oscar Wilde
- 16 Marković Gordana i Kovačević Katarina, „Engleski jezik za III razred filološke gimnazije“, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Beograd, 2001
- 17 Hornby A S, „Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary“, International Student's Edition, Oxford University Press, Oxford, first published in 1948, seventh edition, revised 2006
- 18 <http://wilde.thefreelibrary.com/>
- 19 http://quotationspage.com/quotes/Oscar_Wilde/
- 20 <http://www.anecdote.com/browse.php?category=people&who=Wilde>

⁴¹ <http://www.oscarwilde.com/wilde.html>