

# L'UOMO: TRA CRISI E VALORIZZAZIONE

*Nello stesso contesto storico di Gabriele D'Annunzio visse un altro "Dandy", anzi il dandy per eccellenza: Oscar Wilde. L'arte diviene l'unica ragione di vita, un'arte che tende sempre più verso l'artificio, complicata, esigente, sempre più raffinata ed esclusiva.*

*Oscar Wilde (1856-1900), like Shaws, was of Irish birth and moved to London as a young man. He made a reputation for himself as a literary dandy, the first British artist to lead a life according to the doctrine of Aestheticism which also inspired his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890).*

## INGLESE

(Oscar Wilde: La vita come opera d'arte)

*The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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### Oscar Wilde (1856 - 1900)



An Irishman, Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin in 1856 into an upper middleclass family. He went to England having won a scholarship for Oxford University. There he created an image of eccentricity for himself, for his ostentatious way of life and his support of the idea of "Art for Art's sake".

He settled in London and married Constance Lloyd, who bore him two children. In the last decade of the 19th century, Oscar Wilde scandalised London when he was tried for homosexuality and imprisoned for two years. Society ostracised him after his

release. Wilde went to live in Paris where he died in poverty and alone in 1900.

He wrote poetry and prose, and achieved success in a range of genres: poetry, essays, fiction and drama. Especially successful was a short novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891). The four plays that Wilde wrote between 1891 and 1895 - *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *A Woman of No Importance* (1893) and *An Ideal Husband* (1895) - were all stage triumphs. Their reputation mainly rests on Wilde's gift for characterisation and brilliant dialogue. While in prison, he wrote an epistle, known as *De Profundis*, to Lord Alfred Douglas, who was to a large extent responsible for his ruin. His imprisonment also inspired his last poem, *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*, where the criminal is identified with all suffering humanity and regarded in a spirit of forgiveness.

## The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891)



**T**his short novel reflects some controversial aspects of English literature and society at the end of the 19th century. From the traditional conventions of **Gothic fiction**.

Oscar Wilde borrows the supernatural elements of the plot and the dark atmospheres in the underworld of London where Dorian live a life of vice and crime.

By contrast, the new influence of **Aestheticism** is predominant when Wilde describes Dorian's life among the members of his own social class. Lord Henry, a perfect dandy with cynical opinions, converts Dorian to the aesthetic philosophy of "Art for Art's sake", which separates art from life and moral sense.

Driven (spinto) by narcissism and self-love, the young man distorts this doctrine and indulges in immoral pleasures (piaceri), whose nature is left to the reader's imagination (è lasciata all'immaginazione del lettore). The interest of the novel lies in its **theme** of a double life based on the contrast between appearance and reality, in this case a man and his portrait.

The former, although deeply corrupted, remains unchanged to the outwards eye while the latter is made ugly by vice and crime.

Although Dorian eventually meets his punishment in self-inflicted death, Wilde does not pass any explicit judgment on him. The novel has been read either as a criticism of Aestheticism, or of Victorian society which hides its moral responsibilities under a facade of hypocrisy, or as a description of the perils of hedonism.