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## The picture of dorian gray original book cover

"There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book," wrote Oscar Wilde in the preface to the 1891 edition of The Picture of Dorian Gray. "Books are well written, or badly written. That is all." Of course, even as Wilde wrote these words, he knew that the critics did not agree with his assessment. In fact, the entire preface is a protest; a response to the backlash created by the original publication of his now-classic novel. By the time he wrote the above in 1891, The Picture of Dorian Gray had existed in three forms: the original typescript, commissioned by and submitted to J.M. Stoddart, the editor at Lippincott's, the edited 1890 version published in the magazine (which had also published Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's The Sign of the Four, earlier that year), and the re-edited and expanded 1891 version, published by Ward, Lock and Company. That sounds reasonable enough on its face—there can't be many novelists whose manuscripts were accepted for publication without their editors making any changes, and as I've noted before, substantial edits can accompany the leap from magazine publication to book for a variety of reasons. But it seems that most of the changes between these three versions were attempts to make the book more "moral" (that is, less gay) and that they were at least partially enacted, like Wilde's preface, as a response to the critics, and also as a bulwark against prosecution of Wilde for homosexuality, which was a real danger at the time. According to Nicholas Frankel, editor of The Picture of Dorian Gray: An Annotated, Uncensored Edition: When Wilde's typescript of the novel arrived on [editor J.M.] Stoddart's desk, he quickly determined that it contained "a number of things which an innocent woman would make an exception to," as he explained to Craige Lippincott, while assuring his employer that The Picture of Dorian Gray would "not go into the Magazine unless it is proper that it shall." He further guaranteed Lippincott that he would edit the novel to "make it acceptable to the most fastidious taste." The vast majority of Stoddart's deletions were acts of censorship, bearing on sexual matters of both a homosexual and a heterosexual nature. Much of the material that Stoddart cut makes the homoerotic nature of Basil Hallward's feelings for Dorian Gray more vivid and explicit than either of the two subsequent published versions, or else it accentuates elements of homosexuality in Dorian Gray's own make-up. But some of Stoddart's deletions bear on promiscuous or illicit heterosexuality too—Stoddart deleted references to Dorian's female lovers as his "mistresses," for instance—suggesting that Stoddart was worried about the novel's influence on women as well as men. Stoddart also deleted many passages that smacked of decadence more generally. Still, according to Nicholas Frankel's introduction to his uncensored version, Stoddart only cut about 500 words from Wilde's typescript. Editorial practices were rather different than they are today, and Wilde had no idea about any of the changes until he read his own, less-explicit, piece in the magazine. But it was quickly clear that Stoddart had not gone far enough. The book was roundly criticized and badly reviewed by the British press, who were not only disgusted but offended. In fact, Britain's biggest bookseller went so far as to remove the offending issue from its bookstalls, citing the fact that Wilde's story had "been characterized by the press as a filthy one." Here's one review, from London's Daily Chronicle: Dulness and dirt are the chief features of Lippincott's this month: The element that is unclean, though undeniably amusing, is furnished by Mr. Oscar Wilde's story of The Picture of Dorian Gray. It is a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French decadents—a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction—a gloating study of the mental and physical corruption of a fresh, fair and golden youth, which might be fascinating but for its effeminate frivolity, its studied insincerity, its theatrical cynicism, its tawdry mysticism, its flippant philosophizings. . . . Mr. Wilde says the book has "a moral." The "moral," so far as we can collect it, is that man's chief end is to develop his nature to the fullest by "always searching for new sensations," that when the soul gets sick the way to cure it is to deny the senses nothing. You could count the number of old-timey euphemisms for "gay" in there, but you'd probably get tired. Wilde worked with another editor to prepare the novel for publication in book form, enlarging it significantly and further reducing its allusions to homosexuality. Frankel notes that Wilde "also heightened Dorian's monstrosity in the moments before his fateful, final encounter with the portrait, to bring the story to a more appropriate moral conclusion. In an atmosphere of heightened paranoia, Wilde and his publishers were unwilling to risk prosecution." Wilde even changed Dorian's age in the 1891 edition, so that no one could argue that as a connection between them (they were both 32 at the time), and he had reason for caution—only five years after the book's original publication, Wilde was convicted of "gross indecency" (read: homosexual acts) and sentenced to two years' hard labor. As mentioned above, you can now read all three versions of The Portrait of Dorian Gray, and Frankel's edition does an excellent job of in-depth comparison. But on this, the anniversary of the novel's first publication in Lippincott's, and for those of us who don't necessarily have time to read three similar books, I thought it would be fun to take a closer look at a few of the edited passages.
\* A conversation between Lord Henry and Basil Hallward about Dorian, 1890 magazine edition: ". . . Tell me more about Dorian Gray. How often do you see him?" "Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. Of course sometimes it is only for a few minutes. But a few minutes with somebody one worships mean a great deal." "But you don't really worship him?" "I do." "How extraordinary! I thought you would never care for anything but your painting,—your art, I should say. Art sounds better, doesn't it?" "He is all my art to me now. . . ." A conversation between Lord Henry and Basil Hallward about Dorian, 1891 book edition: ". . . Tell me more about Mr. Dorian Gray. How often do you see him?" "Every day. I couldn't be happy if I didn't see him every day. He is absolutely necessary to me." "How extraordinary! I thought you would never care for anything but your art." "He is all my art to me now," said the painter gravely. The reason for the above edit is pretty clear: this exchange takes place quite early on in the book, in the middle of the first chapter, and in its original form it suggests that Basil has very strong personal (and more romantic) feelings for Dorian. He worships him! He's even willing to double down on it. The edited version makes it all about the art and not at all about love.
\* Basil Hallward to Dorian, 1890 magazine edition: Don't speak. Wait till you hear what I have to say. It is quite true I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give to a friend. Somehow I have never loved a woman. I suppose I never had time. Perhaps, as Harry says, a really 'grande passion' is the privilege of those who have nothing to do, and that is the use of the idle classes in a country. Well, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I quite admit that I adored you madly, extravagantly, absurdly. I was jealous of everyone to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. When I was away from you, you were still present in my art. It was all wrong and foolish. It is all wrong and foolish still. Of course I never let you know anything about this. It would have been impossible. You would not have understood it. I did not understand it myself. One day I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you. It was to have been my masterpiece. It is my masterpiece. But, as I worked at it, every flake and film of color seemed to me to reveal my secret. I grew afraid that the world could know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had told too much. Then it was that I resolved never to allow the picture to be exhibited. You were a little annoyed; but then you did not realize all that it meant to me. Basil Hallward to Dorian, 1891 book edition: Don't speak. Wait till you hear what I have to say. Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power, by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream. I worshipped you. I grew jealous of every one to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. When you were away from me, you were still present in my art. . . Of course, I never let you know anything about this. It would have been impossible. You would not have understood it. I hardly understood it myself. I only knew that I had seen perfection face to face, and that the world had become wonderful to my eyes—too wonderful, perhaps, for in such mad worships there is peril, the peril of losing them, no less than the peril of keeping them. . . Weeks and weeks went on, and I grew more and more absorbed in you. Then came a new development. I had drawn you as Paris in dainty armour, and as Adonis with huntsman's cloak and polished boar-spear. Crowned with heavy lotus-blossoms you had sat on the prow of Adrian's barge, gazing across the green turbid Nile. You had leaned over the still pool of some Greek woodland and seen in the water's silent silver the marvel of your own face. And it had all been what art should be—unconscious, ideal, and remote. One day, a fatal day I sometimes think, I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually are, not in the costume of dead ages, but in your own dress and in your own time. Whether it was the realism of the method, or the mere wonder of your own personality, thus directed to me without mist or veil, I cannot tell. But I know that as I worked at it, every flake and film of colour seemed to me to reveal my secret. I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had told too much, that I had put too much of myself into it. Then it was that I resolved never to allow the picture to be exhibited. You were a little annoyed; but then you did not realize all that it meant to me. Basil's thinking, 1891 book edition: The painter felt strangely moved. The lad was infinitely dear to him, and his personality had been the great turning point in his art. He could not bear the idea of reproaching him any more. After all, his indifference was probably merely a mood that would pass away. There was so much in him that was good, so much in him that was noble. Basil's thinking, 1891 book edition: The painter felt strangely moved. The lad was infinitely dear to him, and his personality had been the great turning point in his art. He could not bear the idea of reproaching him any more. After all, his indifference was probably merely a mood that would pass away. There was so much in him that was good, so much in him that was noble. Apparently it's fine for a lad to be dear to you, as long as neither of you are feminine!
\* Basil lectures Dorian, 1890 magazine edition: Why is it, Dorian, that a man like the Duke of Berwick leaves the room of a club when you enter it? Why is it that so many gentlemen in London will neither go to your house or invite you to theirs? You used to be a friend of Lord Cawdor. I met him at dinner last week. Your name happened to come up in conversation, in connection with the miniatures you have lent to the exhibition at the Dudley. Cawdor curled his lip and said that you might have the most artistic tastes, but that you were a man whom no pure-minded girl should be allowed to know, and whom no chaste woman should sit in the same room with. I reminded him that I was a friend of yours, and asked him what he meant. He told me. He told me right out before everybody. It was horrible! Why is your friendship so fatal to young men? There was that wretched boy in the Guards who committed suicide. You were his great friend. There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had to leave England, with a tarnished name. You and he were inseparable. What about Adrian Singleton and his dreadful end? What about Lord Kent's only son, and his career? I met his father yesterday in St. James's Street. He seemed broken with shame and sorrow. What about the young Duke of Perth? What sort of life has he got now? What gentleman would associate with him? Dorian, Dorian, your reputation is infamous. I know you and Harry are great friends. I say nothing about that now, but surely you need not have made his sister's name a by-word. Basil lectures Dorian, 1891 book edition: Why is it, Dorian, that a man like the Duke of Berwick leaves the room of a club when you enter it? Why is it that so many gentlemen in London will neither go to your house or invite you to theirs? You used to be a friend of Lord Staveley. I met him at dinner last week. Your name happened to come up in conversation, in connection with the miniatures you have lent to the exhibition at the Dudley. Staveley curled his lip and said that you might have the most artistic tastes, but that you were a man whom no pure-minded girl should be allowed to know, and whom no chaste woman should sit in the same room with. I reminded him that I was a friend of yours, and asked him what he meant. He told me. He told me right out before everybody. It was horrible! Why is your friendship so fatal to young men? There was that wretched boy in the Guards who committed suicide. You were his great friend. There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had to leave England with a tarnished name. You and he were inseparable. What about Adrian Singleton and his dreadful end? What about Lord Kent's only son and his career? I met his father yesterday in St. James's Street. He seemed broken with shame and sorrow. What about the young Duke of Perth? What sort of life has he got now? What gentleman would associate with him?" "Stop, Basil. You are talking about things of which you know nothing," said Dorian Gray, biting his lip, and with a note of infinite contempt in his voice. "You ask me why Berwick leaves a room when I enter it. It is because I know everything about his life, not because he knows anything about mine. With such blood as he has in his veins, how could his record be clean? You ask me about Henry Ashton and young Perth. Did I teach the one his vices, and the other his debauchery? If Kent's silly son takes his wife from the streets, what is that to me? If Adrian Singleton writes his friend's name across a bill, am I his keeper? I know how people chatter in England. The middle classes air their moral prejudices over their gross dinner-tables, and whisper about what they call the profligacies of their betters in order to try and pretend that they are in smart society and on intimate terms with the people they slander. In this country, it is enough for a man to have distinction and brains for every common tongue to wag against him. You are talking about things of which you know nothing." "Dorian," cried Hallward, "that is not the question. England is bad enough I know, and English society is all wrong. That is the reason why I want you to be fine. You have not been fine. One has a right to judge of a man by the effect he has over his friends. Yours seem to lose all sense of honour, of goodness, of purity. You have filled them with a madness for pleasure. They have gone down into the depths. You led them there. Yes; you led them there, and yet you can smile, as you are smiling now. And there is worse behind. I know you and Harry are inseparable. Surely for that reason, if for none other, you should not have made his sister's name a by-word." This one is interesting, because it gives Dorian a voice where he had none—he gets to interject into his own drubbing for a minute. Again, it may be an effort at fleshing out Dorian's character, and making the text more book-length. But I wonder if this isn't also a case of Wilde snapping back at his own critics, those "hypocrites" who "air their moral prejudices over their gross dinner-tables, and whisper about what they call the profligacies of their betters in order to try and pretend that they are in smart society and on intimate terms with the people they slander. In this country, it is enough for a man to have distinction and brains for every common tongue to wag against him." You couldn't blame him, if it was.

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