

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As a poet who sought Beauty, Wilde pursued closely the way led by the French as well as the English Art for Art's Sake poets. Aestheticism was their common aim. Although the imitation of Wilde was artistic as it was sometimes praised, in comparison with the masters he pursued, he was still inferior to them. He imitated them, but remained a derivative poet. In his poems, he recaptured many kinds of aesthetic imagery, but he could not achieve the correspondence of the imagery which is the most aesthetic element in poetry, as Baudelaire has given his examples. Dorian Gray expounded the spirit of the decadents though he himself was, in many ways, less decadent than Des Esseintes. It is notable that when Wilde borrowed, he could not fuse his borrowings into a higher form of art. However, he remained rather close to his masters as proved by the fact that while he was reproached, on the one hand, by the standard of morality, he was praised, on the other hand, by the standard of aestheticism.

The inferiority of his imitation is marked only in his poems and novel; in his criticism and plays, however, the effect is positive as Karl Beckson, in applying the standard of T. S. Eliot, judged him:

If the alchemy did not always succeed, it was not the fault of the borrowing but of the alchemist, for as T. S. Eliot wrote in The Sacred Wood (1920):

One of the surest of tests is the way in which a poet borrows. Immature poets imitate; mature poets steal; bad poets deface what they take, and good poets make it into something better or at least something different.

By this standard, Wilde was perhaps less than a mature poet, but a good critic, and a splendid playwright.

Though he was criticized, his works stand as proof of literary influence.

¹Karl Beckson, ed. Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage, p. 2.