

CHAPTER IV

THE INFLUENCE OF THE FRENCH ART FOR ART'S SAKE SCHOOL ON THE IMAGERY IN THE NOVEL OF OSCAR WILDE

Among the stories that Wilde wrote, The Picture of Dorian Gray, his only novel, is the most interesting to study about the influence derived from the French school. The book appeared in 1890 in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine with the reaction that showed the widening split between the 'nonconforming' artist and the readers. The review written by Samuel Henry Jeys, a journalist and biographer, entitled 'A Study in Puppydom' appeared on June 24, 1890. Sidney Low, editor of the St. James Gazette, who wrote a prefatory memoir to a volume of Jeys' writing entitled 'Samuel Henry Jeys' said:

. . . [Wilde] waged strenuous warfare against the fads and freaks which were shooting through the intellectual and artistic atmosphere in the last decade of the nineteenth century. For Yellow-Bookism, Walter Paterism, aestheticism and all other 'isms' and cults sprouting so bounteously from the soil at that period, he had no indulgence.¹

The Daily Chronicle was the review that made the strongest attack on this book:

It is a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French Décadents- a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction.²

¹Karl Beckson, ed. Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage, p. 67.

²Ibid., p. 72.

However, there were some who appreciated the book, especially, the Art for Art's Sake poets who pursued the same disciplines. Walter Pater saw in *Dorian Gray* the brother of his heroes¹ and singled out the "really alive quality of the dialogue."² Even Mallarmé, the French poet, expressed his appreciation when he wrote a letter to Wilde:

I have finished the book, one of the few which can move one. Its deep fantasy and very strange atmosphere took me by storm. To make it so poignant, and human with such astonishing intellectual refinement, and at the same time to keep the perverse beauty is a miracle that you have worked through the use of all the arts of the writer . . . This disturbing, full-length portrait of a *Dorian Gray* will haunt me, as writing, having become the book itself.³

Yeats, as well, liked it and praised it as "a wonderful book."⁴

From different sides of criticism, there is one common point of view. It was the imitation of the French writers as shown in the attack of the Daily Chronicle and the comment of Pater in 'A Novel by Mr. Oscar Wilde' in the Book Man, November 1891:

Mr. Wilde's work may fairly claim to go with that of Edgar Poe, and with some good French work of the same kind, done, probably, in more or less conscious imitation of it.

The French influence on his imagery is manifest in his preface to this book, Wilde revealed the concepts of some French poets:

¹Philippe Jullian, Oscar Wilde, p. 222.

²Epifanio San Juan, Jr., The Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 49.

³Philippe Jullian, Oscar Wilde, p. 223.

⁴Epifanio San Juan, Jr., The Art of Oscar Wilde, p. 49.

⁵Karl Beckson, ed. Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage, p. 86.

The artist is the creator of beautiful things.
To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim.¹

This is the idea similar to the aphorism of Flaubert who declared:

Je veux qu'il n'y ait pas dans mon livre un seul mouvement, ni une seule réflexion de l'auteur. . . . Rien dans ce livre n'est tiré de moi: jamais ma personnalité ne m'aura été plus inutile. . . .² Dans ce livre-ci pas de réflexion, personnalité de l'auteur absente.

The concepts about art and morality are, as well, borrowed from the French poets. He stressed this idea firmly:

- There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all.³
- No artist has ethical sympathies. An ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style.⁴

It showed that Wilde had confidence in the idea that the spheres of art and of ethics were absolutely distinct and separate. It is possible that this idea was partly borrowed from Flaubert. When Wilde was attacked about morality, he referred to Flaubert, in a letter written to the editor of the Scots Observer, August 13, 1890:

You may ask me, sir, why I should care to have the ethical beauty of my story recognized. I answer, simply because it exists, because the thing is there. The chief merit of Madame Bovary is not the moral

¹ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 17.

² Flaubert, Madame Bovary (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1972), p. 513.

³ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 17.

⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

lesson that can be found in it, any more than the chief merit of Salambô is its archeology, but Flaubert was perfectly right in exposing the ignorance of those who called the one immoral and the other inaccurate . . . the critic has to educate the public, the artist has to educate the critic.¹

Wilde also recaptured the concepts of Gautier: "All art is quite useless."² This same concept is shown in the preface of Mademoiselle de Maupin.

It means that, Wilde, influenced by the French poets, rejected the expressive theory of romantic orientation which declares that art is the expression of the artist's personality, and the mimetic theory that art is an imitation or a reflection of life as proved by his attempt to make his novel unreal. Neither did he accept the pragmatic theory for he did not expect this work to be useful for society. These rejections are shown in The Picture of Dorian Gray. Among the French poets who influenced this work, Huysmans is the one who had the strongest influence. Enid Starkie remarked in her book: "There is no doubt that the 'yellow book' which leads Dorian Gray to perdition is A Rebours."³ Wilde himself accepted this fact. When he wrote to E.W. Prett, on April 15, 1892, he declared:

The book in Dorian Gray is one of the many books I have never written, but it is partly suggested by Huysmans' A Rebours, which you will get at any French booksellers. It is a fantastic variation on Huysmans' over-realistic study of the artistic temperament in our inartistic age.⁴

¹Philippe Jullian, Oscar Wilde, p. 221.

²Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 18.

³Enid Starkie, From Gautier to Eliot, p. 105

⁴Rupert Hart-Davis, ed. The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 313.

The imagery used in this book is similar to the imagery found in the poems which reappeared in the description of the scenes and of characters. Light and colour imagery are especially revealed as well as olfactory imagery:

The studio [of Basil] was filled with the rich odour of roses, and when the light summer wind stirred amidst the trees of the garden, there came through the open door the heavy scent of the lilac, or the more delicate perfume of the pink-flowering thorn.

. . . the little clouds that, like ravelled skeins of glossy white silk, were drifting across the hollowed turquoise of the summer sky.²

The curves of her throat were the curves of a white lily. Her hands seemed to be made of cool ivory.³

. . . the huge sunlight flamed like a monstrous dahlia with petals of yellow fire.⁴

Except for these kinds of imagery, there is something more and different. The French influence is shown, in the characters' artistic preferences, proved as well by the imagery each one uses. The characters themselves represent the image of the dandy and supreme decadent. Those whose roles are interesting to study are: Dorian Gray, Lord Henry, Basil Hallward and the role of the picture. The first three characters have the common interest for it is not life, but art that inspires them.

Dorian Gray

In the protagonist of this novel, Wilde tried his best to portray the image of Des Esseintes, the hero in A Rebours. The author

¹Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 19.

²Ibid., p. 26.

³Ibid., p. 97.

⁴Ibid., p. 95.

imitated very closely the personality, the thoughts, the habits and the conduct of this hero. Dorian Gray was fascinated by the book sent by his friend, Lord Henry. This book was said to be A Reboours as it was described:

It was a novel without a plot and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian who spent his life trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own, . . . The style in which it was written was that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of argot and of archaisms of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterizes the work¹ of some of the finest artists of the French school of Symbolistes.

Dorian read this book over and over and was strongly influenced by it. He could not free himself from the influence of this book or he never sought to free himself from it. He found his life the allegory of the life of the hero:

The hero . . . became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him² to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it.

Consequently, the way Dorian led his life was similar to the one of the supreme dandy of the period. He manifested several concepts of the dandy or the decadent. The imagery he revealed towards certain events reflected the influence of Des Esseintes upon him.

The Nihilist

Des Esseintes, being very pessimistic with the world outside because of his childhood suffering and the influence of Schopenhauer,

¹ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 138.

² Ibid., p. 140.

the great philosopher, isolated himself from society to live his own world. He lived a life "sans communication avec le dehors, dans des pièces aux fenêtres et aux portes closes."¹ Society was his great enemy which he tried in every way to destroy:

. . . mon but sera atteint, j'aurai contribué, dans la mesure de mes ressources, à créer un greffin, un ennemi de plus pour cette hideuse société qui nous rançonne.²

Dorian Gray reacted in the same way against society. Although he did not isolate himself from society like Des Esseintes, he still lived in it but he "never fell into the error of arresting his intellectual development by any formal acceptance of creed or system."³ His description of certain satanic acts showed that he did not care about the judgment of society. He proved himself a master of his own actions like other dandies, specifically, Des Esseintes, his model. Des Esseintes rejected all the restrictions of society and of religion because it made him "mécontent de ne plus être maître absolu chez lui."⁴ The similar image of Dorian is manifest towards the death of Sibyl Vane: "A man who is master of himself can end a sorrow as easily as he can invent a pleasure. I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, to enjoy them, and to dominate them."⁵ So followed the imagery which showed his irresponsibility for his crime: "What is done is done. What

¹Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 76.

²Ibid., p. 120.

³Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 145.

⁴Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 125.

⁵Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 122.

is past is past."¹ Then the same image is revealed in the episode of Hetty, the village girl whom he loved just for pleasure and suddenly abandoned without reason as he said: "I determined to leave her as flower-like as I had found her."² Concerning this act, he said: "I know I was right in acting as I did."³

The Escape from Reality into the Domain of Art and Beauty

As a dandy, Dorian did not surrender to any creed or system, rejected all social responsibility and led his life as an escapist or an epicurian as proved by his philosophy: "To become the spectator of one's own life . . . is to escape the suffering of life."⁴ Art and Beauty are the outlets of the dandy: "Celui qui aspire à la perfection sera d'abord dandy, car le dandysme est, à sa manière 'une tentative pour affirmer la modernité absolue de la beauté."⁵ Consequently, the life of a dandy is dedicated to beauty, luxury and many works of Arts. Dorian behaved like Des Esseintes, the archetypal dandy, immersing himself in the realm of arts. Des Esseintes was interested in literature. He devoted himself to many kinds of literature, for example, Latin literature in the period of the 'decadence,' symbolist literature, Christian literature and English literature: "il lui sembla que son esprit saturé

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 221.

³Ibid., p. 222.

⁴Ibid., p. 124.

⁵Albert J. Farmer, Le Mouvement Esthétique et 'Décadent' en Angleterre (1870-1900), p. 182

de littérature et d'art se refusait à en absorber davantage . . . Le tas confus des lectures, des méditations artistiques, qu'il avait accumulées depuis son isolement."¹ Reading was for him the way to escape from 'spleen':

il tomba, désorienté, dans le spleen. Afin de changer le cours de ses idées, il essaya des lectures émoullientes, tenta, en vue de se réfrigérer le cerveau, des solanées de l'art, lut ces livres si charmants pour les convalescents."²

Wilde portrayed the image of Des Esseintes to Dorian who, after the murder of Basil, in a state of anxiety, was found reading as an outlet. In reading books, his soul flew away in an artistic dream:

The mere lines looked to him like those straight lines of turquoise-blue that follow one as one pushes out to the Lido. The sudden flashes of colour reminded him of the gleam of the opal-and-iris-throated birds that flutter round the tall honeycombed Campanile, or stalk, with such stately grace, through the dim, dust-stained arcades. Leaning back with half-closed eyes, he kept saying over and over to himself :

Devant une façade rose,
Sur le marbre d'un escalier³

Dorian confessed that he was very fascinated by the work of Huysmans as he said to Lord Henry: "That book you sent me so fascinated me that I forgot how time was going."⁴

The image of a dandy who was interested in arts and the beautiful is verified in the taste of decoration also. Dorian led a luxurious

¹ Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 122.

² Ibid., p. 144.

³ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 176.

⁴ Ibid., p. 139.

life. His style of decoration in the house and in dressing was exquisite. Most of his commodities are exotic and curious and carefully selected, for example, small trays of old Sevres China, silver Louis-Quinze toilet-set, onyx-paved bathroom, blue dragon bowl, Renaissance tapestries.

Dorian, feeling himself to be in the company of those whom Dante described as having sought to "make themselves perfect by the worship of beauty,"¹ introduced his aesthetic theory: "I love beautiful things that one can touch and handle."² The first beautiful thing of which he was jealous was his own portrait. The flattery of Basil and Lord Henry made him aware of his own beauty. He grew more and more enamoured of his beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his soul. He treasured his youth and beauty very much and could not bear the state of being old as he said: "When I find that I am growing old, I shall kill myself."³ He could even give his soul for youth and beauty as he announced his wish: "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!"⁴ Every image represents his youth, aspiration, and devotion to art.

¹Ibid., p. 142.

²Ibid., p. 124.

³Ibid., p. 43

⁴Ibid., p. 42.

The statement of Dorian in the episode with Sibyl showed the influence of Gautier on Wilde. Albert, the hero of Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin was fascinated by the heroine when she acted as Rosalind in Shakespeare's As you Like It. So was Dorian; he fell in love with Sibyl by personae, by masks, not by persons. He loved her because she was not an ordinary woman, but a gifted actress with great ingenuity: "She is all the great heroines of the world in one. She is more than an individual."¹

His tastes thus, were similar to those of Gautier's hero. Both heroes were attracted by the aesthetic artistry of the women. This is why they fell in love: they did not love the real women only the artistic roles each represented.

She is simply a born artist . . . haven't I, to take my love out of poetry and to find my wife in Shakespeare's plays? Lips that Shakespeare taught to speak have whispered their secret in my ear. I have had the arms of Rosalind around me, and kissed Juliet on the mouth.²

Dorian in this episode also reflected the image of Wilde himself. Wilde, in his real life, adored the 'eternal feminine' as incarnated by actresses and acquaintances like Ellen Terry, Lily Langtry, Sarah Bernhardt to whom he dedicated some poems.

A Reboours, the book sent to Dorian by Lord Henry had much influence upon him and led him to appreciate the beauty in evil: "Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book. There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception of the

¹Ibid., p. 69.

²Ibid., p. 90.

beautiful."¹ It was the idea of 'Les Fleurs du Mal' which suggested itself to him. Wilde revealed this idea through the imagery Dorian used towards the death of Sibyl which showed his need to conduct his life artistically:

- It is one of the great romantic tragedies of the age.²

- . . . she died, as Juliet might have died. She passed again into the sphere of art. There is something of the martyr about her.³

- . . . my dear old Basil, if you want to console me, teach me rather to forget what has happened, or to see it from a proper artistic point of view. Was it not Gautier who used to write about La consolation des arts?⁴

And in the episode with Hetty, the village girl whom he abandoned, the similar attitude is revealed. In her sufferings, Dorian could see beauty: "Of course, she cried and all that. But there is no disgrace upon her. She can live, like Perdita, in her garden of mint and marigold."⁵ And another one was as follows: "I saw her white face at the window, like a spray of jasmine."⁶

The Search for New Sensations

It is in the doctrines respected by the dandy that we must try to test new sensations as Walter Pater declared. Dorian inherited this idea from Lord Henry and practised it throughout his life. Pleasure was

¹Ibid., p. 158.

²Ibid., p. 123.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 124.

⁵Ibid., p. 221.

⁶Ibid., p. 222.

essentially the aim of his life as his philosophy showed: "I ^{have} never searched for happiness. Who wants happiness? I have searched for pleasure."¹ This also shows the influence of Gautier who wrote in the preface of Mademoiselle de Maupin: "La jouissance me paraît être le but de la vie, et la seule chose utile du monde."² Lord Henry made this statement and suggested it to Dorian who did not hesitate to accept it. Dorian tried to find these pleasures in every moment of his life, both when he was among other people and when he was alone. Sometimes he went outside in search of some adventures which could give him a sense of delight. It was not long after the meeting with Lord Henry that Dorian found that he was changed as he said to Basil: "I am a man now. I have new passions, new thoughts, new ideas."³ Respecting the maxim of Lord Henry: "To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the senses by means of the soul,"⁴ he was fascinated by the search of the senses as obviously proved in Chapter XI. This chapter shows the influence of Huysmans so clearly that it is called the chapter of pseudo-Huysmans. It is the imagery that Wilde himself, not the characters, used that reflects this influence. Wilde chose, like Huysmans, the form of narration without any dialogue. The common aim is to present the hero in search of sensations. Wilde incarnated the imagery of Des Esseintes in Dorian. The domain in which Dorian absorbed himself to search for new sensations was similar to the

¹ Ibid., p. 209.

² Théophile Gautier, Mademoiselle de Maupin, p. 24.

³ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 124.

⁴ Ibid., p. 196.

one of Des Esseintes. In this chapter, Dorian is presented mostly in the locked room which, according to him, was the world of pleasure, like Des Esseintes who isolated himself from the society and made his home, ' la maison de Fontaney, ' his own world and "ne recevait aucune visite."¹ In their isolated world, both heroes satisfied their pleasure in the search for sensations. Des Esseintes found that colour could procure him new sensations and made him escape from monotony as shown in his decoration of the room with different colours by the help of light: "Ce qu'il voulait, c'était des couleurs dont l'expression s'affirmât aux lumières factices des lampes."² His search tended to the display of colour in an aquarium:

. . . il faisait manoeuvrer le jeu des tuyaux et des conduits qui vidaient l'aquarium et le remplissaient à nouveau d'eau pure et il y faisait verser des gouttes d'essences colorées, s'offrant, à sa guise ainsi, les tons verts ou saumâtres, opalins ou argentés, qu'ont les véritables rivières, suivant la couleur du ciel, l'ardeur plus ou moins vive du soleil, les menaces plus ou moins accentuées de la pluie, suivant, en un mot, l'état de la saison et de l'atmosphère.³

The similar fascination is found in Dorian. He acquired nine copies of the first edition of A Rebours "and had them bound in different colours, so that they might suit his various moods and the changing fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to have almost entirely lost control."⁴

¹ Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 95.

² Ibid., p. 72.

³ Ibid., p. 78

⁴ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 140.

Dorian's study of perfume reflected the image of Des Esseintes as well. Des Esseintes devoted himself to the study of perfume: "Je cherche des parfums nouveaux, des fleurs plus larges, des plaisirs inédits."¹ Des Esseintes enjoyed his symphonies of perfume and taste. So did Dorian in like manner. The study of perfume in this chapter is a very philosophical one:

And so he would now study perfumes and the secrets of their manufacture, . . . and set himself to discover their true relations . . . and seeking often to elaborate a real psychology of perfumes, and to estimate the several influences of sweet-smelling roots and scented, pollen-laden flowers; of aromatic balms and of dark and fragrant woods; of spikenard, that sickens; of hovenia, that makes man mad; and of² aloes, that are said to be able to expel melancholy from the soul.

In studying perfumes, he absorbed at the same time the idea of correspondence of Baudelaire when he tried to find their relations.

It is remarkable that both Dorian and Des Esseintes, in search of sensations, introduced themselves to the study of the senses:

It appeared to Dorian Gray that the true nature of the senses had never been understood, and that they had remained savage and animal merely because the world had sought to starve them into submission or to kill them by pain, instead of aiming at making them elements of a new spirituality, of which a fine instinct for beauty was to be the dominant characteristic.³

Dorian's study of perfume echoed that of Des Esseintes:

¹Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 143.

²Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 146.

³Ibid., p. 143.

Il étudia aux bougies toutes ses nuances, en découvrit une qui lui parut ne pas devoir se déséquilibrer et se soustraire aux exigences qu'il attendait d'elle;"¹

Dorian's fascination with jewels paralleled that of the other dandy who adored artifice. Des Esseintes, in one episode, devoted himself to the search for curious jewels. Dorian satisfied himself with the collection: "He would often spend a whole day setting and resetting in their cases the various stones that he had collected."² The collection of embroideries and tapestries also gave him pleasure: "for a whole year, he sought to accumulate the most exquisite specimens that he could find of textile and embroidered work."³

The attention to music was very distinct. Seduced by the fantastic character of exotic musical instruments, he found strange pleasure. He devoted himself to barbaric and primitive music and collected from all parts of the world the strangest instruments that could be found. Owing to these instruments, "he felt a curious delight in the thought that art, like Nature has her monsters, things of bestial shape and with hideous voices."⁴

Dorian was interested in Catholicism but it was not the doctrines that attracted him, rather the ritualistic beauty of its ceremony. He possessed the same spirit as Des Esseintes who was very fascinated by

¹ Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 73.

² Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 147.

³ Ibid., p. 151.

⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

Christian literature because he could prove new sensations by its novelty and strangeness:

. . . la littérature chrétienne prenait place, apportant avec des idées neuves, des mots nouveaux, des constructions inemployées, des verbes inconnus, des adjectifs aux sens alambiqués, des mots abstraits, rares . . .

So did Catholicism have an effect on Dorian. He was interested in it because its mystery quickened his imagination. It was an intellectual pleasure to let himself be fascinated by the splendour of the ritual as well as the daily dramatic sacrifice.

The daily sacrifice, more awful really than all the sacrifices of the antique world, stirred him as much by its superb rejection of the evidence of the senses as by the primitive simplicity of its elements and the eternal pathos of the human tragedy that it sought to symbolize.²

To escape from the monotony of life, the heroes found pleasure in dining in an aesthetic environment:

His [Dorian's] little dinners . . . were noted as much for the careful selection and placing of those invited, as for the exquisite taste shown in the decoration of the table, with its subtle symphonic . . . arrangements of exotic flowers, and embroidered cloths, and antique plate of gold and silver.³

Des Esseintes showed his artistic taste when he organised 'un repas de deuil.' It was merely the symphony in black.

¹ Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 89.

² Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 145.

³ Ibid., p. 142.

Dans la salle à manger tendue de noir, ouverte sur le jardin de sa maison subitement transformé, montrant ses allées poudrées de charbon, son petit bassin maintenant bordé d'une margelle de basalte et rempli d'encre et ses massifs tout disposés de cyprès et de pins, le dîner avait été apporté sur une nappe noire, garnie de corbeilles de violettes et de scabieuses . . . On avait mangé dans des assiettes bordées de noir, de soupes à la tortue, des pains de seigle russe, des olives mûres de Turquie, du caviar, des poutargues de mulets . . .

His aim in this organisation was to satisfy his pleasure: "Il songeait simplement à se composer, pour son plaisir personnel et non plus pour l'étonnement des autres."²

In comparison, the image of Des Esseintes that Wilde portrayed to Dorian was less aesthetic to the archetype. The way Des Esseintes searched for sensations is more artistic than Dorian's. Besides, Wilde's use of language in this chapter is inferior to Huysmans'. Wilde himself praised the style of writing of A Rebours:

The style in which it was written was that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of argot and of archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterizes the work of some of the finest artist of the French School of Symbo-
listes.³

His appreciation is manifest in his attempt to imitate this writer, but his style is less elaborate.

¹ Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 71

² Ibid.

³ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 138.

Lord Henry

He was the one who mostly dominated Dorian Gray as the latter said to Basil: "I owe a great deal to Harry, Basil . . ." ¹ Every doctrine that Lord Henry revealed to him touched him very much: ". . . words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with wilful paradox in them - had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses." ² Dorian's theories about life, pleasure and arts were formed by Lord Henry. Therefore, we can find in Lord Henry the sources of Dorian's way of thinking and of leading his life.

Although Wilde tried to conceal the artist's personality as he had stated in his preface, he could not help revealing his own personality in the character. Lord Henry's personality was very close to Wilde's. He was the spokesman of Wilde himself. Once he showed his regret for the youth of Dorian. This was the idea which came to Wilde six years previously when he had visited the studio of a painter called Basil Ward, for whom a very handsome young man was sitter. When the portrait was finished, Wilde happened to say: "What a pity such a glorious creature should ever grow old." The artist agreed, adding: "How delightful it would be if he could remain exactly as he is, while the portrait aged and withered in his stead." ³ The role of Lord Henry is the exponent of

¹ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 122.

² Ibid., p. 36.

³ Philippe Jullian, Oscar Wilde, p. 214.

the Art for Art's Sake theories. It was he who expounded them and it was Dorian who practised them.

Lord Henry as the Aesthete

The ideas concerning Art and Morality which Wilde derived from Gautier are manifest mostly in the characterization of Lord Henry. It was he who imbued Dorian with the ideas that the spheres of arts and of ethics were absolutely separate. The reflection of Gautier's epigram is shown many times: "But beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins. Intellect is in itself a mode of exaggeration, and destroys the harmony of any face,"¹ and "I think that it is better to be beautiful than to be good."² This concept affected him in the way he led his life, for beauty was of primary importance as his speech revealed: "And beauty is a form of genius- is higher, indeed, than genius, as it needs no explanation."³; "To me, beauty is the wonder of wonders."⁴ Consequently, through his life, he led everything artistically to beauty as he declared his thoughts: "If a man treats life artistically, his brain is his heart,"⁵ and "We live in an age that reads too much to be wise, and that thinks too much to be beautiful."⁶ Therefore, when he came into contact with someone, it was only their attractive appearance which interested him.

¹ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 21.

² Ibid., p. 206.

³ Ibid., p. 38.

⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

⁵ Ibid., p. 225.

⁶ Ibid., p. 117.

His own words confirm this: "I choose my friends for their good looks, my acquaintances for their good characters, and my enemies for their good intellects;"¹ and "It is only shallow people who do not judge by appearances."² For this reason, he became a great admirer of the beauty of Dorian. His admiration is manifest so much that he spoilt Dorian by teaching him to aspire to everlasting youth. His conviction is: "Youth is the one thing worth having."³

Lord Henry regarded everything artistically even tragedy, for example, the death of Sibyl Vane. His description of this episode echoed the idea of 'Les Fleurs du Mal' of Baudelaire, and of Poe who was attracted in by the beauty in the death of a beautiful woman, for example, Poe's short story Ligeia.

There is something to me quite beautiful about her death. I am glad I am living in a century when such wonders happen. They make one believe in the reality of the things we all play with, such as romance, passion and love.⁴

Like other dandies, he was interested in arts in every form. He had the same taste in decoration as Dorian and Basil because it was the mode of the aesthete of the age. He was interested in music as well as in literature: "I am too fond of reading books to care to write them."⁵ His interest turned to the works of the Art for Art's Sake poets who aimed at

¹ Ibid., p. 26.

² Ibid., p. 39.

³ Ibid., p. 38.

⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

aestheticism in the use of words: "My one quarrel is with words. That is the reason I hate vulgar realism in literature."¹

Besides, his imagery showed that he shared the same impression with Baudelaire about 'ennui': "The only horrible thing in the world is ennui, Dorian. That is the one sin for which there is no forgiveness."² So it was he who gave the idea to Dorian that pleasure was the most important thing to which one must devote oneself: "Pleasure is the only thing worth having a theory about . . . when we are happy, we are always good, but when we are good, we are not always happy."³ Then he became also the spokesman of Pater: "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 its visible symbol."⁴ According to him, one's own pleasure was the most important thing as he introduced many times the epicurian imagery:

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 its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful.⁵

To be good is to be in harmony with one's self, . . . Discord is to be forced to be in harmony with others. One's own life - that is the important thing.⁶

¹Ibid., p. 206.

²Ibid., p. 214.

³Ibid., p. 92.

⁴Ibid., p. 39.

⁵Ibid., p. 35.

⁶Ibid., p. 92

His principle was that sensations were the best elements that could provide pleasure. So his epigram ran: "Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the soul."¹

These ideas made him selfish for he thought only of his own pleasure and ignored the sufferings of others. He could provide himself pleasure and new sensations from the sufferings of others as proved by his imagery towards the love affair of Dorian-Sibyl: "I hope that Dorian Gray will make this girl his wife, passionately adore her for six months, and then suddenly become fascinated by someone else. He would be a wonderful study."²

Lord Henry as a Cynic

The decadents, feeling the ugliness of life, were never satisfied with society and instinctively revolted against its bad conditions. Lord Henry was one of the victims of this perverse age, finding himself a cynic who did not want himself to be in harmony with society. Every doctrine that he declared was always against the grain. He declared his hatred against society and his wish to escape from it.

Each class would have preached the importance of those virtues, for whose exercise there was no necessity in their own lives. The rich would have spoken on the value of thrift, and the idle grown eloquent over the dignity of labour. It was charming to have escaped all that!³

¹ Ibid., p. 37.

² Ibid., p. 39.

³ Ibid., p. 30.

He did not respect any principles of the society and advocated individualism. He said: ". . . individualism has really the higher aim . . . I consider that for any man of culture to accept the standard of his age is a form of the grossest immorality."¹ Besides, many passages showed his cynicism:

- I like persons better than principles, and I like persons with no principles better than anything else in the world.²
- The real drawback to marriage is that it makes one unselfish. And unselfish people are colourless. They lack individuality.³
- Being natural is simply a pose, and the most irritating pose I know.⁴

His cynicism was manifest as well in the disdain of women. Women for him were only the flesh with no intellect. He found that relations with women were the way to find new sensations as shown by his epigram towards the love affair of Dorian and Sibyl. This was also one tenet of the decadents: "Plusieurs, parmi les décadents, affectent le mépris de la femme et vont vers les dérèglements de l'instinct, ou bien vers un mysticisme de chasteté."⁵ There were many times that Lord Henry emphasized the foolishness of women:

- No woman is a genius.⁶

¹ Ibid., p. 92.

² Ibid., p. 27.

³ Ibid., p. 88.

⁴ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵ P. Martino, Parnasse et Symbolisme, p. 125.

⁶ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 63.

- Women have no appreciation of good looks.¹
- A man can be happy with any woman, as long as he does not love her.²

Never did he admire women not even his own wife.

The Worshipper of Artifice

To Des Esseintes "L'artifice paraissait la marque distinctive du génie de l'homme."³ The spirit of the dandy that he possessed made him prefer the artificial to the natural.

Autrefois, à Paris, son penchant naturel vers l'artifice l'avait conduit à délaisser la véritable fleur pour son image fidèlement exécutée, grâce aux miracles des caoutchoucs et des fils, des percalines et des taffetas, des papiers et des velours.

The imagery of Lord Henry showed the tendency towards the same aim. He detested reality, while everything that was unreal fascinated him. The details of life and life itself for him were vulgar. Therefore, the life presented on the stage stirred his emotion much more as he once declared: "I am always ready for a new emotion . . . I love acting. It is so much more real than life;"⁵ and "I don't like scenes, except on the stage."⁶ And then the opinion on literature: ". . . I should like to write a novel

¹ Ibid., p. 31.

² Ibid., p. 192.

³ Huysmans, A Rebours, p. 80.

⁴ Ibid., p. 133.

⁵ Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 94.

⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

certainly a novel that would be as lovely as a Persian carpet and as unreal."¹

As a rule, Lord Henry is most responsible for the personality of Dorian. His decadent personality and outlook were transferred to Dorian and led the latter to his downfall.

Basil Hallward

Among the characters in the novel, Basil possessed and reflected the least image of the decadents. His only characteristics as a dandy were devotion to the work of art and worship of the beautiful. Obviously, he worshipped the beauty of Dorian. He confessed the domination of Dorian over him: "As long as I live, the personality of Dorian Gray will dominate me;"² and "My life as an artist depends on him."³ Dorian stirred his imagination in the creation of his work of art, but on the other hand his influence made Basil miss the spirit of dandy which he possessed before. A dandy usually wanted to be the master of himself. Basil's speech proved that he had before treasured his own independence, but he had to give it up because of the influence of Dorian: ". . . how independent I am by nature. I have always been my own master; had at least always been so, till I met Dorian Gray."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 58.

²Ibid., p. 30.

³Ibid., p. 31.

⁴Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, p. 24.

Concerning the concept of the creation of the work of art, Basil echoed the influence that Wilde derived from Flaubert: "An artist should create beautiful things, but should put nothing of his own life into them."¹ In fact, his role was only the exponent of this doctrine but he did not practise it. When he painted the portrait of Dorian, he had put into it all his power and all his soul as he said to Lord Henry: "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter."² He declared that he followed the doctrine of expressive art. Basil, once more, showed that he was the devotee of art: "Nothing about politics, I hope! They don't interest me. There is hardly a single person in the House of Commons worth painting."³ In fact, Basil reflected very little the influence of the Art for Art's Sake school. Mostly, he tended to react against it. He submitted himself to the restriction of the society and was a conformist artist. The society of his time and its strict ethical code forced him to conform to certain patterns of conduct. Consequently, he acquired the status of spokesman of standard morality. He sublimated his feeling in art, thus separating morality from nature. Therefore, he was strongly against Lord Henry's point of view and the conduct of Dorian. His reproach to Lord Henry showed that he was against his decadent spirit: "England is bad enough, I know, and English society is all wrong. . . Yours [your friends] seem to lose all sense of honour,

¹Ibid., p. 29.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Ibid., p. 87.

of goodness, of purity. You had filled them with a madness for pleasure;¹ and "it is better not to be different from one's fellows."²

Wilde has contrasted Basil with Lord Henry and Dorian. The characterization of Basil renders the concept of the decadent more distinct.

The Picture

The picture is only a work of art, but it seems to have life like other characters. It has its evolution. Firstly, it reflected the soul of the artist and after, the soul of Dorian. The role of the picture in the story indicated Wilde's rejection of mimetic theory in trying to make his work unreal. Besides, Dorian rejected this same theory because the picture, being the reflection of his own, was mimetic too. He called his picture 'my soul' because it really was the soul which bore the burden of his sins and corruptions:

Eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins - he was to have all these things. The portrait was to bear the burden of his shame: that was all.³

The picture, reflecting the soul and the sins of Dorian became the image of the decadents which showed the decay of beauty and the corruption of the soul. Every time Dorian had committed sins, the picture changed, for example, after the death of Sibyl: "The face appeared to him to be a little changed. The expression looked different. One would have

¹Ibid., p. 163.

²Ibid., p. 21.

³Ibid., p. 119.

said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth. It was certainly strange."¹ The picture represented the concept of "Les Fleurs du Mal." "Le Mal" was incarnated in the picture while Dorian represented "Les Fleurs." There was no look of cruelty on the face of Dorian though he had committed sins. Though time passed, only the picture grew old while the beauty of Dorian remained untarnished. If these two are separated, the picture bears only the burdens of "Le Mal" which is opposite to the idea of Baudelaire.

The Picture of Dorian Gray, showed many images of the decadents. Most imagery used by the characters marked the influence of the French Art for Art's Sake School. It is an escapist testament which preaches the doctrine of the dandy because the imagery reflects the sensual titillation of the protagonist as he cultivates a life of pleasure in response to A Rebours of Huysmans.