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THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY AS
A REFLECTION OF OSCAR WILDE'S LIFE



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THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY AS
A REFLECTION OF OSCAR WILDE'S LIFE

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English
Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College
Prairie View, Texas

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by

Beatrice Chatman Callicutt

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DEDICATION

To my husband, two sons and daughter, the writer dedicates
this thesis.

B. C. C.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past half century Oscar Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, has been the controversial subject matter of many literary writers. Literary critics have expressed diversities of opinions on the questions (1) "What is the novel?" and (2) "What are the aspects of the novel?" It is the task of the writer of this study to attempt to show through thorough analysis that Oscar Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, is the life of the author.

It has been observed that many potential readers have avoided the reading of Wilde's novel because of the author's reputation as a sexual invert. Readers, associating the novel with Wilde's most appalling life, seemed to have conceived the idea that the novel is unwholesome.

The writer wishes to point out that in order to give fairness to the author and not to overlook a good work, one should never judge a writing by the things an author may or may not do in his private life. Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, represents a work of an artist with unusual brain power and excellent talents.

The purpose of this investigation is to analyze Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, in an effort to prove that it is the author's autobiography. By pointing out the biographical elements of Wilde's life through the colorful passages, epigrams, and paradoxes of his novel, the writer believes that the readers will be able to comprehend the true significance of its message, "The struggle of man against good and evil." In the light of these statements, it is firmly believed that this study will be invaluable to those individuals who are interested in an artistic work

that is gaining, by degrees, its popularity and fame on modern stages and theaters throughout the land.

The problem under investigation is primarily concerned with those influences and factors that are instrumental in the revealment of the characteristics of Wilde's life implanted in his The Picture of Dorian Gray. The first chapter of this study reviews the background of the Victorian age, including those characteristics that helped to influence the life and writings of Oscar Wilde. The second chapter will illustrate the controversy and storm of criticisms that Wilde's only novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, produced. Chapter three will give an analysis of Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, including a brief review of three well-known works of Wilde preceding the writing of his novel. Chapter four will give the summary and conclusion.

The primary sources used and referred to in this investigation were Wilde's own novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, edited by Carl Van Buren; De Profundis, Wilde's autobiographical writings edited by Robert Ross; Life of Wilde, edited by Robert Harborough, an intimate friend of the Wilde family; Oscar Wilde, edited by Frank Harris, a close friend and an associate of Oscar Wilde; Oscar Wilde: His Life and Wit, edited by Hesketh Pearson, acclaimed by his contemporaries as one of the most competent biographers of Oscar Wilde, and Oscar Wilde and the Yellow 'Nineties, by Frances Winwar.

CHAPTER I

THE VICTORIAN AGE AND ITS INFLUENCES ON OSCAR WILDE

The Victorian Age, which began with the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne in 1837, and continued until her death in 1901, was highlighted by prosperity, perplexities, and progress, dominant characteristics of the time. This era was significantly marked by many changes in thoughts and practices of writers. Many literary critics of the period condemned its religion as narrow and hypocritical, its morals as prudish, its arts as stuffy and commonplace, and its literature as romantic and realistic.¹

Oscar Wilde, a product of the Victorian Age, was chief among those critics who made it their mission to break down the conventionality of the Victorian society. The late Victorians were encompassed by traditionalism; every expression and every action of the individual were required to conform to the rigid rules of behavior and ethics laid down by the Victorians. Wilde, along with other writers, rebelled against the rigidity of the Victorians for freedom of expressions and actions.

Before venturing further into the forces that promoted or reacted against the tendencies of the age the writer feels that it is important to discuss characteristics of the Victorian period that influenced or produced changes which Wilde and some of his contemporaries effected.

In the opinions of many literary writers, the Victorian Age is justly considered as England's "Golden Age" of prosperity and progress. The British seemed to have achieved everything a nation may reasonably hope to

¹Frederick W. Roe, Victorian Prose (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1947), p. xi.

attain. The age seemed to have been a long day of sunshine, where prosperity and progress brought forth a new spirit and a new life in the Victorian's world. During Queen Victoria's reign, men concentrated their efforts upon the improvement of mechanical industry, communication and transportation until England became the richest country on earth, sending forth her products on land and sea to all parts of the world. The picture of England was one of acceleration and expansion. After 1837, railroads became a fashion for builders and travelers. In 1838, the Great Western steamboat came plying through the coastal waters of England. In 1837, the telegraph came, the submarine cable in 1836, and the telephone in 1876.¹

The Victorians had many reasons to believe in progress, if by progress is meant making uses of the resources and materials of the earth for man's happiness and well-being. And that is exactly what it meant to the typical Victorian such as John Bright and John Macaulay, whose remarkable ability in literary powers were often exhibited in vivid descriptions of the achievements of England. Macaulay wrote:

Our fields are cultivated with a skill unknown else where, with a skill which has extracted rich harvest from moors and moorasses. Our houses are filled with conveniences which the kings of former times might have envied. Our bridges, our canals, our roads, our modes of communication fill every stranger with wonder; no where are manufactures carried to perfection, no where does man exercise such dominion over matter.²

The vast material and economic expansion of England brought about new currents of thought, prosperity, wealth, and the rights of man. Consequently, various reform measures were passed in the House of Commons that

¹Boris Brasol, Oscar Wilde, the Man, the Artist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), pp. 1-2.

²Roe, op. cit., p. xii.

extended democracy and education to the people as a whole. The poor people, as well as the rich, could now enjoy the privileges that had been denied them. Experience proved to England that democracy and education for the poor was not a curse, but a blessing to the growth and development of their nation.¹

However, the economic, political and social problems that came during the transition were not the major concern of the Victorians. In the midst of the great movements came the questions of religion and morality, literature and traditional art, questions which perplexed the whole Victorian society but produced only a minor effect upon the old rigid and religious practices. The tendency was to adhere to the puritanical beliefs and customs of the past.²

Generally speaking, the Victorians were a religious people, predominantly "Puritans" in feeling and outlook, although a great majority regarded themselves as Orthodox Christians. They accepted the Bible as an inspired Book, literally true from cover to cover, and firmly believed that the Scriptures were free from all errors, not only on the side of the spiritual truth, but on the side of the scientific and historical truth as well. The Victorians, being a so-called "religious people," naturally attempted to uphold high moral character. They believed in a fixed moral code, set down in the "Word of God" and enforced by the power of conscience. Their supreme objects were to discipline and strengthen the mind and to accustom men to repudiate the pleasurable and accept the painful, to overcome the natural tastes and affections, to narrow and weaken the

¹Ibid., p. xiii.

²Clarence R. Decker, The Victorian Conscience (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), pp. 25-29.

desires.¹

In Oscar Wilde's "Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray," he struck basically at the Victorian's moral code and the infallible Book, the Bible. Wilde wrote:

There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book. Books are well written or badly written....No artist has ethical sympathies....No artist is ever morbid....²

The Victorians shouted in denial of Wilde's statements, because Christian ethics were based on a single great and moral Book, the Bible. However, Wilde delighted in antagonizing the self-righteous Victorians, whose morality and customs he despised.

Walter Houghton, an English writer, gave the following description of the rigidity of the Victorians' conscience:

...The Victorian's mind was rigid. It tended to follow one line of thought...to look at the object from a single point of view, to shut out wide interests....The Victorian was marked by a want of flexibility and aptitude for seeing more than one side of a thing. His mind moved in the groove of a single order of ideas....The Victorians tend to divide ideas and people and actions into the tight categories of true-false, good-bad, right-wrong...and not to recognize the mixed character of human experiences.³

The Victorian moral and religious principles, like any other forces that find their way through human channels, had their strengths and their weaknesses. Hypocrisy, crime, vice, and other social evils existed abundantly in the Victorian society. However, England, with all its shortcomings, yielded illustrious characters and profound thinkers.

¹Deckers, op. cit., pp. 25-30.

²Oscar Wilde, "Preface to The Picture of Dorian Gray" (Ohio: the World Publishing Company, 1946), pp. 11-12.

³Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 272-275.

An expression of this moral dominance was found in the morality of literature of the period and its relation to life. Literature, both prose and poetry, seemed to have been actuated by a definite moral code. Fictional literature, especially the novel, was the primary concern of the English public. The aim of the traditional novelist was to a study life and to point out what life should be. The novelist attempted to do for society what Darwin did for science, that is, to tell the truth and to show how it might be used to uplift humanity.¹

Trollope, an English novelist and a firm believer in the morality of literature, asserted:

The writer of stories must please or he will be nothing, and he must teach, whether he wishes to teach or not.... If he can make virtue alluring and vice ugly, while he charms his reader instead of wearying him, we think that he should not be spoken of as being among the workers of iniquity who do evil in their generation....It behoves the English novelist to be pure.²

The obligation of the fiction writers was to write stories that would "teach and delight," and to reflect in their works a true picture of life. The Victorians believed that the purity of literature would help to improve the moral conditions of society.³

In Oscar Wilde's opinion, the Victorian public was incapable of distinguishing a good work of art. Wilde declared that the novel that its Victorian public called moral was always morbid and that the novel the called unhealthy was always a beautiful and healthy work of fiction.⁴

¹Ibid., pp. 161-162.

²Decker, op. cit., pp. 20-36.

³Ibid.

⁴Oscar Wilde, Works (New York: P. F. Collier and Son, 1927), pp. 502-03.

The great emphasis placed on the morality of literature allowed the writer little or no time for freedom of thought in his works. His way of thinking and writing was governed by the Victorian's "word of authority." The average Englishman was narrow in his thinking and beliefs; he could never place himself in the position of writers who disagreed with him, and he could never see the strong point of their questions; therefore, literature appeared to be one-sided, dull and repetitious.¹

As the nineteenth century progressed, many writers ventured out from the old bondage of conventionalism and "struck back" with force at those old puritanical ideas and customs that had formed the foundation of the English society. The Victorian's strict moral code in literature became a target of attack.²

The revolt for more democratic literature came from many sources: from the pulpits, platforms and press; from the Orthodox journals, such as The Daily Chronicle, Monthly Review, Pall Mall Gazette, Spectator and the Dublin Review. Revolts also came from those critics who protested on intellectual grounds. The Pall Mall Gazette published excerpts from the novel of Emile Zola, a French novelist, that stirred the minds of the English public. Zola's works were considered to contain bad examples and bad emotions that would do harm to the morality of the readers. The Pall Mall Gazette published excerpts from Zola's novel which read as follows:

...Our literature during the last two centuries has been terribly hampered by the social tendency of life to slur expressions and to paraphrase or surpress all forceful and poignant words. If we go back to Chaucer or Shakespeare, we realize what power of expression we have lost. It is

¹George K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948), pp. 108-112.

²Ibid., pl 120.

enough to turn to our English Bible....If some of the stories of the Old Testament were presented to us under disguise...we should declare that they were filthier than the filthiest....It is a question of how far vital literature can be produced under such conditions.¹

As the nineteenth century advanced, literary writers became more and more violent in their attack on traditionalism. The writers' aims were to make literature more flexible and democratic by challenging the respectability of the Victorian society. Their next center of attack was the social evils of the English society. Their exposure of the slum conditions of the poor, the crime, vice and hypocrisy of all classes brought storms of protest from the self-righteous Victorians. Charles Swinburne and Dante Rossetti were among those writers who were charged with polluting society with cheap or obscene literature. To combat such problems, the House of Commons introduced the act on "obscenity" which reads as follows:

Whoever imports, prints, publishes, sells or distributes a pamphlet, ballad, printed paper or other things containing obscene, indecent or impure language, or manifestly tending to corrupt the morals of youths...shall be punished by imprisonment for not more than two years or by a fine of not less than one hundred dollars....²

On the basis of this act, numerous types of literature were banned from the English public. In 1874 the English Customs Bureau black listed and forbade the importation of 739 books of literary writers. Among these works were masterpieces of ancient and modern literature. Nevertheless, the continuous struggle of writers for literary freedom resulted in a more flexible literature. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Victorians had begun to look upon literature more optimistically. Their old ideas,

¹Unsigned, "Emile Zola--The Novelist," Pall Mall Gazette, (January 12, 1892), p. 5.

²Chesterton, op. cit., pp. 115-130.

that literature must "teach or delight," were gradually passing away.¹

Not only in the literature of the Victorian Age were controversial issues dominant but also in the art of the period much controversy was evident. The attempt to restore artistic beauty to its rightful place in life met strong oppositions from the Victorian society. The Victorians looked upon art as an evil force against a religious people. Lovers of beauty were considered effeminate and a menace to society. Grotesqueness was common and unashamed. The houses of prosperous Englishmen were hideous internally and externally. It seemed to have been a day of imitation for the Victorians. Wall paper was made to look like marble, and wood-like bronze. The furniture legs were carved to resemble flowers and animals and "everything else was made to appear as something else."²

Some of the best prose of the period was an attack on Victorian art. Carlyle vociferated against the things of antiquity; Arnold preached against the Victorian art; Ruskin, too, attacked the blindness to beauty. The crusade was further championed by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of Victorian England, an organization of young painters with Dante Rossetti and Charles Swinburne as their leaders. They claimed that the British contemporary art was sloshy and that what painting really needed was sincerity. Their aim was to beautify England with the color and tones of nature. The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood was later condemned by the Victorian public and considered dangerous to the morality of society. Consequently, the Pre-Raphaelite organization failed to survive.³

¹Louis Cazamin, A History of the English Literature (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), pp. 1341-1342.

²William D. Templeman, English Prose of the Victorian Era (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), pp. 501-543.

³Horace M. Kallen, Art and Freedom (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), pp. 448-449.

But in spite of the many oppositions the writers and painters encountered, the battle for the revival of art continued to rage. In the midst of the great turmoil came the so-called "Aesthetic Movement," with Walter Pater as its leader and Oscar Wilde as its chief exponent. This aesthetic group came forward in the service of art and beauty, sometimes from the angle of creation and sometimes in the battle against the bourgeois. Among its members were three famous artists, John Ruskin, William Morris and Charles Swinburne. Their aim was to make the life in England lovely with beautiful surroundings.¹

Morris was one of the most influential artists of the aesthetic group. He was sincere in his criticism and always attempted to give practical suggestions for improvements. In a sermon-like manner, Morris tried to arouse the artistic spirit of the Victorians by stressing the importance of beautiful surroundings. Morris emphasized that the houses, churches, streets and country sides of England were hideous--and that workmen passed up and down the grotesque streets day by day without a care for beauty. Morris further stated that art would make the streets as beautiful as the woods and as everlasting as the mountain sides. In his conclusion, Morris stressed that art was made for the people and by the people. Silver and gold were not necessary to make a lovely home; just a few simple tools and materials would build a shelter that expressed thoughts and aspirations that would help to make life comfortable and beautiful.²

The early stage of the "Aesthetic Movement" was an aid to the revival of art. The aesthetes had an ethical and moral purpose in their desire to make England lovely and beautiful. In its later stage, it became to mean

¹Ruth C. Childs, The Aesthetic Movement (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1958), pp. 34-45.

²Ibid., p. 550.

more than the "love of art for the sake of life." Ruskin, Pater, Wilde and other aesthetes invented another meaning for art. They suggested that there was an "ethic sect" which was concerned with the "sensual" and "fleshy" side of art rather than the spiritual side. Wilde went further than the other aesthetes. He labeled himself as the "Apostle of Aestheticism" and went with full force into the "fleshy" direction and perverted the meaning of beauty. Finally, the aesthetes, like the Pre-Raphaelites, lost their moral ground and were excluded from the Victorian society. However, Wilde continued his immoral behavior and was later sent to prison.¹

It seems to the researcher that the picture just presented of the Victorian Age supports the premise that the great and rapid transition in this period brought about growth, development and changes in the English society. Despite the prevalence of the many social evils, there was a concomitance of good, for the age produced profound thinkers and illustrious writers, men of strong character, integrity and conviction. Thus, it was in such a framework of struggle of man against good and evil that Oscar Wilde did his writings. And it is against this background that Wilde's work is projected.

¹Katherine Gilbert, A History of Aesthetics (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), p. 486-495.

CHAPTER II

CONTROVERSY AMONG CRITICS

In Chapter I, the writer presented those factors which revealed the background of the Victorian Age, of which Oscar Wilde was a product. Since there was considerable controversy expressed among critics relative to Wilde's only novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, it would seem necessary to give a brief review of these opinions. Literary critics have expressed divided opinions on the questions, (1) "What is the novel?" and (2) "What are the moral aspects of the novel?"

Writers, including Edouard Roditi¹ and George Woodcox,² claimed that Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, was a copy. Woodcox maintained that Wilde copied his novel from Maturin's³ Melmoth the Wanderer, a story of a man who sold his soul to the devil for a new lease on life. He suggested that the novel and the story compared in the following manners:

Dorian Gray like Melmoth, wished for a prolonged life.... while the bargain with the Devil is not explicit...it is implied in Dorian's wish....Like Melmoth, he has a "strange and dangerous charm..." like him, he draws others to their destruction....his sinister reputation as well as his prolonged youth makes him shunned by the world....Like Melmoth, he gathers all experiences in his grasp.... Finally, Dorian, like Melmoth...must surrender his youth he has unnaturally retained; the other self that has been growing old and depraved...enters his body.... Dorian, like Melmoth committed murder.⁴

¹Edouard Roditi, Oscar Wilde (New York: James Laughlin Company, 1947), pp. 120-124.

²George Woodcox, The Paradox of Oscar Wilde (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), pp. 34-35.

³Charles Robert Maturin, a Gothic novelist of the nineteenth century and a great uncle of Oscar Wilde.

⁴Woodcox, op. cit., p. 34.

Roditi, in his critical study, also claimed that Wilde's novel showed distinct evidences of direct copying from Charles Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer. In support of his belief, Roditi gave this account of the similarity of the two works:

In the opening chapter of Maturin's novel, ...Melmoth, the young student, comes to his uncle's death bed...he is sent to fetch some wine from the closet which no foot but that of Melmoth had entered for nearly sixty years....The lumber was decayed and useless...such as the locked and abandoned schoolroom where Dorian Gray concealed his portrait....Young Melmoth's eyes, as if by magic, were rivetted on a portrait that represented an evil ancestor... who by the pact of the devil had been permitted to live 150 years without aging, much as Dorian was permitted to retain the appearance of his youth inspite of his crime and debauchery.¹

Roditi added that in the last hours of Melmoth's life, the evil ancestor returned and Melmoth became old and horrid. Dorian Gray, like Melmoth, became the image of an old wicked soul.

Another school of critics, including William Gaunt² and Frances Winwar,³ maintained that Wilde conceived his first notion of The Picture of Dorian Gray from the French novel, A Rebours, which he translated into English. Winwar suggested that Wilde was well read in French literature and accepted Huysman's A Rebours as the "gospel of fascinatingly wicked religion."⁴ Winwar further stated that the influence of A Rebours was obvious on every

¹Ibid.

²William Gaunt, The Aesthetic Adventures (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1912), pp. 126-138.

³Frances Winwar, Oscar Wilde and the Yellow 'Nineties (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1940), pp. 156-165.

⁴Ibid., p. 157.

page of The Picture of Dorian Gray, and that Wilde introduced Huysman's novel into his own as the "yellow book," which he so often referred to as the "poisonous book" in Chapter eleven of his novel. To support this point of view, Winwar extracted the following passages from Wilde's novel:

...The yellow book...the strangest book he had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and delicate sounds of flutes the sins of the world were passing before him....It was a poisonous book....The heavy odours of incense seemed to cling to its pages....¹

Gaunt, with similar views, set out to prove that Wilde copied from Huysman's novel, A Rebours, by making a comparison of incidents in the two works. Gaunt made this observation:

Des Esseintes has experimented with perfumes; Dorian Gray must study them, distilling oils and burning gums from the East. Des Esseintes has been deeply affected by music; Dorian Gray must follow. In a long lattice room, with gold ceiling and walls of olive-green lacquer, he used to give curious concerts in which mad gypsies tore wild music from little zithers. Dorian Gray, too, gave dances and was a lover of music and ornamentations....²

Gilbert Cooleridge³ and Walter Kenilworth⁴ were among those who declared that the germ of Wilde's novel appeared in Poe's short story, William Wilson. These writers claimed that Wilde, well read in Poe's works, copied his ideas of the supernatural from Poe's William Wilson into his own novel. Cooleridge, chief among this group, gave the following version of the supernatural in Wilde's novel:

The novel represented a mysterious inversion of the natural order through which Dorian Gray kept his youth and beauty

¹Winwar, op. cit., p. 165.

²Gaunt, op. cit., pp. 184-185.

³Gilbert Cooleridge, Oscar Wilde (California: Clarks University Press, 1922), pp. 107-109.

⁴Walter Kenilworth, A Study of Oscar Wilde (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1912), pp. 79-87.

...while his portrait aged with every line of lust, cruelty, and dissipation...which should have aged Dorian's face....The moment came...the portrait revealed to Dorian his 'wicked self...the leprosy of sin were slowly eating the portrait away...burdened by his pastDorian violently pierced a dagger through his portrait...thus killing himself....The portrait was the image of his own monstrous soul.¹

Cooleridge and Kenilworth pointed out similar incidents in Poe's work to show that Wilde copied. Kenilworth stated that Poe's character, William Wilson, lived a wicked life--and Dorian Gray likewise. William Wilson was constantly tortured by his counterpart which always appeared before him when he indulged in evil. The evil secrets of Dorian's conscience tortured him. After many years of tortured, corrupted life, Wilson, in a struggle against his own image, murdered himself. Dorian Gray in a similar manner killed himself.²

Still another group of critics proclaimed that Wilde's novel was a critical work deploring British society. Included among this group were Ralph P. Boas,³ Boris Brasol,⁴ and St. John Ervine.⁵ These writers agreed that Oscar Wilde proclaimed himself to be an intellectual rebel against the high modes of English society, that he despised their daily routines, be-

¹Gilbert Coolidge, op. cit., pp. 107-109.

²Kenilworth, op. cit., p. 87.

³Ralph P. Boas, Social Background of English Literature (Boston: Little Brown and Company., 1938), pp. 89-100.

⁴Boris Brasol, Oscar Wilde, The Man-The Artist (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), pp. 191-199.

⁵St. John Ervine, Oscar Wilde, A Critical Study (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 118.

liefs, and strict morality and chose to write the novel to challenge the respectability of Victorian society. Brasol asserted that Wilde could attain no appreciable measures on British soil, and that the Victorians constantly revolted against him and his works, because his novel described the red light districts in London--the slums, loathsome dens, and crude disordered life. Brasol added further that Wilde's novel attacked the evils of the wealthy class and the hypocritical dignitaries of the churches of England. Ervine stated that Wilde used shrewd epigrams in his novel to further antagonize the bourgeois society and gave the following examples of Wilde's epigrams:

Ugliness is one of the seven deadly virtues....Beer, the Bible, and the seven deadly virtues have made England what she is....Beautiful sins...are the privileges of the rich....The Englishmen are more cunning than practical.... They balance stupidity by wealth, vice and hypocrisy.... I don't desire to change anything in England but the weather.¹

Ervine suggested that Wilde's epigrams, however startling, contained a great deal of truth; and in a satirical manner, Wilde was able to strike at the basis of some of the evils that were practiced among the middle and upper classes of England, and to disclose to the reading public the "mask" in which the "self-righteous" Victorians were wearing.²

Boas declared that the Victorians were aware of the fact that London, like any other city, was full of crimes and vice, but they would not permit anyone, especially a prominent writer like Wilde, to admit these shameful conditions in a public utterance. However, Wilde, having distaste for the Victorian's traditions, lost no opportunity to attack the vice and hypocrisy existing in English society in his novel. Boas asserted that the sharp

¹Ibid., p. 118.

²Ibid., p. 120.

tone of Wilde's novel threw England in a storm of rage, not so much of what he said but how he said it. Boas, sanctioned by Ervine, Boris and other critics, concluded that Wilde's whole novel was a challenge to the English society.¹

Literary critics of the fourth school of thought proclaimed that The Picture of Dorian Gray was the author's biography. This group of critics included Louis Cazamin,² Martin Birnbaum,³ Hesketh Pearson,⁴ and others. Cazamin declared that The Picture of Dorian Gray was a complete analysis of Wilde's life, in his two characters Lord Henry and Dorian Gray. He claimed that the book contained the following aspects of Wilde:

The search for intense or rare sensations, the ban put on every belief, every feeling, which sets a limit to the faculty of enjoyment, the superiority of the true artist--of him whose life is a work of art--over the rules of the morality of society. He gives to his own thesis his antidote, by depicting the inner ruin brought about by the stubborn quest of beauty....⁵

Cazamin further stated that the novel was the nearest approach of a psychological study of which Wilde was capable. "The novel," Cazamin says, "is written in a very studied style; it is as sincere as it was in Wilde to be."⁶

¹Boas, op. cit., pp. 89-100.

²Louis Cazamin, A History of English Literature (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), pp. 510-512.

³Martin Birnbaum, Oscar Wilde: Fragments and Memories (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), pp. 100-101.

⁴Hesketh Pearson, Oscar Wilde: His Life-His Wit (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), pp. 128-130.

⁵Cazamin, op. cit., p. 511.

⁶Ibid., p. 512.

Birnbaum emphasized that The Picture of Dorian Gray revealed all the aspects of Wilde's character—all his faults, which were great, and all his virtues which were greater. He asserted that Wilde should have called himself Dorian Gray.¹

Albert C. Baugh maintained that Wilde's novel was an analysis of his own life, showing the search for rare sensations and his divided personality. Baugh also said that the novel was prophetic of the ruin into which Wilde fell.²

Hesketh Pearson, one of the most influential members of this group, had these words to say about Wilde's novel:

The book contains a full-length portrait of himself as a talker in the character of Lord Henry Wotton, with many of his most searching comments on life...with a complete revelation of his emotional unreality in portraying human nature and the morbid stain in which wretched his life....Each facet of Wilde's nature is discernible in the book: his theatricality, his love of paradox, his showmanship, his passion for luxury, his adoration for beauty, and his delight in scandalizing the bourgeois.³

Pearson concluded that the novel was one of the most life-like things that Wilde ever wrote. Pearson has been acclaimed by critics as having written one of the most competent biographies of Oscar Wilde.⁴

The second question that confronted literary critics was "What were the moral aspects of Wilde's novel?" This question has been debated largely among Wilde's contemporaries with most of them refusing to see the

¹Martin Birnbaum, Oscar Wilde: Fragments and Memories, op. cit., p. 100.

²Albert C. Baugh, A Literary History of England (New York: Appleton-Century Press, 1942), p. 1479.

³Pearson, op. cit., pp. 128-130.

⁴Stuart Mason, Bibliography of Oscar Wilde (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1914), p. 10.

moral aspects in his novel, because they were living in an age governed by the Victorian's "morality code." However, there were those critics who exercised more freedom of judgment and pointed out many of the moral aspects of Wilde's novel.

Walter Pater, who exercised a great influence upon Wilde's life, made the following comments:

Wilde has a true epicurean aim....His story is a beautiful creation and a careful exposure of the corruption of a soul with a very plain moral pushed home, to the effect that vice and crime make people coarse and ugly....It is one of the strangest things that this book should have been indicted as an immoral book....¹

Stuart Mason,² in his Bibliography of Oscar Wilde, gave the following version of the moral aspects of Wilde's novel:

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a story with a moral. And the moral is this: All excess, as well as renunciation, brings its own punishment. This is a moral which the prurient will not be able to find in it, but which will be revealed to all whose minds are healthy.³

Francis A. Douglas, who could also see the optimistic side of Wilde's novel, expressed these opinions:

Wilde wrote the novel because he had deep interest in common humanity....The novel is profoundly ethical.... It could have been entitled 'The Wages of Sin.' ...The novel is free and elastic...highly decorative....The novel also contains many of his best known epigrams.... Only in Victorian England could people have made such fools of themselves over a book.⁴

To a great majority of Wilde's contemporaries, The Picture of Dorian Gray appeared to be a compilation of hideous subject matter written to

¹Walter Pater, The Renaissance (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1933), p. 49.

²Mason, op. cit., p. 90.

³Ibid.

⁴Francis A. Douglas, Oscar Wilde and The Black Douglas (New York: Hutchinson and Company, 1949), pp. 121-122.

corrupt the minds of youth. Among the writers who held this view were Robert Sherard,¹ Max Nordou,² and Robert Hichen.³ Wilde's novel also met an artillery of fire from the various newspapers. W. E. Henley, an influential Victorian editor of the Scotts Observer, spoke out:

Why go grubbing in muck heaps? Mr. Wilde has begun writing stuff that was better unwritten....The story which deals with matters fit for the Criminal Investigation Department....Mr. Wilde has brains...but can only write for none but outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph boys; the sooner he takes to tailoring, the better for his own reputation and public morals.⁴

In conclusion, the researcher has attempted to give a brief survey of critical writers who have disagreed on the source from which Wilde received his inspiration for writing his novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, and the storm of criticisms that it has created over a period of sixty years.

It is the desire of the writer that the materials thus far will be an aid in the analysis of Wilde's novel in Chapter III, in an effort to prove that The Picture of Dorian Gray is an autobiography of the author.

¹Robert Sherard, "Oscar Wilde, Drunkard and Swindler," Galvi (December, 1933), pp. 64-65.

²Max Nordou, Degeneration of Wilde (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1895), p. 161.

³Robert Hichen, Wilde and the Green Carnation (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1894), p. 140.

⁴Sherard, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

CHAPTER III

LIFE OF OSCAR WILDE REFLECTED IN The Picture of Dorian Gray

In the preceding chapters, the writer has endeavored to give a background of the Victorian period and a review of the diversities of opinions that surrounded Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, in an effort to establish a more understandable relationship of the author's life to his novel. The writer will assume the task in this chapter to analyze Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, in an attempt to prove that the novel is the author's autobiography.

Oscar Wilde has been labeled by many of his contemporaries as one of the most autobiographical writers of the Victorian period. He expressed his life and character in all of his works, and, in his novel, unreservedly.¹ Inasmuch as Wilde's personality was injected into his works, it seems plausible, at this point, to consider Wilde's personality traits in relation to his works preceding The Picture of Dorian Gray.

Authorities writing about the Victorian period identified Wilde as a sexual invert, whose moral standards were unacceptable to the English society. He was fanatically attached to young male characters of marvelous beauty and, frequently found in the houses of prostitutes--drinking champagne, smoking cigarettes containing opium, and indulging in indecent acts--a lustful character indulging in sex. Brasol, in his biographical works, stated that during Wilde's early life, he was bi-sexual, and sought sexual gratifications from females as well as his own sex, and in later life

¹Pearson, op. cit., p. 128.

Wilde experienced a psychological reversal of nature, in which he was forced to give up normal physical relationships and become a "complete homosexual."¹

Ervine, in his evaluation, stated that Wilde's personality and behavior seemed to have been overcome by the driving force of sex, and that an evidence of sex is present in almost all of his early works. Ervine further asserted that Wilde's tragedy, Salome, is a profound representation of Wilde's personality and behavior in early life, as well as in later life. In Salome, striking similarities exist between Wilde's personality and that of his characters. King Herod, a replica of Wilde, drank wine excessively. Wilde drank champagne excessively. King Herod yearned for young women, while his creator, Wilde, was lustful for both sexes. Because of Herod's perverted desire for a young woman, he lost sexual interest in his wife, Herodias; Wilde eventually lost his sexual desire for his wife, Constance, in pursuit of youths. Herod, like Wilde, was fascinated by immodesty; Salome's dance of the "seven veils" was a pleasure to him. In Wilde's room at Oxford, he decorated his walls with nude pictures of men and women. Wilde, again, was fascinated by the young Greek athletes who raced unclothed. Sex was one of the desires of Wilde's heart.²

Not only was Wilde's personality and behavior shown in his character, Herod, but in Herodias, the wife of Herod, likewise. Herodias, like Wilde, was adulterous. Oscar Wilde sought young men and women who lived outside of moral law, while his character, Herodias, pursued young men among the

¹Brasol, op. cit., p. 120.

²Ervine, op. cit., p. 120.

Egyptians, whose character apparently was low, due to the fact of their intimacies with a well-known adulterous woman. In the following passages of Salome, Herodias' character is revealed through the mouth of Iokanaan; as she speaks to her daughter, Salome, Iokanaan says:

Where is she who gave herself to the Egyptians?...Where is she who has given herself to the young men of the Egyptian army?...Go bid her rise from her bed of incestuousness....Thy Mother has filled the earth with wine of iniquities.¹

Wilde's tragedy, Salome, not only illustrates an inundation of sexual immoralities existing between the principal characters, but also an under-current of sexual impurities in the author's own personality and behavior in private life.

Wilde's tragedy, Lady Windermere's Fan, is another example of Wilde's personal life. The story concerns a faithful wife, Lady Windermere, whose morality collapses when she discovers the infidelity of her husband, Lord Windermere. Constance, the faithful wife of Wilde's, experienced a collapse of morality when she discovered that Wilde was neglecting her in pursuit of men and women for immoral purposes.

Lord Darlington, another principal character in Lady Windermere's Fan, also possessed similar behavior patterns to those of Wilde. Lord Darlington's persuasive tone and flattery to Lady Windermere induced her to commit adultery. In Wilde's private life, he engaged in illicit relationships with Lily Langtry, a young married woman, who became infatuated by Wilde's soft musical and alluring voice.²

Wilde's play, The Duchess of Padua, is another representation of his

¹Wilde, Works, op. cit., pp. 257-295.

²Winwar, op. cit., pp. 97-98.

behavior. Love, sex, and violence were highlights of the play. Guido, the Duke of Padua, was adulterous, like Wilde. Guido's infidelity toward his wife, Beatrice, the Duchess, caused her to turn to immoral acts similar to Constance, Wilde's wife. The play ended in tragedy for all three characters. The Duchess of Padua was considered an immoral play and was banned from the stages of London.¹

In the preceding paragraphs, the writer has attempted to give a brief review of Wilde's personal life and character as shown in his early works, in order to establish a background for analyzing his novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, in relation to his life.

According to Louis Cazamin, The Picture of Dorian Gray is a complete and prophetic analysis of Wilde's life, through his characters, Dorian Gray and Lord Henry Wotton. Cazamin further claimed that the book contains all the aspects of Wilde:

The search for intense or rare sensations, the ban put on every belief and every feeling which sets a limit to the faculty of enjoyment, the superiority of the true artist--of him whose life is the work of art--over the rules of the morality of society....He gives to his own thesis his antidote, by depicting the inner ruin brought about by the stubborn quest for beauty.²

Thus, Cazamin³ and Pearson,⁴ among others confirmed that The Picture of Dorian Gray contains all the aspects of Wilde's character, and that Wilde's life was composed of four basic elements:

1. His excessive love of beauty
2. His humor and wit
3. His paganistic beliefs
4. His effeminate behavior and morbid experiences

¹Wilde, Works, op. cit., pp. 597-598.

²Louis Cazamin, A History of English Literature (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948), pp. 560-570.

³Ibid., pp. 597-598.

⁴Pearson, op. cit.

At this point, the writer will assume the task to relate each of the elements above, with corresponding traits found in Wilde's novel, in an effort to prove that The Picture of Dorian Gray is the story of the author's own life. Consideration will be given first to Wilde's pursuit of beauty.

Inasmuch as beauty constituted a supreme place in Wilde's life, it seems necessary to give Wilde's definition of beauty. In Wilde's essay, The Critic as an Artist, he gave the following definition of beauty:

Beauty is the symbol of symbols....It is higher than ethics and belongs to a more spiritual sphere...to discern the beauty of a thing is the finest point to which we can arrive. Even a color sense is more important in the development of the individual than a sense of right and wrong. Beauty...makes life lovely and wonderful.¹

Through the mouth of Wilde's character, Lord Henry Wotton, in words addressed to Dorian Gray, Wilde reproduced a similar meaning of beauty; Lord Henry says:

Beauty is a form of genius....Indeed it is higher than genius, as it needs no explanation....Beauty is higher than ethics....Beauty is the great facts of the world, like sunlight or springtime, or reflections in dark waters, that silver shell we call the moon....To me beauty is the wonder of wonders.²

Approaching Wilde's beauty from a more practical point of view, one finds that Wilde made use of every opportunity to apply his ideas of beauty in his private life. Wilde worshipped beauty excessively. He loved luxurious surroundings, perfumes, jewelry and flowers. Oscar Wilde's financial success as a writer enabled him to secure these luxuries of life.

¹Wilde, Works, op. cit., pp. 597-598.

²Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1946), p. 37.

His four-story brick home on Tite Street in London, with its elaborate furnishings and exquisite flower garden, was a landmark of beauty. Visitors, on entering Wilde's home, were enchanted by the fragrance of flowers and perfumes from the adorned guest tables. Wilde's personal possessions consisted of several gold rings and pins; gold cigarette cases, and a pearl handled walking cane. Wilde's epigram, "Give me the luxuries and anyone can have the necessities," became a part of his life. Because of his artistic ability and his love for beauty, Wilde was labeled by his contemporaries as the "Apostle of Aestheticism."¹

Wilde's counterpart, Dorian Gray, in the novel The Picture of Dorian Gray, worshipped beauty excessively. Dorian Gray, like Wilde, loved exquisite surroundings, jewelry, perfumes and flowers. Dorian's picturesque home on Grosvenor Street in London was called "the house beautiful," the same as Wilde's home. The following excerpts, taken from Chapter eight and Chapter eleven of the novel, illustrate the comforts of Dorian Gray's home:

His bell sounded....Victor came in with a cup of tea on a small tray of old Sevres china, and drew back the olive satin curtains...in front of three tall windows....Dorian Gray, throwing on an elaborate dressing gown of silk cashmere wool, passed into the onyx paved bathroom....a French breakfast had been laid out for him on a small table....blue dragon bowls filled with yellow roses stood before him....He rose from the table...and lit a cigarette and flung himself down on a luxuriously-cushioned couch.²

Another noticeable aspect of Oscar Wilde was his love for flowers. Flowers to Wilde were symbols of love and beauty. There was always a scenic display of flowers in his home, library and club house. Wilde's

¹Winwar, op. cit., pp. 37-40.

²Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit., pp. 113-115.

four-story brick home was partly surrounded by beautiful flower gardens yielding his favorite flowers--lilies, sunflowers and roses. In each room of his "house beautiful" were emblems of yellow roses, sunflowers and lilies. Aside from home surroundings, Wilde always wore a sunflower and sometimes carried a lily in his hand while attending the Mayfair balls and Pall Mall clubs and other social gatherings in London.¹

Wilde's love for flowers is highly illustrated in the introduction of Chapter one in The Picture of Dorian Gray. The scene takes place in the art studio of Basil Hallward. The introduction of the setting is given in the form of a descriptive narrative, with emphasis on a lovely flower garden. Lord Henry, a replica of Wilde, narrates:

The studio 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....Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose...branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like....The fantastic shadows of birds flitted across the long silk curtains....²

Dorian Gray, again like Wilde, wore a sunflower on his lapel and carried a lily in his hand when he made social calls at the May Fair balls and the Pall Mall Club in London. The clubs which Dorian Gray visited have the same names--Pall Mall and May Fair, as those which Wilde frequented in his real life.³

Just as flowers were symbols of love and beauty to Wilde, so was his "house beautiful" located in one of the most artistic quarters in London, on Tite Street. To Wilde, the four-story brick building was not merely a

¹Brasol, op. cit., pp. 152-153.

²Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

³Ibid., pp. 151-152.

dwelling but a place for poetry and beauty. The most attractive places in Wilde's house were his library, dining room and drawing room. The walls of the library were painted buttercup yellow and the ceiling lacquer red, harmonizing with his writing desk and chairs. Hanging on the walls were Japanese paintings of various kinds. Perhaps the loveliest spot in Wilde's home was the quaint dining room, with its Chippendale chairs, and large dining table decorated with embroidered table cloth and cut flowers. The prevailing colors were white blending with blue and yellow. The next most comfortable place in Wilde's home was the drawing room, a place for the entertainment of his guests. The room was colorfully decorated and furnished with Turkish divans arranged in Oriental style. In the center of the room stood a Japanese table with delicate scented flowers in small China jars. Wilde's house was indeed a place of beauty.¹

Dorian Gray's "house beautiful," located on Grosvenor Street in London, was decorated in a similar manner as Wilde's. The most unique spots in Dorian's comfortable home were the library and dining room, where he entertained and served his fashionable guests. The furniture in the dining room was carried out in a decorated scheme of blue and white. The large dining table was covered with an embroidered table cloth and decorated with a symphonic arrangement of exotic flowers. Dorian Gray's next place of interest was his exquisite library, used for study and relaxation. The library was luxuriously furnished with a soft-cushioned couch, a perfumed-scented Japanese table, and a large opened hearth. Dorian's home, like Wilde's, was a place of comfort and beauty.²

¹Vyvyan Holland, Oscar Wilde: A Pictorial Biography (New York: The Viking Press, 1960), pp. 53-57.

²Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, pp. 151-171.

In addition to Wilde's excessive love of beauty was his remarkable gift as a talker. Wilde was, without exceptions, the most witty and the most brilliant talker of his day. Wilde never influenced the conversation in any direction and he never attempted to dominate it; he just slipped into it, and whatever the subject was his wit was always ready. Wilde's wit was effortless and spontaneous. Frivolity was the keynote of his wit. Whatever his listeners took seriously, he dealt with it humorously; and what they considered trivial Wilde treated it gravely. The following incidents illustrate Wilde's humor: After Coulson Kernahan had given an honest summary of his religious beliefs, Wilde said, "you are so unmistakably sincere and most of all so truthful, that I can't believe a single word you said."¹

"It is a kind of genius to be twenty-one," Wilde informed a youthful writer. After having delivered a sermon on the glories of youth, Wilde concluded, "To win back my youth, there is nothing I would not do---nothing---except take exercise, get up early, or be a useful member of the community."²

During Wilde's presence at a wedding luncheon, given by Margot Asquith and her husband, Wilde surpassed himself with his brilliancy. Out of all the guests present, there was none who out-shined him in his wit. Wilde kept his listeners spellbound for over an hour as he ridiculed the conventional standards of England. The method that Wilde used was to change a word or two in proverbs or cliché and add an aspect of truth.³ Here are some examples of his conversational wit about the people of his native land, England:

¹Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

²*Ibid.*, p. 173.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 174-176.

The English have a miraculous power of turning wine into water....You can't make people good by an act of Parliament---that is something....Work is the curse of the drinking class....Genius is born, not paid....It is always a silly thing to give advice, but to give good advice is absolutely fatal....Duty is what one expects from others; it is not what one does one's self....Don't be led astray in the path of virtue....Morality is simply the attitude we adopt toward people we personally dislike....Nowadays most people die of a sort of creeping common sense, and discover when it is too late that the only things one never regrets are one's mistakes.

Most of Wilde's humor was a mixture of fun and profundity; and when the fun predominated, he would always preface his wit with a laugh or end it with some sort of gesture. In Wilde's opinion, humanity takes itself too seriously. He said, "If the caveman had known how to laugh, history would have been different." It was said that Wilde never experienced a whole day of unhappiness until the pillars of fate brought about his downfall.

Wilde was persuasive and astonishing in his conversation. He always excelled in giving a certificate of truth to what was probable. Wilde knew hundreds of stories and could invent many, which he heightened with humor and radiated with wit. Wilde delighted in inventing Biblical stories and making them fantastic with humor. During Wilde's conversation with a group of orthodox Biblical students whom he met at a luncheon in London, he elaborated one of his fabulous parables in a Biblical style in this manner:

Christ came from a white plain to the purple city; as he passed the street, He heard voices overhead and saw a young man lying drunk upon upon a window sill. 'Why do you waste your soul in drunkenness?'

He said, 'Lord, I was a leper and you healed me. What else can I do?'

¹Ibid., pp. 174-176.

²Frank Harris, op. cit., pp. 59-60.

A little farther through town, He saw a young man following a harlot, and said, 'Why do you dissolve your soul in debauchery?'

And the young man answered, 'Lord, I was blind and you healed me. What else can I do?'

At last in the middle of the city, He saw an old man crouching, weeping upon the ground; and when he asked why he wept, the old man answered, 'Lord, I was dead, and you raised me; what else can I do?'¹

Having entranced his listeners with his Biblical anecdote, Wilde related another story of his own invention:

On the night when Jesus died, Joseph of Arimathea went down from Mount Calvary and came upon a young man weeping bitterly. And Joseph spoke to him: 'I know how great thy grief must be, for surely He was a just Man.'

And the young man answered, 'I am not weeping for Him, but for myself. For I, too, have wrought miracles; I have turned water into wine, healed the sick, given sight to the blind, fed the multitude, cast out devils, caused the barren fig-tree to wither, and raised the dead. All that this Man did, I have done. And yet they have not crucified me.'²

Wilde told several other humorous stories to the Biblical students who enjoyed every moment of his presence and insisted that he tell more of his fabulous stories, but Wilde never liked to bore his listeners; therefore, with a delightful gesture, he left them in a happy state of gaiety.

Wilde was also a master of satirical nonsense; the gravity of his utterance made his words inexpressibly comical. Sometimes Wilde would start with the utmost solemnity as though giving his mind a chance to think over the seriousness of the subject, with a pause, and then would come the flash of the phrase and the fun. Wilde demonstrated this method of holding the attention of his listeners during an elaborate wedding party in London in which he was guest of honor. In the midst of the conversation concerning

¹George Woodcox, Paradox of Oscar Wilde (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), p. 65.

²Ibid., p. 70.

marriage and life, Wilde would slip in such satirical nonsensical sentences as these:

A well-tied tie is the first serious step in life....More men grow old nowadays through the faithfulness of their admirers than through anything else. Each time that one loves is the only time that one has ever loved. Difference of objects does not alter singleness of passion; it merely intensifies it. When a woman marries again it is because she detested her first husband. When a man marries again it is because he adores his first wife. Women try their luck; men risk theirs. Young men want to be faithful and are not; old men want to be faithless and cannot. Good resolutions are simply checks that men draw on a bank where they have no account. It is sad. One half of the world does not believe in God, and the other half does not believe in me.¹

On another occasion, Harry Gerard, a famous publisher, invited Wilde to be his guest at a fashionable luncheon at the Cafe Royal in London. Wilde arrived late with a gloomy expression on his face, dressed in deep mourning. The guests became silent. Gerard hinted tactfully to those near him to not bother Wilde because he was apparently in a state of bereavement. During the course of silence, Wilde came forth with these words:

Ladies and Gentlemen: This day happens to be my birthday, and I am mourning, as I shall henceforth do on each of my anniversaries, the flight of one year of my youth into nothingness, the glowing blight upon my summer. -- As for the introduction, I must wait for the necessary inspiration.²

Wilde's delightful personality and his facetious conversations made him a popular figure in society. He was seldom without an invitation to the fashionable parties and luncheons of publishers and other dignitaries in London. His own "house beautiful" became the reception center for many celebrities, such as Robert Browning, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Sarah Bernhart, and a host of others.³

¹Pearson, op. cit., p. 175.

²Ibid., p. 174.

³Holland, op. cit., pp. 60-62.

Wilde's success as a conversationalist has been attributed to his literary education at Oxford University and to his extensive travel over the continent, intermingling with people of various cultures, thus affording him an exceptional wide range vocabulary. George Bernard Shaw, in his appraisal of Wilde, stated that "words to Wilde were the tools of his art" and that Wilde will always be remembered as the "world's wittiest talker."¹

Wilde transplanted in his characters, Dorian Gray and Lord Henry Wotton, his brilliancy and art of conversation. As counterparts of Wilde, Dorian Gray and Lord Henry were literary scholars and Oxford graduates, the same as Wilde. Dorian Gray, like Wilde, could entertain his guests in French as well as in English. Both Lord Henry and Dorian Gray were magnificent conversationalists the same as Wilde. However, Dorian Gray's conversations represented the more serious side of Wilde's personality, while Lord Henry's portrayed the humorous and witty side of Wilde's personality. Dorian Gray was a character of action; Lord Henry was a character of words, a character who "could enthrall his listeners with eloquence and appeal to their intelligence with humor and wit."²

The brilliant humor and wit of Wilde's counterpart, Lord Henry, are illustrated in the following paragraphs. The story begins:

Lord Henry frequently visited his uncle, Lord Fernor, a genial wealthy old bachelor who lived on Albany Street in London. One cool morning, Lord Henry entered his uncle Fernor's house. Before Lord Henry could give his usual morning greetings, Uncle Fernor, puffing smoke from his pipe says:

¹George Bernard Shaw, My Memories of Oscar Wilde (Michigan: State Press, 1959), pp. 102-110.

²Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit., p. 48.

'Well, Harry, what brings you out so early? Money, I suppose. Young people nowadays imagine that money is everything.'

'Yes,' replied Lord Henry, 'and when they grow up they know it. But I don't want money. It is only people who pay their bill who want that—I never pay mine. Credit is the capital of young sons, and one lives charmingly upon it. What I want is information, of course useless information.'¹

Lord Henry, like Wilde, was good-natured, alert, and alive with humor. He was always ready to express his opinions in an amusing way to those who listened to him. Again like Wilde, Lord Henry desired to "impart happiness where bitterness was found."²

The scene of the next episode takes place in the home of Lady Agatha, an old aunt of Lord Henry's. The theme of the conversation is centered around the gravity of responsibilities and age. Mrs. Vandeleur, one of the guests, remarks:

'But we have such grave responsibilities.'

'Terribly grave,' echoed Lady Agatha.

'Humanity takes itself too seriously,' Lord Henry slips in.

'It is the world's original sin. If the cave man had known how to laugh, history would have been different.'

As the conversation continued, the Duchess asked Lord Henry how she may become young again. Before Lord Henry gave her an answer, he inquired:

'Can you remember any great error you committed in your early days, Duchess?'

'A great many, I fear,' the Duchess said.

'Then commit them over again,' Lord Henry exclaimed.

'To get back one's youth, one has merely to repeat one's follies. Nowadays, most people die of a sort of creeping common sense, and discover when it is too late that the only things one never forgets are one's mistakes.'³

¹Ibid., p. 48.

²Pearson, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

³Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* *op. cit.*, p. 57.

Wilde has reproduced through his character, Lord Henry, in an amusing way, some of the general concepts that he applied in his personal life. "Seriousness," says Wilde, "is a refuge for the shallow....Humanity takes itself too seriously."¹ These familiar expressions of Wilde are found frequently in his humorous and witty conversations. Through Lord Henry, one may picture Wilde as carefree, an excessive lover of follies, and a pleasure seeker of life.

The following scene is another example of Lord Henry's humor and wit: The conversation takes place in the drawing room of Lady Narborough, a very clever lady of French ancestors. The occasion is an elaborate house party given in the honor of Lady Narborough's newly-married daughter, Gladys. Among the special guests present is the fabulous story-teller, Lord Henry. Around the dinner table, everyone becomes interested in the subject of romance and marriage. Gladys, the daughter of Lady Narborough, suggested to Lord Henry:

'We women, as someone says, love with our ears, just as you men love with your eyes, if you ever love at all.'

'My dear Gladys!' said Lord Henry. 'How can you say that? Romance lives by repetition--Each time that one loves is the only time one has ever loved. Difference of objects does not alter singleness of passion. It merely intensifies it--And the secret of life is to reproduce the experience as often as possible.'²

In the course of the conversation on romance, marriage became the next subject. Lady Narborough implies:

'I shall have to marry again to be in the fashion.'

'You will never marry again, Lady Narborough,' Lord Henry

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

broke in. 'When a woman marries again it is because she detested her first husband. When a man marries again, it is because he adored his first wife. Women try their luck; men risk theirs.'

After Lord Henry had finished sermonizing love and marriage, Lady Narborough made an implication upon Lord Henry's character in this manner:

'Lord Henry, I am not at all surprised that the world says that you are extremely wicked.'

'But what world says that?' asked Lord Henry--'It can only be the next world. This world and I are on excellent terms.'

'Everybody that I know says that you are very wicked,' the old lady said indignantly.

Lord Henry looked serious for a moment. 'It is perfectly monstrous,' he said, 'the way people go about nowadays saying things behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true.'¹

Lord Henry, like Wilde, never bored his listeners by conversing too long on one subject; he would always tactfully change to another. In Wilde's private life, he frequently said that a "conversation should touch on everything, but concentrate itself on nothing."² In the last scene, the conversation is concerned with romance and marriage. Lord Henry's expressions on matrimony to Lady Narborough were the exact words that Wilde used on love and marriage in his personal life. These expressions may also be found in Wilde's "Humor and Wit." The malicious attack that Lady Narborough made upon Lord Henry's character, according to Pearson, was an actual experience that Wilde encountered while he was in New York waiting for a cab to arrive, when an old acquaintance came up to him and remarked:

'Everybody that I know says that you are very wicked.'

Wilde, who seldom took people seriously, replied, 'It is perfectly monstrous, how people go about nowadays saying

¹Ibid., p. 203-204.

²Woodcox, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

things behind one's back that are absolutely and entirely true.¹

Because of Lord Henry's brilliancy as a "talker," he was seldom without an invitation to the parties and luncheons of the dignitaries in London, in a similar manner as Wilde.

Another striking characteristic of Oscar Wilde was his paganistic beliefs. According to Wilde's biographers, Hesketh Pearson,² Frank Harris,³ and Robert Sherard,⁴ Wilde was a pagan who believed that the pursuit of sensual pleasure was the highest aim in life, and that every man has a right to act according to his own desires and to follow where ever temptation leads.

Wilde exemplified through his characters, Lord Henry and Dorian Gray, his paganistic beliefs. An illustration of Wilde's paganistic ideals of life is shown through his counterpart, Lord Henry, whose attention has been drawn toward Dorian Gray, a young male sitter of marvelous beauty, in the art studio of Basil Hallward. Lord Henry, the invisible Wilde, attempts to influence Dorian with his Hellenic ideals of life. Lord Henry elucidates:

I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expressions to every thought--I believe that the world would gain such impulse of joy that we would--return to Hellenic ideal.--The only way to get rid of a temptation is to

¹Pearson, op. cit., pp. 172-173.

²Ibid., p. 79.

³Frank Harris, Oscar Wilde (Michigan: Michigan State Press, 1959), pp. 60-74.

⁴Robert Sherard, The Life of Oscar Wilde (New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1928), pp. 38-47.

yield to it. Resist it and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden.¹

Lord Henry continues his unwholesome advice to Dorian Gray:

Don't squander the gold of your days, listening to the tedious trying to improve the hopeless future--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....²

In the quotation above, Lord Henry, the older man, represents Wilde, while Dorian Gray, the younger man, corresponds to the young male characters whom Wilde influenced and corrupted in his personal life. One particular example of this nature occurred while Wilde was entertaining a group of male youths in the Cafe Royal in London. Harris was present, and later related the substance of Wilde's conversation. Harris stated that Wilde informed the youths that the "prime aim of life was the pursuit of pleasure." To illustrate his point, Wilde used the ancient Greek youths who raced in the sunshine nude. Harris concluded that Wilde's conversation was so obnoxious that he departed from their company.³

Wilde's contemporaries, Winwar, Martin Birnbaum, and Andre Gide,⁴ were among those writers who claimed that pagan Greece had a profound influence upon Wilde's paganistic beliefs. It was suggested that Wilde studied religiously, Greek literature, Greek philosophy, and Greek art and became one of the best classical scholars during the Victorian Age.

Having been inspired by the classics and arts of pagan Greece, Wilde

¹Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

²Ibid., pp. 37-38.

³Harris, op. cit.

⁴Andre Gide, Oscar Wilde, A Study (New York: Harcourt Brace Company 1905), p. 75.

made several tours through Greece to become more acquainted with its culture. Wilde became intensely interested in the Greek ways of life and accepted their Epicurean Creed, "living for the pleasure and beauty of life." Wilde became absorbed in the Greek gods and goddesses and adopted them for his sacred belief, thus leaving the "God of the Universe" completely out of his life. Wilde declared in his autobiography, De Profundis, "My gods dwell in temples made by hands, and within the circle of actual experience."¹

Wilde illustrated through his characters, Dorian Gray and Lord Henry, the effects of Greece upon his paganistic beliefs. Both Dorian Gray and Lord Henry were engrossed in the Greek doctrine that "pleasure is the highest good in life," in a similar manner as Wilde. Dorian Gray and Lord Henry were irreligious like Wilde. Both Dorian Gray and Lord Henry believed in the strength of the Greek gods; the same was true in Wilde's personal life. Lord Henry, Wilde's super ego, in Chapter three of The Picture of Dorian Gray, demonstrates his belief in the pagan gods of Greece as he gives to Dorian Gray his panegyric on the splendors of youths:

Yes, Mr. Gray, the gods have been good to you. But what the gods give they quickly take away. You have only a few years to live really and perfectly--when your youth goes, your beauty will go with it--Time is jealous of you--Don't squander the gold of your days--Live the wonderful life that is in you--Let nothing be lost upon you--Be afraid of nothing--A new Hedonism--that is what our century wants.²

¹Oscar Wilde, De Profundis (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1905), pp. 42-43.

²Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit., pp. 37-38.

Woodcox suggested that Wilde's paganism led him to believe that Jesus Christ was an individual and not divine. To Wilde, Christ was a great artist and a romantic figure in history. Woodcox further suggested that Wilde was strongly fascinated by the personality of Jesus Christ, even to the extent of identifying himself with him.¹

Wilde also believed that the only way for man to be Christ-like was to be "absolutely himself," to realize the perfection that is in him, and to act according to his own desires, following where ever temptation may lead him. Wilde claimed that "sin" increases the experiences of the race, and if man resists sin, "he has to make up for his repression in some form of compensation."²

Wilde illustrated through his characters, Lord Henry and Dorian, his own interpretation of a christ-like life. In Chapter three of The Picture of Dorian Gray, Lord Henry, an irreligious character, like Wilde, attempts to induce Dorian Gray to secular practices, as he expounds his worldly doctrine, in these words:

The aim of life is self-development--To realize one's nature perfectly--that is what we are here for. Self-denial mars our lives--Every impulse--we try to strangle broods in the mind and poisons us--The body sins once and has done with its sins, for action is a mode of purification--Nothing remains then but the recollection 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 itself.³

¹Woodcox, op. cit., pp. 80-91.

²Rupert Hart-Davis, Letters of Oscar Wilde (New York: Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., 1962), pp. 476-480.

³Ibid.

Winwar asserted that during Wilde's early manhood, he made frequent visits to the Roman Catholic Church, and was blessed several times by the Pope; but it was later discovered that Wilde was not interested in any concepts or religious doctrines of any church; his mind had been captivated by the beauty of the Catholic rituals--the music, the brilliant jewelry on the priest's robe, and the embellishment of the building.¹ Wilde, in his autobiography, De Profundis, had this to say about his own religion:

Religion does not help me. The faith that others give to what is unseen, I give to what one can touch and look at--When I think of religion at all, I feel as I would like to find an order for those who cannot believe--If I have not got it, it will never come to me.²

Wilde's attractions for the Roman Catholic worships, and his irreligious attitude toward the doctrines of the Church, were manifested through his character, Dorian Gray. Like Wilde, Dorian Gray made frequent visits to the Catholic Church and was greatly moved by the beauty of the Catholic rituals. An example of Dorian Gray's aesthetic attractions to the Roman Catholic rituals is shown in chapter eleven of the novel. In the following passages Dorian Gray expresses himself:

It was rumored of him once that he was about to join the Roman Catholic Communion--the ritual had always a great attraction for him. The daily sacrifice, more awful than the sacrifices of the antique world stirred him--He likes to kneel down on the pavement and watch the Priest in his flowered vestment--moving aside the veil of the tabernacle--But he never fell into the error of any formal acceptance of creed....³

Wilde's specific paganistic beliefs may be summarized as follows:

1. Wilde believed that the pursuit of pleasure was the prime aim of

¹Winwar, op. cit., pp. 97-107.

²Wilde, De Profundis, op. cit., pp. 42-43.

³Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit., p. 155.

life and that every man should act according to his desires and follow where ever temptation leads.

2. Wilde believed in the strength of the pagan gods of Greece, but failed to believe in the "God of the Universe."
3. Wilde believed that Jesus Christ was an individual, an artist, and a great personality.
4. Wilde failed to believe or accept any form of religious faith.

Wilde injected into his principal characters, Dorian Gray and Lord Henry, all of his specific paganistic beliefs which the writer has illustrated from Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray. Wilde remained a pagan throughout his life.

Paralleled to Wilde's paganistic beliefs were his effeminate behavior and morbid experiences which predominated the greater portion of his life. Pearson, in his biography of Wilde, asserted that much of Wilde's character and actions have been attributed to his family life, and that Speranza, his mother, perhaps influenced him more than anyone else. He further stated that Speranza was profoundly greived over the birth of her son, Oscar, when she had anxiously awaited the arrival of a girl. To compensate for her disappointment, Speranza dressed Oscar in feminine clothes, put jewelry around his neck, and allowed his hair to grow long. While other boys Oscar's age were wearing knee-breeches, he was still wearing dresses. Speranza continued to dress Wilde in this manner until he was eight years old.¹

Robert Sherard, an intimate friend of the Wilde family, suggested in his biography of Oscar Wilde, that Speranza allowed Wilde to grow up in the society of her Royal guests, generally, ladies. Speranza, who loved

¹Pearson, op. cit., pp. 15-23.

ostentation, would often compel her guests to view him and listen to her converse about Oscar's brilliance. Much of Wilde's fondness for "showing off" came from his mother. It was further pointed out that when boys Oscar's age were fast asleep in bed, Speranza permitted Oscar to stay up late for dinner; no matter how distinguished her guests, how much the liquor flowed, or how freely the conversation flowed, "little Oscar" was present. It appeared that Wilde was educated in the ways of the world long before such knowledge was necessary.¹

In Chapter one of The Picture of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde satirically portrays his mother, Speranza, as Lady Brandon, during a dialogue between his two characters, Basil Hallward, the artist, and Lord Henry Wotton, in the studio of Basil Hallward. Basil asked Lord Henry to give him a description of Lady Brandon, whom he had met. Lord Henry, the invisible Wilde, satirically describes her in this manner:

She's a peacock in everything but beauty....I could not get rid of her....she brought me up to Royalties, Stars and Garters, and elderly ladies....She lionized me....I believe a picture of mine had made a great success....She goes in for giving a rapid precis of all her guests....Lady Brandon treats her guests as an auctioneer treats his goods. She either explains them away or tells one every thing about them except what one wants to know....She says 'Charming boy'-- poor dear Mother, and I are inseparable.²

George Woodcox, in his study, stated that Wilde was devoted to his mother and aware of the great pride that she took in him; but on the other hand, he never failed to recognize her weaknesses.³

According to Lewis Broad, Speranza's effeminate and possessive treat-

¹Sherard, op. cit., pp. 38-47.

²Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit., pp. 21-22.

³Woodcox, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

ment of Oscar Wilde appeared to have lain dormant until he had reached the age of twenty. He further explained that in the early years of Wilde's adolescence, little had been recorded of his effeminate behavior, but in the later years of Wilde's life, his behavior had been attested by ample documents.¹

At the age of twenty, Wilde's parents sent him to Oxford University to complete his education. However, this step forward seemed to have marked the turning point in Wilde's life. Unfortunately, Wilde fell under the influence of Walter Pater, who was at that time an instructor at the University of Oxford. Pater was described as a baneful aesthete who emphasized the study and realization of beauty and the essence of living dangerously. It was during this time that the effeminate treatments that Wilde received during childhood began to crystalize into abnormal behavior.²

One of the first indications of Wilde's effeminate behavior was his appearance at a dress ball at Oxford, as "Prince Rupert." Wilde wore his hair long, knee-breeches, a velvet coat edged with braid; black silk stockings, a silk shirt with a wide turned down collar; a large green tie, and a sunflower on his lapel. Wilde considered himself a fashionable, well-dressed dandy. Wilde, like Speranza, always loved to exhibit himself in his aesthetic garbs and attract the attention of the public. For a short time, Wilde could boast of the young men imitating his dandyism, but unlike Wilde, these young men abandoned their costumes and resumed their normal way of dressing, while Oscar Wilde continued to appear in his

¹Lewis Broad, The Friendship and Follies of Oscar Wilde (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1955), p. 95.

²Ibid.

aesthetic fopperies.¹

Striking similarities of Wilde's effeminate mannerism are shown through his character, Dorian Gray. Like Wilde, Dorian Gray proudly exhibited his dandyism in dress on the streets of London, in the club houses, and in the various lunch rooms, the same as Wilde. Dorian Gray wore his hair long, knee-breeches, long silk stockings, and a velvet jacket with a lily or sunflower on its lapel, in a similar manner as Wilde. Again like Wilde, Dorian Gray smoked gold-tipped cigarettes and carried a jewel-topped walking cane as he promenaded downtown London. In the paragraph below, Dorian Gray boastfully described his own dandyism and popularity, after having entertained a group of his young men friends from Eton and Oxford Universities in a fashionable house party. Dorian Gray enthusiastically says of himself:

There were many--among the young men fancied what they saw in Dorian Gray--the true realization of a type that they had often dreamed in Eton or Oxford days--a type of real culture--grace--distinction--perfect manners--Fashion--which is really fantastic--and dandyism, which in its own modernity of beauty, has its fashion for him....²

Harris stated that Wilde always wrote in the third person and sometimes spoke of himself in the third person, which accounts for his character, Dorian Gray, speaking in a similar manner. Through the boastful expressions of Dorian Gray one may discern three traits that were identical of Oscar Wilde in his personal life: (1) his love of self and (2) his fondness for dress and (3) his delight in ostentation for the sake of attracting public attention. George Bernard Shaw, who knew Wilde personally, once

¹Holland, op. cit., p. 58.

²Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit.

asked him, "Why do you adopt such peculiar mode of dressing?" Wilde, with a smile on his face, replied:

If you wish for reputation and fame in this world, and success during you life time, you ought to seize every opportunity of advertising yourself---Fame comes from comes from one's ownself; you must go about repeating how great you are till the dull crowd comes to believe it.¹

Harris suggested that Wilde's reputation came to him, however, but not in the sense of ethical or social values, but in the form of his effeminate behavior and wreckless living, which began to unfold at Oxford University in 1878. An indication of Wilde's unmanly behavior was found in his private rooms, which were located on the kitchen staircase of the building. Wilde filled the mantle shelves of his room with a collection of "little blue China relics" and decorated his walls with pictures of undraped human figures and drawings. On week ends, Wilde's room became the gathering place for many of his perverted young male associates. Wilde entertained them extravagantly, serving intoxicated drinks, cigarettes and food.²

Patrick Braybrook, who made a study of Wilde's life, asserted that when Wilde left Oxford with his degree, he declared to his friends that he was going out into the world to make a name for himself, and that he "wanted to eat of every tree in the garden of the world." Consequently, Wilde went "out" and he did "eat"---until the pillars of fate enclosed his life.³

A few months after leaving Oxford, Wilde married Constance Lloyd, the daughter of a wealthy landowner. Two sons were born, whom they named Cyril

¹Shaw, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

²Harris, op. cit., pp. 35-66.

³Partick Braybrook, Oscar Wilde: A Study (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), pp. 120-129.

and Vyvyan. Unfortunately, before Wilde's marriage was four years old, he had plunged again into his abnormal behavior. Wilde became attached to Alfred Douglas, a youth of marvelous beauty, and the son of the Lord Queensberry of England. Wilde's intimacy with Douglas helped to bring about his downfall.¹

George Bernard Shaw, in My Memories of Wilde, described Wilde as an invert who was "seeking to cure the soul by the means of the senses and the senses by the means of the soul." Shaw further implied that Wilde ceased to care about ethics of any kind, and seemed to have said to himself "I will resist nothing; I will be literally selfish; I will not only be a rascal but a monster."²

Percy Colson³ stated in his critical works that Wilde's behavior became so discreditable that his marriage with Constance drifted apart. Colson described Wilde as a bi-sexual, with a lean toward homosexuality, which he claimed accounted for his sexual behavior with both sexes. Havelock Ellis,⁴ in his psychological study, implied that the homosexual impulse was present in Wilde from childhood but remained in a latent form until the latter part of his manhood; Wilde's case, he said, was that of retarded inversion.

Basil Hallward,⁵ in his Preface to Dorian Gray, disclosed that Wilde

¹Harris, op. cit., pp. 75-90.

²Shaw, op. cit., pp. 121-125.

³Percy Colson, Oscar Wilde and the Black Douglas (New York: Hutchinson and Company, 1949), pp. 23-25.

⁴Ellis Havelock, Studies in the Psychology of Sex (Philadelphia: F. A. D. Publishers, 1930), pp. 48-50.

⁵Basil Hallward, A Preface to Dorian Gray (Ohio: The World Publishing Company, 1946), pp. 9-10.

made frequent visits to his art studio to watch his work advance, and that during one of his visits, Wilde became enchanted by the beauty of one of his male sitters whose portrait was being painted. After the portrait was finished, Wilde remarked: "What a pity such glorious creature should ever grow old." Basil stated that in the eyes of young men, Wilde could see his own youth and beauty mirrored, and that those things in his youth he had resisted took possession of him.¹

Wilde's character, Dorian Gray, followed a similar pattern of abnormal behavior. Like Wilde, Dorian Gray was a sexual invert. Basil Hallward, the artist, initiated Dorian Gray into sex perversion; Robert Ross, a homosexual, was Wilde's first known master-mistress. Dorian Gray, like Wilde, plunged into a sea of pleasure, seeking "to cure the soul by the means of the senses and the senses by means of the soul."² Dorian Gray, like Wilde again, entertained young male perverts in his "house beautiful;" Wilde entertained the pederasts, Robert Ross and Alfred Douglas, in his home.

The experiences that Wilde encountered in the painter's studio in his private life, and as pointed out above, corresponded closely to those that occurred in his characters' lives. Basil Hallward, in Wilde's novel, had the same name and occupation as the painter, Basil Hallward, in Wilde's personal life.

Lord Henry, a self-portrait of Wilde, made frequent visits to Basil Hallward's studio to watch his painting of male youth progress, the same as Wilde. Lord Henry was fascinated by the radiant beauty of a young male

¹Hallward, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

²Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit., pp. 210-211.

sitter, whose name was Dorian Gray; Wilde, likewise, was enchanted by the extraordinary beauty of a young male sitter, whose name was not disclosed. Dorian Gray allowed his madness for youth to dominate his life, in the same manner as Wilde.

William Gaunt, in his study, gave a vivid account of Wilde's abnormal behavior. He declared that Wilde, feeling the pressing of the threads of time, went to the depths in search of pleasure and forbidden experiences. He further asserted that Wilde's life assumed an air of arrogance; he would do nothing in moderation except work. Gaunt asserted again that Wilde made frequent visits to the house of prostitutes on Little College Street, in London, a musky place with burning incense and heavy dark curtains shading the windows. There were tea parties in which the gentlemen were introduced to barmaids, unemployed waitresses, and to a choice of grooms, who would do anything for money. Gaunt concluded that the only difference between Wilde and his low associates was that Wilde had talent.¹

Edouard Roditi² gave a further description of Wilde's morbid behavior in his work, Oscar Wilde. He pointed out that at this time, Wilde had reached the age of forty and had become a complete homosexual and had no limitation to his course of conduct. Roditi claimed that Wilde, under an assumed name, frequented Taylor's House, in the red-light district of London, and entertained prostitutes and blackmailers, with elegant champagne suppers, and gave them money and gifts for the pleasure of their society. Roditi further asserted that Wilde also frequented the opium dens and taverns near the dockyards, where he indulged in immoral acts with

¹William Gaunt, op. cit., pp. 112-120.

²Roditi, op. cit., pp. 211-220.

merchants and sailors. Wilde was frequently followed by the blackmailers whom he paid a considerable sum of money to save his reputation from the higher class of society.

Wilde injected into his character, Dorian Gray, his immoral behavior. Like Wilde, Dorian Gray, being aware that his young manhood was swiftly passing away, resolved to "gather his harvest" before he was too old to enjoy it, in the same manner as Wilde. Dorian Gray, like Wilde, frequented the loathsome dens and taverns of London for immoral purposes. Dorian often visited the little "shabby houses" located between the giant factories near the shipyards, known as the red-light district of London, where all forms of vice were practiced. Wilde, in his private life, frequented the same places for indecent behavior. Dorian Gray, like Wilde, sometimes spent the night in one of the prostitute houses with merchants and sailors for illicit purposes. Dorian Gray, Wilde's alter ego, gave the following description of an opium den that he frequented in London. Dorian Gray says:

The door opened quietly and he went in...not saying a word to the mis-shaped figures who were flattened on the floor.He entered a low room...once been a third rate dancing salon...the floor was covered with saw dust...stained by liquor. In one corner a sailor sprawled over a table... by the bar stood two haggard women...in a dark chamber. ...The heavy odor of opium met him...his nostrils quivered with pleasure.¹

Dorian Gray, like Wilde, attempted to disguise himself, but he was always recognized by the blackmailers whom he had to pay to conceal his reputation from the upper class of society, the same as Wilde.

Stuart Mason, who wrote a competent account of the Queensberry Case, in which Wilde was the offender, claimed that the climax of Wilde's

¹Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit., pp. 213-214.

debaucherous life came when the rumors of his scandalous reputation began to spread around London. Wilde was accused by the Victorian society of corrupting the lives of youths with his hideous behavior. Men and women of great titles and wealth, who had once enjoyed the pleasure of Wilde's company, turned against him. Many of Wilde's associates of low moral character jeered him. The upper class hotels refused him board and lodgings. Fate had overtaken Wilde and driven him to the point where he could realize that "what one does in his secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud on the house tops." Wilde had to account for the life that he had lived in the Central Criminal Court of England.¹

During Wilde's trial in the Criminal Court, another explosive came that shocked the Victorian audience when Edward Carson, the prosecuting attorney, disclosed some "love letters" that Wilde had written to Lord Douglas, the young son of his accuser, the Marquis of Queensberry. These letters had been given to Carson by blackmailers whom Wilde had paid to conceal the secrets of his behavior. Carson read the partial contents of the following letter:

...It is a marvel that those red rose-leaf lips of yours should be made no less for the madness of music and song than for the madness of kissing. Your slim-gilt soul walks between passion and poetry. No Hyacinthus followed so madly as you in Greek days....It is a lovely place and only lacks you....

Yours,
Oscar²

Following the reading of Wilde's love letter, Carson selected a scene from Chapter nine of Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray to show the

¹Stuart Mason, Wilde, Three Times Tried (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912), pp. 150-161.

²Hart-Davis, op. cit., p. 450.

similarity and significance of both writings. The dialogue of the novel was centered around the "love confession" of Wilde's effeminate character, Basil Hallward, addressed to Dorian Gray, a young invert. Carson read these lines:

...Dorian, from the moment I met you...I was dominated, soul brain, and power by you. You became to me the visible incarnation...of a dream....I worshipped you madly, I grew 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 you were away from me you were always present in my heart....¹

These writings of Wilde served as positive evidence in establishing his guilt as a man of low character, a corrupter of youth and dangerous to the English society. Wilde was later convicted and sentenced to serve two years at hard labor in the prison of Reading Gaol.

According to Wilde's biographers, Pearson, Harris and others, Wilde predicted his downfall several years before the writing of his novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, which was written in 1890. They stated that Wilde began his abnormal behavior as early as 1878 while a student at Oxford University. It was also suggested that Wilde was well aware of the Victorian moral code which strongly upheld ethical principles and moral behavior, and the Obscenity Act which stated that any expressions uttered or written that would impair the lives of others, the offender would be punished by imprisonment of not less than two years. The biographers further asserted that Wilde disregarded the Victorian moral code and plunged to the depths in corruptive living with full knowledge that he was destined to failure.²

¹Shaw, op. cit., pp. 119-134.

²Pearson, op. cit., pp. 252-265.

During Wilde's imprisonment in Reading Gaol, he wrote his famous De Profundis, a collection of letters confessing the type of life he had lived. Wilde's contemporaries, including Harris, Pearson and Sherard acclaimed it to be one of the most sincere works of Wilde. In De Profundis, Wilde wrote this of himself:

I had genius...distinguished name...high social position....
I allowed pleasure to dominate me....Tired of being on the
height, I deliberately went to the depths in search for
new sensations....perversity came to me in the sphere of
passions....I grew careless of the lives of others....I
forgot that every little action of the common day makes or
unmakes character....I ended in horrible disgrace.¹

Wilde's character, Dorian Gray, was affected by his scandalous reputation in a similar manner as Wilde. Strange rumors of the dreadful things that Dorian had done in his life crept through London--the same as Wilde. The loathsome dens and opium taverns that Dorian had frequented for immoral purposes had been revealed to him, in a similar manner as Wilde. Dukes and Duchesses and other people of distinction who had once considered Dorian the "limelight" of their society turned against him. Wilde was treated the same way. Many of Dorian's secret associates became his enemies--like Wilde's associates had become. Dorian, like Wilde, finally recognized "that sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face; it cannot be concealed."²

In the final stage of Dorian Gray's corrupted living, he wanted a new life, but a new life would mean to confess the murder of Basil Hallward, who marred his life, the hypocrisy and vices with which he had been involved, the evil influences that he had exerted upon others, and lastly, that he would have to suffer public shame and public atonement for what he

¹Wilde, De Profundis, op. cit., pp. 62-63.

²Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray, op. cit., pp. 173-180.

had committed. Rather than to confess, Dorian Gray chose to "destroy the past and free himself." Consequently, Dorian seized a knife and stabbed his portrait--thus killing himself. The portrait was the image of his own soul.¹

Although Wilde injected murder into his character, Dorian Gray, he never committed murder. Dorian Gray, like Wilde, believed that purification of a wicked soul came through punishment. Having reached this decision, Dorian chose suicide, while Wilde chose to be punished by the horrors of a prison life, which later, according to Sherard, was greatly responsible for his death, which occurred November 30, 1900.²

The researcher has endeavored to show that the characteristic traits revealed in Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, paralleled those elements found in the author's personal life and that through Wilde's characters, Dorian Gray and Lord Henry, a prophetic analysis of the author's own life was given. The researcher also attempted to point out to the reader that Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray represents a true picture of life; the desperate struggle of a man against the good and the evil; a man with all his faults, which were great, and a man with all his virtues, which were greater.

¹Ibid., pp. 252-253.

²Sherard, op. cit., pp. 321-330.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It was the purpose of this investigation to analyze Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, in order to show that the author in this work reveals his own life.

It was assumed that many potential readers have avoided Wilde's novel because of the author's reputation as a sexual invert. It was believed that the biographical elements of Wilde's life revealed in passages of his novel would enable readers to understand the true significance of its contents, the struggle of man against good and evil.

The study revealed that Oscar Wilde was a product of the Victorian Age, an era that was marked by prosperity, perplexities and progress, and an age that experienced a great transition in thoughts and practices of many literary writers. The investigation further showed that the Victorians were governed by fixed moral codes and that all literature was supposed to "teach and uplift humanity." Oscar Wilde was one of the chief opponents of Victorian traditionalism. He disregarded the Victorian moral code and wrote according to his own thoughts and feelings. Consequently, Wilde's only novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, shocked the morality of the Victorian society and created an outburst of criticisms and controversies among many of Wilde's contemporaries.

The research revealed that one group of writers, including Woodcox, Kernahan and others, claimed that Wilde's novel was an allegory; another school of thought led by Kenliworth proclaimed that Wilde's novel was a challenge to the Victorian society, while another group of writers, in-

cluding Pearson and Harris, declared that the novel was the author's autobiography.

The investigation has shown that Wilde's novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray, contained the four basic elements of Wilde's life; these elements were (1) his excessive love of beauty, (2) his humor and wit, (3) his paganistic beliefs, and (4) his effeminate behavior and morbid experiences. These four elements were found abundantly in his works preceding the writing of his novel, The Picture of Dorian Gray. It was further discovered that Wilde's principal characters, Dorian Gray and Lord Henry, were self-portraits of Oscar Wilde and that through these characters a complete revelation of Wilde's life was shown.

The research showed that Wilde's excessive love of beauty was demonstrated through his luxurious home surroundings--elaborate furniture, expensive jewelry, perfumes and lovely flower gardens. Wilde's characters, Dorian Gray and Lord Henry, lived luxuriously. Both characters possessed lovely homes, exquisite furniture, jewelry, perfumes, and beautiful flower gardens, the same as Wilde.

The study has further revealed that Wilde was acclaimed by many of his contemporaries as the greatest conversationalist of his time. Wilde was alert, brilliant, fantastic, and he could always charm his listeners with his radiant humor and wit. Because of his delightful personality and gift as a "talker," Wilde was considered a "spotlight" in society. It was further observed that Wilde exemplified through his character, Lord Henry, his mastery of the art of conversation. Lord Henry, like Wilde, could enthrall his listeners with eloquence, and he could appeal to their intelligence with humor and wit. Because of his brilliancy, Lord Henry, like Wilde, was a "limelight" in society.

The investigation revealed that Wilde was a pagan, and that he had been greatly influenced by Greek philosophy, Greek art, and Greek literature. The study also disclosed that Wilde's specific paganistic beliefs could be summarized as follows:

1. Wilde believed that the prime aim of life was the pursuit of pleasure, and that man should not resist temptation but yield to it.
2. Wilde believed that Jesus Christ was an individual, an artist, and a great personality. Wilde's faith was in the pagan gods of Greece.
3. Wilde failed to recognize God as a Supreme Being.

The research also disclosed that Wilde transplanted into his principal characters, Dorian Gray and Lord Henry, his specific paganistic beliefs. Both Dorian Gray and Lord Henry were pagans and believed strongly in the Greek gods, like Wilde. Lord Henry and Dorian Gray, replicas of Wilde, believed that pleasure was the highest good in life. Both characters believed that temptation was not to be resisted. Dorian Gray, the invisible Wilde, said that "art has a soul, but man has not."

The research further revealed that paralleled to Wilde's paganistic beliefs were his effeminate behavior and morbid experiences. It was observed that Speranza, Wilde's mother, influenced his effeminate behavior more than anyone else. Speranza dressed Wilde in feminine clothes and treated him as a delicate girl until he was nine years old. Speranza also allowed him to grow up in the society of her Royal guests, who were principally ladies.

The study also discovered that Wilde satirically portrayed his mother, Speranza, as "Lady Brandon in The Picture of Dorian Gray, and that his character, Lord Henry, a self-portrait of the author, described Lady Brandon's possessive treatment of him and her delight in exhibiting him in the presence of her Royal guests.

The investigation further revealed that the first indication of Wilde's effeminate behavior occurred while he was a student at Oxford University. Wilde allowed his hair to grow long and made public appearances in his effeminate aesthetic attires. Wilde also held drinking and sex parties in his apartment. It was observed that Wilde became attached to the pederast, Robert Ross, who later initiated him into homosexuality.

The research disclosed that after leaving Oxford, Wilde went to the depths in corruptive living. It was observed that Wilde frequented the "red light districts" in London and became involved in all types of vice. The study further showed that the end of Wilde's debaucherous life came when his illicit relationship with Alfred Douglas, the young son of the Marquis of Queensberry, was revealed. Wilde was later convicted and sentenced to two years in Reading Gaol.

The research further revealed that Wilde's character, Dorian Gray, followed a similar pattern of effeminate behavior and moral degeneration as Wilde had followed. Dorian Gray, like Wilde, made public appearances in his effeminate garbs. He wore long hair, knee-breeches and ladies' silk hosiery. It was observed that Dorian Gray, like Wilde, threw open his house for drinking parties for his perverted young male friends. It was also discovered that Basil Hallward initiated Dorian Gray into homosexual behavior (Robert Ross was Wilde's first known master-mistress). The research also disclosed that Dorian Gray, like Wilde, lived a debaucherous life, frequenting places of vice in the taverns and dens in London for immoral purposes. The study showed that the climax of Dorian Gray's scandalous life came when the secret of his immoral behavior was revealed. Rather than to be punished by society, Dorian Gray committed suicide. Wilde suffered his punishment in the prison of Reading Gaol and died in

1900, two years after his release from prison. Thus Oscar Wilde, influenced by the Victorian Age, portrayed himself and his age through the characters of Dorian and Lord Henry in The Picture of Dorian Gray.

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