

Basel and lord henry's influence on dorian



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In Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the concept of influence is clearly reflected in two different characters and in two different forms, and juxtaposes them through the main character and his reaction to the two clashing ideologies projected upon him throughout the novel. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, first published in 1890 by renowned author Oscar Wilde follows the protagonist, young and incredibly beautiful Dorian Gray through the life stages of young adulthood and culminates as he matures into adulthood at the end of the novel. The novel is a manifestation of Wilde's own ideas and attitudes of the time, his admiration of art and expression, while at the same time rejecting a great deal of art and expression, generating a complex personal stance at the concept and a supremacy complex, projected into the character of Dorian Gray. Through Wilde's own attitudes and experiences, the character of Dorian comes to life and is used as a tool to broadcast his ideas into the world. The book encompasses as well as rejects many values of the upper class Victorian society from which it stems, such as the importance of art and supremacy of youth, however rejecting the strict religious beliefs of the time and the notion of harsh punishment for crimes. The final ideology of Dorian in the novel is influenced and somewhat controlled by two men he spends considerable amounts of time with while he is young and impressionable, Lord Henry Wotton, a nobleman who takes Dorian under his wing and Basil Hallward, a painter contracted to capture his transcendent beauty.

Lord Henry appears in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a mentor and could be viewed as a paternal figure to the young and susceptible Dorian, however, in contrast to Basil, Henry appears almost entirely as a negative influence in

Dorian's life, driving him to live a morally wrong life. Henry's influence upon Dorian is entirely derived from the values of the upper class Victorian English society, placing high importance on art and youth/beauty and having little care for the struggles of others, placing himself on a higher level and living a hedonistic life. Henry tells Dorian " People like you - the wilful sunbeams of life - don't commit crimes, Dorian" and says " Oh, she is better than good - she is beautiful," when discussing Sibyl Vane with Basil, both indicative of his lack of morality and shallowness regarding the important aspects in his life. The power of using a metaphor to describe Dorian, as a " sunbeam of life" is incredibly significant in assessing the power and influence that Henry holds over Dorian, being able to convince him to do, say and think seemingly anything. Henry completely influence's Dorian's life in regards to his ability to make Dorian think whatever he wants, and has forced the idea upon him that beauty and youth will conquer morality and that it weights more heavily than being a good person, thus making Henry a device of sin in Dorian's life.

Directly contrasting with Lord Henry's negative influence on Dorian's life, Basil appears to Dorian as a beacon of light and morality, emerging at a time in Dorian's life where he was perhaps too immersed in Lord Henry's influence, however Basil's influence over Dorian is evident as the novel continues. Basil is a physical representation of the softer concept of aestheticism, in that he values art and the more expressive features of life over the more political or theoretical, but the power of youth, beauty, art and hedonism hasn't not consumed him in the way it has Lord Henry, and later the way Dorian is consumed by The Yellow Book. Where Henry's influence and adoration of Dorian relates to his perfection because of his beauty and

youth, Basil's influence and adoration of Dorian stems from his beauty but is magnified by his personality and Basil's opinion on the beauty of his soul, as evidenced in his speech " Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power, by you." The amplification in Basil's dialogue, extending Dorian's power over him from an obsession to a beautiful sounding worship has an incredible effect on Dorian, hearing of Basil's love for him, of an astounding and possibly homoerotic nature. Basil in this way attempts to make his influence over Dorian one of a positive nature of emotional growth and connectedness rather than a life of hedonism as Henry is trying to sway him to, in that way; Basil is arguably a good influence over Dorian, promoting love and kindness over coldness and egotism.

In contrast to previous statements about Henry being representative of the concept of evil, Henry does genuinely care about Dorian and tries to better Dorian's life through interjecting his opinions and guiding him. Without a predominant father figure in his life, (his father having been killed in a duel and subsequently being raised by his grandfather when his mother died) it is likely that Dorian reached out towards Henry because of the absence of a paternal figure, having only his " wicked" grandfather for guidance, and without any textual evidence of a strong relationship between them, it is likely that Lord Henry was closer to Dorian than his grandfather. In Henry's eyes, friendship is less about loyalty than it is about enjoying oneself:

"'Always!' That is a dreadful word. It makes me shudder when I hear it.

Women are so fond of using it. They spoil every romance by trying to make it last for ever. It is a meaningless word, too. The only difference between a

caprice and a lifelong passion is that the caprice lasts a little longer." The analogy Henry makes to the concept of "always" being like a caprice is one that invokes great thought in Dorian and sways him to accept Lord Henry's reasoning and live for the moment, which Henry would have thought would lead to an enjoyable and significantly less painful life, giving Dorian no expectations of people to always stay or live up to their promises and instead take every day and situation as it comes in order for him to get the most out of his life. This diverges from the idea that Lord Henry is only a negative influence in Dorian's life and encourages the idea that perhaps Lord Henry was just incredibly misguided in his guidance of Dorian.

Likewise, with the duality of Lord Henry's influence, Basil also exhibits a negative influence over Dorian, feeding his vanity and then complaining about it later. Dorian's accusation of how Basil only taught Dorian to be vain is true to an extent, as Basil did gloat over Dorian openly and often while he was painting Dorian and after the painting was completed. Dorian's defense of Henry; "I owe a great deal to Harry, Basil," (...) "more than I owe to you." Is not only reflective of the novel but also of the events that occurred as a precursor, as far as Dorian meeting and befriending Henry and the advice and guidance Henry gave him up to the points that we are critical of as readers. The language Basil uses when talking to Dorian is often that of an intense infatuation and worship which influences Dorian in the wrong way to become more egotistical when Basil was aiming to make him more self-aware and to undo Lord Henry's work in how selfish Dorian is, leaving the audience with a bitter frame of mind to see Basil's downfall and the irony it encompasses.

The influence that both Harry and Basil hold over Dorian through the duration of the novel is ultimately a fight of good versus evil, altogether, Henry represents evil and immorality, and Basil represents goodness and decency. The morals that they each try to impose on Dorian are their own values derived from the Victorian society in which they lived and though sometimes misguided, both Basil and Lord Henry had their reasoning behind their values and their justification for attempting to etch these values onto their human canvas: Dorian Gray.