

Lord Henry is the root  
of Dorian Gray's  
corruption



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In the novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, written by Oscar Wilde, the main character Dorian Gray is corrupted by his acquaintance Lord Henry, who ultimately leads to Dorian's demise. Throughout the story Lord Henry fills Dorian's head with all types of immoral thoughts and lies. Lord Henry's flawed philosophical theories alter his mind and eventually lead Dorian down the wrong path.

As a result of this, Dorian ends up murdering his dear friend Basil Hallward, after he confronts Dorian. Later on, Dorian then commits suicide. Dorian's suicide was indeed influenced by no one other than Lord Henry, for he is to blame for poisoning Dorian's pure mind.

When Lord Henry and Dorian Gray first meet it is almost premeditated that their friendship would lead to Dorian's demise. Just before Basil Hallward introduces Lord Henry to Dorian, Basil expresses to him that Dorian Gray is my dearest friend, he said He has a simple and a beautiful nature Don't spoil him (Wilde 15). Basil knew Lord Henry would indeed be toxic to Dorian's nature, which is why he proceeded to keep the two apart. Basil explicitly states, Don't try to influence him. Your influence would be bad because of prior knowledge of what Lord Henry is capable of doing to Dorian's mind (Wilde 15). Lord Henry's philosophy is obviously flawed if Basil questions Dorian even being able to meet him. Additionally, when Basil finally introduces the two, Basil is described as, looking worried, and when he heard Lord Henry's last remark, he glanced at him, hesitated for a moment, and then said, Harry, I want to finish this picture to-day. Would you think it awfully rude of me if I asked you to go away? (Wilde 17). It is evident that Basil is trying to protect Dorian from Lord Henry's corruption for the simple

fact that he is deliberately going out of his way to isolate from each other. Lord Henry patently has the power to alter Dorian's mind into something evil since Basil is extremely concerned from the beginning.

Additionally, Lord Henry knows the potential his influence holds. He says himself, "There is no such thing as a good influence, Mr. Gray. All influence is immoral" (Wilde 18). Lord Henry admits that all influence is corrupt in this line. He furthers his philosophy stating "...to influence a person is to give one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions which proves that he is very much aware of what he is doing" (Wilde 18). Lord Henry continues on to mention that the person who is receiving influence is no longer themselves. According to Lord Henry they transform into an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him (Wilde 18). By Lord Henry expressing these thoughts it is conspicuous that he would have to believe these statements true of himself.

A major component in Lord Henry's philosophy that has the greatest impact on Dorian is the belief that beauty is what is important. Dorian is a very handsome young man, who was an orphan, meaning he didn't receive much guidance during his childhood. This makes him more vulnerable to being persuaded by Lord Henry's flawed philosophy. Whatever Lord Henry feeds to Dorian, he believes. For instance, Dorian and Lord Henry are in Basil's garden and Lord Henry suggests, "Some day, when you are old and wrinkled and ugly, when thought has seared your forehead with its lines, and passion branded your lips with its hideous fires, you will feel it terribly. Now, wherever you go, you charm the world.." (Wilde 22). He basically says that Dorian's life will be worthless once his youth is gone. His life will become

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stagnant and won't have any meaning that once Dorian is old and no longer beautiful. By Lord Henry planting this in Dorian's head, it shapes the way he lives for the rest of his life.

When Dorian comes to the realization that he will not be young, beautiful, and charming forever, it is hard for him to swallow. The thought of not having his good looks to rely on causes him uneasiness. As he ponders growing old, a sharp pang of pain struck through him like a knife and made each delicate fibre of his nature quiver which exemplifies him not being able to handle the fact that his beauty will run out (Wilde 25).. By Lord Henry convincing him that his beauty is all he has to offer in the world, his life then begins to spiral out of control. In addition, Dorian gains feelings for an actress named Sibyl Vane and when he invites Lord Henry to her show, Lord Henry says to Dorian that she isn't that good of an actress. Dorian becomes upset and treats Sibyl poorly and she eventually commits suicide. Once again Dorian is manipulated by Lord Henry. Furthermore, around the town it is rumored that Dorian is corrupting younger boys and one of them even commits suicide as well. As Dorian continues down his path of destruction, he ends up murdering the only person who generally cared for him, which was Basil. Basil had his best intentions for Dorian unlike Lord Henry. Lord Henry ruined Dorian and altered his mind into doing evil things.

Conclusively, Lord Henry is at fault for Dorian being immoral. He originally exposed Dorian to his sin-filled philosophy. He knew Dorian sought leadership and he took advantage of that. Instead of giving him positive reinforcement and good advice such like Basil. Which is why he is responsible for Dorian's negative acts. Had the two ever met, Dorian would

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have never murdered Basil. At the end of the day, the blame should not be placed on anyone other than Lord Henry.

### **References:**

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Oscar Wilde. Ye Olde Paris Booke-Shoppe, 1913.