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Global Literatures

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“The aim of life is self-development. To realize one’s nature perfectly - that is what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves, nowadays. Courage has gone out of our race. The terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion - there are the two things that govern us”(Chapter 2) said by Henry Wotton in Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian*. The novel is a biography of Dorian Gray set in the late Victorian Era, he was a moral man with a pure soul and admired by people, transformed into a hedonist who evaluates self-pleasure over anything even though pleasure contributes to moral decay; and a magical portrait of Dorian, that recorded and indirectly caused the transformation of him, killed him when he attempted to destroyed his sinful past. Henry Wotton said the phrase during the conversation with Dorian, and Basil in Basil’s painting room when Basil was painting a portrait for Dorian. It was the first time Henry Wotton met Dorian after Basil struggled to agree on the meeting between Henry and Dorian because of the hedonistic nature of Henry. Henry said the quote in defense of Basil’s assertion that Henry influenced everyone in a bad way.

Henry meant people should focus on self-development while minimizing the influence of others. Influence, according to Henry all bad because it makes one act differently from its natural behavior. It was true that Henry had a negative impact on the life trajectory of others, but others gained a negative impact due to their failure in self-development as they took the influence from others easily. Henry defended himself, promoted the importance of self-development, and demoted the influence that one should take. The protagonist of the novel, Dorian Gray, is an example of this. Dorian Gray lived a hedonist life mainly due to the impact of Henry Wotton and developed moral decay and committed to a sinful life. The portrait that carried the sins and ages for him killed him when he tried to eliminate the existence of the crime. It conveys the idea that one should not live solely for pleasure and the danger of influences from others. While art is not a textbook that teaches life lessons, Oscar Wilde wants us to think and pay attention to the influence of other people while developing ourselves. With its emphasis on the danger of the influence of a hedonist, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*supports the view of Henry Wotton.

The first evidence that supports the view of Henry Wotton is set in the garden of Basil which foreshadows the sad ending of Dorian when Dorian credulously believes Henry’s assertion of the importance of youth especially the young face that Dorian. Dorian does not agree with Henry’s idea initially but he is quickly convinced by Henry as Henry claims the beauty is not superficial, the beauty of youth only maintained for a few years, and there is nothing in the world worth more than youth. This influence changed Dorian’s view on youth, and the impact started to show when Dorian saw the finished portrait of him. Before the influence, Dorian was only excited about his portrait. However, he developed an extra emotion after the conversation with Henry. “A sharp pang of pain struck through him…his eye…came a mist of tears… ‘how sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will remain always young.’”(Chapter 2) The envious feeling caused him to pray that the portrait shall age for him while himself being young eternally. The portrait not only carried the age, but also sins; and it caused the moral decay and the death of Dorian. The influence of Henry Wotton caused the immoral life of Dorian and his sad ending. And the place where this event took place foreshadowed the ending of him. The foreshadowing is more obvious when we compare the Garden of Basil to the Garden of Eden, Dorian to Adam and Eve, and Henry’s influence on the serpent’s deception. Thus, the influence of Henry on Dorian in the garden of Basil conveys the view of the importance of minimizing the impact of others during self-development.

Another piece of evidence is the development of the moral decay of Dorian Gray after the death of Sibyl Vane which illustrates the influence of Henry Wotton was brutal for his moral mind. In the beginning, Dorian Gray was fascinated by the performance of Sibyl Vane and was excited to share it with his friends: Henry and Basil. However, they found Sibyl’s performance was terrible. The negative feedback from Henry and Basil caused Dorian to feel angry, blame Sibyl, and break the engagement. Then Sibyl could not accept the accusation from Dorian and chose to eliminate her existence. On the other hand, Dorian felt regret for being angry when he calmed down, wrote an apologizing letter, and wanted to keep the engagement. After he learns about the death of Sibyl from Henry, he is shocked and feels guilty, “‘Yes; it is very tragic…’ ‘Is I have murdered Sibyl Vane’”(Chapter 8) In contrast, Henry emphasizes the death of Sibyl is a wonderful thing and precious experience to Dorian: “Someone has killed herself for love of you. I wish that I had ever had such an experience. It would have made me in love with love for the rest of my life”, “The girl never lived, and so she has never really died. To you at least she was always a dream, a phantom that flitted through Shakespeare’s plays and left them lovelier for its presence.”(Chapter 8) The emphasis from Henry successfully influenced Dorian and changed his view on the death of Sibyl as he thinks “It has been a marvelous experience. That is all. I wonder if life has still inshore for me anything as marvelous.”(Chapter 8) The conversation between Dorian and Henry has a significant negative impact on Dorian’s life trajectory because the development of moral decay sped up after the death of Sibyl. In conclusion, the development of the moral decay of Dorian is a result of the influence of Henry, and Dorian experienced this because he failed to minimize the influence of others during his self-development process.

One might assert self-development as being the same as hedonism which promotes the idea of self-pleasure over everything, and Henry who is the major source of impact to Dorian practiced hedonism but did not get a negative impact on himself. Both self-development and hedonism indeed aim for the benefit of oneself. However, the key point is minimizing the influence of others rather than whether or not hedonism is good for someone to practice. Henry Wotton is a hedonist by nature and his self-development had a negative impact on others. In contrast, Dorian Gray was a moral and admirable man with a pure soul whose nature was different from hedonism; and he became a hedonist and immoral due to the influence of Henry. Fortunately, Dorian Gray realizes the influence from Henry has made him a bad person and depicts the influence “‘Yet you poisoned me with a book once. I should not forgive that…’ ‘My dear boy, you are really beginning to moralize.’”(Chapter 19) However, the realization did not let Dorian achieve his redemption. Even though Dorian began developing morals which is self-development in his own way and got rid of the influences from Henry, he did not want to face and admit the sinful and immoral history. Dorian hoped the demon-like portrait transferred into an angel as he started to demonstrate ethical conduct; however, the flame of hope was eliminated when he saw the portrait was the same as usual, reminding him of being a terrible person. Then, Dorian attempted to destroy the paint with the knife that killed Basil who is the painter of the portrait. Suddenly, all the sins and aging depicted in the portrait transferred back to Dorian, leading to his demise as a horrifying old guy. Overall, the self-development can be hedonism for someone like Henry Wotton but one should not be influenced by others easily as the other can be a hedonist, and Dorian demised for the influence of the hedonist.

In conclusion, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*by Oscar Wilde supports the view of the character Henry Wotton in the novel: people should minimize the influence of others in the self-development process. The novel promotes the view with the biography of Dorian Gray who transformed into a hedonist who had a negative impact on others’ life trajectory from a moral and admirable man due to the influence of Henry Wotton. The pivotal events of Henry’s influence that contributed to Dorian’s moral decay and his terrible demise are the emphasis on youth in the garden of Basil and the elevation of Sibyl’s death to an art form. Even though Dorian realizes the influence, in the end, sinful history kills him when he tries to eliminate the past. The novel shows the reader a tragedy when accepting the influence so easily. This reminds readers nowadays to be careful about the influence of other people; it is very important in modern society because everyone receives an excessive amount of information from the internet that includes the attempt of bad influence from many people. The novel reminds readers to be careful of the influences of the tragedy of Dorian Gray.

**Work Cited**

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray.* Project Gutenberg, 1890, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/174/174-h/174-h.htm>.