

**UNIVERSITY OF PARDUBICE
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**THE INFLUENCE OF THE
WRITINGS OF THOMAS DE
QUINCEY AND THE CONTEXT OF
JACK THE RIPPER ON OSCAR
WILDE'S *PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY***

THESIS

AUTHOR: Petr Jína

SUPERVISOR: Michael M. Kaylor, M.A., Ph.D.

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**VLIV DÍLA THOMASE DE
QUINCEYHO V KONTEXTU JACKA
ROZPAROVAČE NA ROMÁN
OSCARA WILDEA
*OBRAZ DORIANA GRAYE***

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

AUTOR PRÁCE: Petr Jína

VEDOUCÍ PRÁCE: Michael M. Kaylor, M.A., Ph.D.

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.....

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Abstract:

This thesis concentrates on the development of the Decadent conception of “murder as a high art” as can be seen in the works of Thomas de Quincey, especially in his *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* and in the later context its influence on Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The thesis also mentions other representatives of the British and French Decadent and Aesthetic movement represented by Walter Pater and Joris-Karl Huysmans, who also seemed to have a great impact on Oscar Wilde and his novel. Oscar Wilde’s reintroduction of the conception of “murder as a high art”, as it is presented in *Dorian*, took place in late 1890s; a period which was highly affected by the rage of the notorious murderer Jack the Ripper. The thesis therefore outlines the reactions of Victorian society to its publication.

Souhrn:

Práce se zabývá vývojem Dekadentní koncepce “vraždy jako krásného umění” tak, jak ji představil Thomas De Quincey ve svém díle *Vražda jako krásné umění*, a jež později ovlivnila Oscara Wilde a jeho *Obraz Dorian Greya*. Práce zmiňuje také další představitele britského a francouzského dekadentního a estetického hnutí Waltera Patera a Joris-Karla Huysmana, kteří také významně ovlivnili Oscara Wilde a jeho dílo. Jelikož Wilde, skrze postavu Dorian, znovu představil koncepci “vraždy jako krásného umění” v devadesátých letech 19. století; tedy v době řádění proslulého vraha Jacka Rozparovače, tato práce se soustředí i na reakce viktoriánské společnosti na publikování Wildeova románu.

Table of content:

1	Introduction	1
2	Decadent conception	3
2.1	Decadence	3
2.2	Decadent movement in Britain.....	4
3	Thomas de Quincey.....	6
3.1	De Quincey as a writer	6
3.1.1	De Quincey's position in English literature	7
3.2	De Quincey's fascination with violence	9
4	<i>On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts</i>	11
4.1	Principles of Taste.....	13
5	Influence on Wilde.....	15
5.1	Early contact.....	15
5.2	Walter Pater's influence	16
5.3	Joris-Karl Huysmans	18
6	Oscar Wilde.....	24
6.1	<i>"Pen, Pencil and Poison"</i>	24
6.2	<i>The Picture of Dorian Gray</i>	26
7	Analysis of <i>Dorian</i>	31
7.1	Morbid Dorian.....	31
7.2	Lord Henry's influence	32
7.3	Basil's death	35
7.4	Dorian fulfils De Quincey's principles	36
7.5	Lord Henry's suspicion	37
8	After dinner talk	38
9	Victorian London	41
9.1	Jack the Ripper	42
9.2	Wilde and press reports	44
10	<i>Dorian's</i> ending	46
11	Reactions	48
12	Conclusion	51

13	Resumé.....	55
14	Bibliography.....	60
15	Table of appendices.....	63

1 Introduction

Nineteenth-century literature is represented by a large number of great writers and also affected by the change in literary taste. The period was highly influenced by the development of the Decadent and Aesthetic movement, represented in Britain by exceptional figures of the literary world such as Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater. This period is quite remarkable and for this reason the chosen topic of the thesis greatly reflects my personal interest in the Decadent movement.

The main aim of the thesis will be, by detailed analysis and a comparison of primary sources, to depict the concept of “murder as a high art” as can be seen in the works of Thomas de Quincey, especially in his *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, and it will try to show his deep influence on the works of Oscar Wilde, for this purpose represented by his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the essay “*Pen, Pencil and Poison*”. Furthermore, the influential factors which affected Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* seem to be far more complex and therefore the thesis will also elaborately concentrate on the influence of Walter Pater and Joris-Karl Husymans.

The first part of the thesis will deal with a description of the development of the Decadent movement in Britain and will find its roots in France. In addition to this, the thesis will outline the role De Quincey played in the influence on decadent writers and will describe in detail De Quincey’s position in English literature, as well as depict his curious personality. Next, after analyzing his *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, the thesis will summarize the aesthetical principles of murder which will, in a later part, be used as an instrument for examining *Dorian* and will show its implementation by Wilde.

The second part, will concentrate on a detailed analysis of Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, providing readers with a complex view of the way Wilde applied the multifarious aspect and how different influences intermesh and culminate in a comprehensive whole. Furthermore, analysis will show how Wilde, through the main characters of his novel, represented by Dorian Gray and Lord Henry Wotton, denotes his aesthetical approach, introduces the criminal form to his audience and finds an echo in De Quincey’s work.

For a clear understanding of the whole context, the final chapters will concentrate on a description the situation in London in the late 1890s, a period which was greatly affected by the mysterious, notorious and never detected murderer, Jack the Ripper. The thesis will analyze the reactions of Victorian readers to Wilde's *Dorian* and point out further circumstances which influenced the first publication of Wilde's novel only two years after the terror which struck London during the period of Jack the Ripper.

2 Decadent conception

2.1 Decadence

Before more than hundred years ago, the word “Decadence” was used only in reference to different inanimate objects and issues. “*Things* were said to be decadent, conditions, states of public and communal existence, but neither the adjective nor the noun had been attached to particular human beings” (Gilman 73). The original meaning was formed during the early decades of the sixteenth century in Italy and meant decline. Before that, in the Middle Ages, the traditional purpose of this word was to refer to the decay of the republican institution as city-states lost their verve and their markets. By the end of the seventeenth century, the meaning of the word “Decadence” had lost its purpose of “falling away” and moved to a term which might be more understandable by modern readers, meaning “moral corruption” (Gilman 73-74). In addition to this, Auchard claims that “Decadence should not be understood as a pose which borders on the camp—and surely the celebrity of Oscar Wilde always raises that possibility—but rather as a serious, seductive vision of life which well might attract fine people” (Auchard 2).

Modern readers can usually find the word “Decadence” in direct connection with the Decadent movement. The Decadent movement originated in the nineteenth century in France and was represented by great figures of French Aestheticism such as Desiré Nisard, Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, Joris Karl Huysmans and Paul Bourget. As Gilman claims: “It was in France that decadence early became a central issue and there that it was given the most agitated attention (Gilman 74).

The whole Aesthetics concept arises from the phrase “art for art’s sake”, which was firstly used in written form in 1837. As Julian North explains:

The phrase ‘art for art’s sake’ seems to have originated in France. It was used first in Victor Cousin’s Sorbonne lectures of 1818, though these were not published till 1836. Significantly, what was probably the first printed use of the phrase in England, in the following year, was also by a French man – Desiré Nisard (North 36).

The concept of “art for art’s sake” follows the strong belief in autonomy of art free of any moral purpose. This concept of the autonomy of art was gradually developed, and as will be shown later in the thesis, into the curious dimensions represented by the great figures of Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater. The first important figures of French Aestheticism could be considered Théophile Gautier and Charles Baudelaire. “Gautier proclaimed art for art’s sake as a declaration of war on the utilitarianism of the establishment. Baudelaire followed Gautier in outspokenly condemning a narrowly-conceived idea of the moral function of literature” (North 36). Furthermore, art was for Gautier “no mere embellishment to practical life, as in the employment of received notions of beauty in the service communal aggrandizement of consolation, nor is it the servant of power” (Gilman 82) It was “instead its critic or alternative” (Gilman 82). Baudelaire kept this concept of the autonomy of art and “found support in French aesthetics and criticism for his defence of the intrinsic, aesthetic value of the literary work” (North 36).

2.2 Decadent movement in Britain

In Britain, the Decadent movement in literature was in 19th century England mostly represented by the great figures of Charles Algernon Swinburne, Walter Pater, Arthur Symons and Oscar Wilde. These authors found deep motivation in the Aesthetics movement, especially through the works of French writers. The first open contact with the Decadent movement was made by Algernon Swinburne, who followed the similar concept of French Aestheticism especially brought by Baudelaire. As North gives evidence:

When the veins of a Romantic resistance to didacticism very gradually resurfaced in British criticism of the later nineteenth century, the influence of French aestheticism played an important part in this. It was, for instance, in a review of Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du mal* in 1862 that Algernon Swinburne made one of the first of a series of attacks on the critical establishment for its moralistic bias. He defended Baudelaire’s volume, which had been withdrawn and censored for alleged immorality, on the grounds that the poet’s business was ‘to write good verses, and by no means to redeem the age and remould society’ (North 35).

Later on, after Swinburne, at the beginning of the second half of nineteenth century other highly important British writers who accepted the concept of the autonomy of art appeared in Britain. These writers are mostly represented by Oscar Wilde and Walter Pater. As Julian North claims:

From the 1860s there were growing indications in Britain that this kind of protest was having its effect in changing critical attitudes. Beside Swinburne, the key figures here were Walter Pater, and later Oscar Wilde and Arthur Symonds. Despite their differences, all of these writers shared a fundamental belief in the intrinsic, aesthetic value of the work of art and a dislike of overt didactic purpose. They attempted to reinvest art with a value that they felt had been debased since the Romantic period – art was for them a new religion: the religion of beauty. Moreover, these beliefs were sometimes reflected in a new style of criticism pioneered by Pater. The critic no longer sought to judge the work so much to render his personal impression of its qualities (North 37).

Apart from these, there was the outstanding figure of Thomas de Quincey, who could be considered their predecessor. Nevertheless, he is not mentioned very often in direct connection with the Decadent movement in France and Britain. The fact is that Thomas de Quincey might have influenced French and British Decadent Aesthetes. As North gives evidence: “the protests of writers such as Baudelaire, Swinburne and Pater found an echo, albeit faint, in critical responses to De Quincey’s work” (North 37). De Quincey was praised by these authors not only for his respected autobiographical writings but, as Wilde tells us, also for his essay *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, which, as will be shown later in the thesis, gave Wilde a powerful inspiration, as it can be seen in his “*Pen, Pencil and Poison*” and later in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. De Quincey’s influence on Wilde may be seen either as direct, or at least through the works of French aesthetes such as Baudelaire and Gautier, who Wilde greatly appreciated. It could be said that the strong impact he had on French and British authors affected the whole development of the Decadent movement.

3 Thomas de Quincey

3.1 De Quincey as a writer

De Quincey (see appendix 1) was considered not only a great writer but also, as although not very frequently, an interesting personality of the period. Thomas de Quincey, an outstanding character in life and in work, is considered one of the most respected essayists, prose writers and literary critics of the period. His life story wavered between social and professional growth, when he wrote a large number of autobiographical works, essays and fiction, and his sudden fall, due to his addiction to opium “which he was to make up later in London in 1804 as an Oxford student’s weekend pleasure” (Chang 17), and the financial slump which caused his decline.

Reading Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* at the beginning of his career had a great influence on him and soon after Wordsworth can be found as his ideal. As Davies claims:

It is easy to imagine with what force Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* must have struck such a temperament, so situated. De Quincey seems to have read them in 1802, and at once he became one of Wordsworth’s earliest and most devoted disciples (Davies 8).

Later on, he formed a strong fellowship with Coleridge and Wordsworth as an intimate friend.

De Quincey became famous for his well-known work, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, his first publication except for a translation from Horace in 1800 and few articles in *The Westmorland Gazette* eighteen years later. *Confessions*, showing strange autobiographical parallels to his odd life experiences, were first published in 1821 and attacked moral London with full power.

It is a fact that “Opium was, of course, completely legal during the nineteenth century and widely used as a painkiller in very much the same way as aspirin is today” (North 11). But in De Quincey’s work “opium was shown to be a stimulant to the imagination, opening up in dreams new worlds of pleasure and pain” (North 11).

Despite the initial enthusiasm shown by critics, as Julian North describes “These first responses to the *Confessions* are refreshing in so far as they are free from the accumulations of prejudice which weighted down later ...” (7) and also despite the positive assertions expressed by critics referring to *Confessions* as “a ‘Book of Wonders,’ ‘singular,’ ‘curious,’ ‘strange’” (North 7), De Quincey later appeared under the flow of criticism coming out of the autobiographical images stated in *Confessions*. North describes the critical reactions:

But the life of the author was not simply discussed as a reality by these critics, it was also judged as such. We still expect review criticism to be evaluative, but these critics are not merely passing judgment on the book as a book, they are offering a moral verdict on the autobiographer as a spiritual case-history. Potential readers are not merely being advised whether or not to buy, they are implicitly being instructed in how to live. Even this kind of moralism may still be found in some reviews from the early to mid-nineteenth century (North 10).

3.1.1 De Quincey’s position in English literature

As a result of De Quincey’s life and work, as seen in *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* and *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, he is considered an outstanding personality in the English literary world but placed in a rather inaccurate position. As Davies claims “... certain oddities in the pattern of his life and writings that both the date and the title give misleading impressions of his place in English literature” (5), and later explains that:

The date suggests that he was a Romantic of the second generation, to be placed with Byron, Shelley and Keats; but in fact he was thirty-six years old when he wrote the *Confessions*, and had been for the past twenty years an admirer and friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge. In literary taste and outlook he belonged to the first generation of English Romantics, not to the second (Davies 5).

Regarding his first novel *Confessions*, which stirred up public opinions, Davies confirms that “... title is no less misleading, with its suggestion of Byron and Keats, the sensational and the exotic; for the book itself is of a sobriety in subject and treatment which owed nothing to Byron or Keats, and much to Wordsworth” (5).

From the very beginning of his exceptional career as a writer, critical views of De Quincey's work had been constantly developing, offering us various public reviews of his works and personality. It is a fact that many other writers found great interest in him and his exceptional and motivating works, which later proved that he had a powerful influence on French and English Aesthetes. As Julian North states and quotes Paul Bourget from *Les Lacs anglais*:

... De Quincey's writings have consistently struck their critics as eccentric, strange, touched with scandal. 'Ce bizarre Quincey,' as Paul Bourget called him, has been reincarnated over years as ruined genius, visionary, madman, drug-crazed degenerate and, most recently, fantasist of racial and sexual violence. On the other hand, De Quincey has also been cast, sometimes by the same critics, as an unworldly aesthete and fastidious scholar (North 1).

His strong exceptionality can be seen in his biographical works of Wordsworth and Coleridge. For these, De Quincey was generally admired and as North confirms in a quotation from Peter Landreth: "As a biographer of Wordsworth and Coleridge, De Quincey was judged kind, faithful and honest by some and a treacherous gossip by others" (North 2).

Concerning his *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, the reactions were much more controversial and far more provoking. North included these reactions in the introduction to his *De Quincey Reviewed*, quoting Margaret Oliphant in reference to *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* as "... an example of subtle wit and powerful horror, but elsewhere scorned as third-rate humour, and still elsewhere as 'prostituted might'" (North 2).

It is a fact that there was a strong influence on French writers. This influence could be seen through the works of Baudelaire and other French Decadents. Baudelaire was certainly fascinated by De Quincey, especially by his *Confessions*. Baudelaire's reactions in the first decade of the second half of nineteenth century to *Confessions* were strong, emotional and admirable. In 1860, Baudelaire published *Enchantements, et tortures d'un mangeur d'opium*, an adaptation of *Confessions* with a commentary, which were later revised and published under the title *Un mangeur d'opium*. As Julian North states about Baudelaire's enthusiasm:

'Un mangeur d'opium' was a work of homage to De Quincey as a great artist. This, coming from the figure of Baudelaire's stature, was enough in itself to create a renewed interest in De Quincey among some of France's major writers – including Flaubert, Edmond de Goncourt and J.K. Huysmans (North 33).

And he continues in the same manner, claiming that:

It also led, as we shall see, to a thriving French critical interest in De Quincey as a decadent stylist and degenerate – an image largely culled from the association in French minds of De Quincey with Baudelaire (North 33).

Baudelaire was fascinated by De Quincey's autobiographical writings and prized them for their moral purpose and their "beauty, irrespective of any usefulness to the reader" (North 34) which perfectly fits the Decadent approach of French Aesthetes, who followed the concept of "art for art's sake" and from whom Swinburne, Pater and Wilde found motivation and brought this concept, in Wilde's case, to an obscure extreme.

3.2 De Quincey's fascination with violence

On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts first appeared in 1827. The decision to write this controversial paper was preceded by his long-term fascination in and deep search for artistic pleasures in murders. As Davies claims "It is one of the curious traits in De Quincey's character that though himself gentle to a degree, diminutive in person, and elaborately courteous in manner, he was strangely fascinated by scenes of violence" (21). His innermost taste for tragic events especially caused by the immoral action of murder developed during his early days at *The Westmorland Gazette*, in 1818, where he "... instead of printing news of the day and political articles, as the proprietors wished, he filled his columns with long reports of lurid crimes collected from all over the country" (Davies 22). This interest became a natural and almost inseparable focus of his later works, even in the literary criticism of the greatest figures in the literary world. As Davies proves:

Four years later, he published his most famous piece of literary criticism, a short essay 'On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth'. It is as different from any other piece of Shakespearian criticism in English as it is typical of De Quincey, for it

contains a digression, written with almost more care and interest than the main theme, and this digression is about a specially bloodthirsty murder (Davies 22)

In *On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth*, De Quincey concentrates on Shakespearian criticism. The concept is rather unusual and is seen as outstanding because he considers murders in Shakespeare's plays as a sort of artistic triumph which gives fascinating exceptionality to the plays of such a genius as Shakespeare certainly was. Nevertheless, De Quincey still points out the unacceptability and immorality of murder. As Davies confirms:

Its dramatic and imaginative function in the play, he thought, was to emphasize the enormity and inhumanity of Duncan's murder: 'the reestablishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them'. In Shakespearian criticism, this was an isolated lucky hit, so far as De Quincey was concerned. And it remained isolated because what had really caught his imagination was not Shakespeare and Shakespearean interpretation, but the odd notion that there might, after all, be an imaginative, even an artistic side to the most brutal murders-a side which would serve to explain to himself his own interest in them (Davies 22).

The concept, where De Quincey depicts an artistic effect despite the fact that he concentrates on murders, could also be seen in his later works such as *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*.

4 *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*

In *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* De Quincey concentrated on murders by a famous criminal of his period, Mr. John Williams. De Quincey's approach to his activity was rather unusual at the time because he considered the murders of Mr. Williams as artistic and described the major principles of an aesthetically perfect murder, as it was simply another work of art.

But what brought about De Quincey's decision to write the essay *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*? Apart from his lifelong fascination with murder, one great impact on him which spurred imagination was a series of tragic events that struck London in the year 1812. These concerned an exceptional series of murders by Mr. John Williams, "The Artist", as De Quincey would call him. It is very clear that De Quincey was fascinated by Williams and focused on his tremendous acts. As Davies claims: "In 1812, Mr. Williams made his début on the stage of Radcliff Highway, and executed those unparalleled murders which have procured for him such a brilliant and undying reputation" (Davies 23). London was in terror of Williams' dangerous activity and as De Quincey writes: "For twelve succeeding days, under some groundless notion that the unknown murderer had quitted London, the panic which had convulsed the mighty metropolis diffused itself all over the island" (*On Murder* 32). From that time, De Quincey became his loyal admirer and kindly refers to Williams as a person who "... has exalted the ideal of murder to all of us, and to me, therefore, in particular, has deepened the arduousness of my task" (*On Murder* 3). In reference to De Quincey's approach concerning the morality and aesthetics of these murders, we can find De Quincey in *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* claiming that:

Everything in this world has two handles. Murder, for instance, may be laid hold of by its moral handle (as it generally is in the pulpit and at the Old Bailey), and that, I confess, is its weak side; or it may also be treated aesthetically, as the Germans call it-that is, in relation to good taste (4).

This great quotation could have been a brief generalization of his attitudes towards murder, and it later proved highly influential especially in the case of Oscar Wilde. De Quincey's perception of murder seems extremely exceptional and outstanding. He does

not concentrate on murder from the moral or immoral point of view, nevertheless still informing his readers that the act of murder is according to him immoral in any situation and gives us evidence for this in:

Before I begin, let me say a word or two to certain prigs, who affect to speak of our society as if it were in some degree immoral in its tendency. Immoral! God bless my soul, gentleman! What is it that people mean? I am for morality, and always shall be, and for virtue, and all that; and I do affirm, and always shall (let what will come of it), that murder is an improper line of conduct, highly improper; and I do not stick to assert that any man who deals in murder must have very incorrect way of thinking, and truly inaccurate principles; and, so far from aiding and abetting him by pointing out his victim's hiding-place, as a great moralist of Germany declared it to be every good man's duty to do, I would subscribe one shilling and sixpence to have him apprehended—which is more by eighteen-pence than the most eminent moralist have hitherto subscribed for that purpose (*On Murder* 4).

But instead, he concentrates on the aesthetical point of view. Once the murder is done, over, finished, there are no other moral or immoral aspects which would give us any advice, intellectual outcome, pleasure, which would fire our imagination, artistic interest or temperament. That might be the reason why De Quincey considers the moral side of murder as “its weak side”. But once we look at murder from the aesthetical point of view, as De Quincey would say “treat it aesthetically”, anything is possible. Certainly murder is a tragic thing which causes great sadness and tears but once we disengage ourselves from the moral aspect, it can serve as a very interesting artistic instrument or as a delightfully artistic piece of work. As De Quincey expresses in *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*:

Enough has been given to morality; now comes the turn of Taste and the Fine Arts. A sad thing it was, no doubt, very sad; but we can't mend it. Therefore let us make the best of a bad matter; and, as it is impossible to hammer anything out of it for moral purpose, let us treat it aesthetically, and see if it will turn to account in that way. Such is the logic of a sensible man; and what follows? We dry up our tears, and have the satisfaction, perhaps, to discover that a transaction which, morally considered, was shocking, and without leg to stand upon, when tried by principles of Taste, turns out to be a very meritorious performance (5).

De Quincey advises his readers to skip the issues of morality and directly introduces to them the “principles of Taste” according to which murder should be reconsidered.

4.1 Principles of Taste

So what according to Thomas De Quincey are the principles of an aesthetically perfect murder? There are a few important factors. De Quincey developed the idea that murder is nowadays [De Quincey's days] very different to the past. It developed, its artistic potential increased, it became professional and the audience became more and more demanding. As De Quincey proclaims: "People begin to see that something more goes to the composition of a fine murder than two blockheads to kill and be killed, a knife, a purse, and a dark lane" (*On Murder* 3). Murder should also have style. De Quincey considers murder as an artistic piece of work and for that reason it should contain all the important segments as any other artistic masterpieces certainly have. De Quincey emphasizes that: "Design, gentlemen, grouping, light and shade, poetry, sentiment, are now deemed indispensable to attempts of this nature" (3). De Quincey regarded as very important the method and technique of murder. Murder by poisoning was not for him an artistic one and greatly preferred the traditional style done with a long pellet knife. De Quincey gives us evidence in his disapproving claim that:

Fie on these dealers in poison, say I: can they not keep to the old honest way of cutting throats, without introducing such abominable innovations from Italy? I consider all these poisoning cases, compared with the legitimate style, as no better than waxwork by the side of sculpture, or a lithographic print by the side of a fine Volpato (*On Murder* 14).

Later in his essay, he summed up the methods in a few important points and developed certain principles which an aesthetically committed murder should have. Starting with the introduction:

But it is time that I should say a few words about the principles of murder, not with a view to regulate your practice, but your judgment. As to old woman, and the mob of newspaper readers, they are pleased with anything, provided it is bloody enough. But the mind of sensibility requires something more. First, then, let us speak of the kind of person is adapted to the purpose of the murderer; secondly, of the place where; thirdly, of the time when, and other little circumstances (*On Murder* 17).

Concerning the person suitable to be murdered, De Quincey "... suppose it is evident that he ought to be a good man" (17) and explains to us the reasons in:

... if he were not, he might himself, by possibly, be contemplating murder at the very time; and such 'diamond-cut-diamond' tussles, though pleasant enough where nothing better is stirring, are really not what a critic can allow himself to call murders" (*On Murder* 17).

Further specifying that: "For the final purpose of murder, considered as a fine art, is precisely the same as that of tragedy in Aristotle's account of it; viz. 'to cleanse the heart by means of pity and terror'" (18). Also, that a notorious person is improper to murder because he would be a mere abstract idea to the public and to murder him would not have the desired effect. The selected person should, as De Quincey writes, "be in good health" (18) because it is "absolutely barbarous to murder a sick person, who is usually quite unable to bear it" (18). Furthermore, the most suitable person should be a friend because as De Quincey spoke of Mr. Williams: "For surely he never could be so indiscreet as to be sailing about on a roving cruise in search of some chance person to murder?" (35), but he "... had suited himself with a victim some time before, viz. an old and very intimate friend" (35). Thus De Quincey's advice could be understood by readers that in order to fulfill the good "taste" of murder, it should be prepared in advance and that it should not have any accidental circumstances. Concerning all these issues, De Quincey came to the conclusion that Williams: "seems to have laid it down as a maxim that the best person to murder was a friend, and, in default of friend, which is an article one cannot always command, an acquaintance: because, in either case, on first approaching his subject, suspicion would be disarmed, whereas a stranger might take alarm ..." (35).

5 Influence on Wilde

Wilde in his life and works was seen as a complex genius which made him one of the greatest literary figures. His life and social and artistic development was affected by many various influences and one cannot, in many cases, say which played a major role in it. It is a fact that these influences were very complex, broad and covered various fields. It seems that all these influences came together into an interesting combination which Wilde presented in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

The direct influence of De Quincey on Wilde will be shown in a later chapter of the thesis. But, apart from De Quincey, there were other personalities who influenced Wilde from the very beginning of his career.

5.1 Early contact

Among the teachers at Oxford, he was particularly impressed by John Ruskin and later Walter Pater, both influencing his life and works very deeply. As a teenager, the sensitive Oscar Wilde fell in love with the mystical Pre-Raphaelite religion of beauty. As an Oxford undergraduate, Wilde was drawn toward the more moralistic branch of that religion preached by the Oxford art professor Ruskin. Ruskin also attracted him with his socialist ideas and his belief in the beauty of manual labour, though Wilde would appreciate such “Work” done by others not himself because it would have soiled his flashy clothing and lamb-skin gloves. But, it was above all Ruskin’s prose-style that Wilde admired.

Pater, while sharing Ruskin’s passion for beauty, taught Wilde a new concept of art devoid of any moral responsibility. Wilde carried both teachings to their extreme, in keeping with his extravagant character, which was outwardly displayed by dressing colourfully and wearing exotic flowers in the buttonhole of his coat.

While at Oxford, he made various trips abroad, visiting Italy and Greece with Professor J.P. Mahaffy, who taught him to love Hellenism. Mahaffy used to hear very often from Oscar Wilde: “Take me all round, I am the best man in Trinity College” (Ellmann, *Wilde* 27). Later, Wilde read Mahaffy’s work *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander* and made some “improvements and corrections“ (Ellman, *Wilde*

29) through the book, which were left out for certain reasons in the second edition. In 1882, Wilde landed in the United States, giving his famous statement at the custom's post: "I have nothing to declare except my genius" (Ellmann, *Wilde* 160). On his return to Europe, he spent three months in Paris, where he met writers and painters such as Leon Daudet, Stéphane Mallarmé, Edmond de Goncourt and Lucien Pissaro, and was also impressed by the works of Gustave Flaubert and Joris-Karl Huysmans.

5.2 Walter Pater's influence

Meeting Walter Pater influenced Oscar Wilde for the rest of his life. Pater was a critic and historian, best known for his influential study, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. Pater was a fellow at Brasenose College, Oxford, when Wilde who was from Magdalen College, first read his study in the autumn of 1874 during his first year at the university. Pater's impact on Wilde may be seen in remarks in *De Profundis* which refer to Pater's *Renaissance* as: "... book which has had such a strange influence over my life" (CW 1022). The influence of Pater's *Renaissance* on Wilde seems obvious in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, particularly when Lord Henry urges Dorian in chapter two to live to the fullest because one's youth is temporary:

Time is jealous of you, and wars against your lilies and your roses. You will become sallow, and hollow-cheeked, and dull-eyed. You will suffer horribly.... Ah! realise your youth while you have it. Don't squander the gold of your days, listening to the tedious, trying to improve the hopeless failure, or giving away your life to the ignorant, the common, and the vulgar. These are the sticky aims, the false ideals, of your age. 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" (*Dorian* 30).

The famous "Conclusion" of Pater's *Renaissance* particularly inspired Wilde, who interpreted Pater's urging as an immoral quest, though Pater, as in the following quotation, had focused on the effect of "experience" on the "spirit":

Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest

number of vital forces unite in their purest energy? To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment....
(*The Renaissance* 237)

Pater's strong influence had a great impact on Wilde and can be seen in almost every fragment of his work. Indeed, when Pater first read *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in manuscript, he realised the obvious fact that he had been the model for Lord Henry. Mortified, Pater urged Wilde to tone down some of the immoral views put into the mouth of Lord Henry. Wilde allowed himself to be persuaded to do so, but this was apparently not enough for Pater, who further distanced himself in a review he wrote of the novel. The direct influence of Pater, as Wilde mentions in *Dorian*, appeared in chapter nineteen, where Dorian talks to Lord Henry about the book he gave him:

You poisoned me with a book once. I should not forgive that. Harry, promise me that you will never lend that book to anyone. It does harm." "My dear boy, you are really beginning to moralize. You will soon be going about like the converted, and the revivalist, warning people against all the sins of which you have grown tired. You are much too delightful to do that. . . . As for being poisoned by a book, there is no such thing as that. Art has no influence upon action. It annihilates the desire to act. It is superbly sterile. The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame (*Dorian* 249).

In this conversation between Dorian and Lord Henry, Dorian pledges to live a reformed life. Reflecting on the course of his past twenty years, he confronts Lord Henry, whom he believes is responsible for his corruption. Dorian criticises the poisonous "yellow book" that years before had such a strong influence on him. This accusation is strange to Wilde's philosophy of aestheticism, which holds that art cannot be either moral or immoral. Lord Henry refuses to believe that a book could have such power. While there is something tempting in his observation that "the world calls immoral ... books that show the world its own shame" (*Dorian* 250), Lord Henry's words here are less convincing than other statements to the same effect that he made earlier in the novel.

5.3 Joris-Karl Huysmans

However, while Walter Pater may have been the model for Lord Henry, another candidate for the “poisonous book” which so corrupted Dorian Gray could be a book by Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Against the Grain (A Rebours)*.

Huysman’s book first appeared in 1884 and is considered to be his greatest achievement. Immediately after its first publication, it aroused great excitement in decadent circles in France and Britain and “shook up the literary scene” (Ellmann, *Wilde* 259). In reference to *A Rebours* Wilde informed *Morning Post* about the greatness of this book, claiming that “This last book of Huysmans is one of the best I have ever seen” (Ellmann, *Wilde* 259). Ellmann depicts the importance of *A Rebours* for Wilde, informing that: It was not an event, but a book, a book which was to be for Wilde in the eighties what Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* had been in seventies” (Ellmann, *Wilde* 259). Since then, it has frequently been mentioned as “a guidebook of decadence” (Ellmann, *Wilde* 259). Havelock Ellis mentions in the introduction to *A Rebours*, that:

Not perhaps his greatest achievement, it must ever remain the central work in which he has most powerfully concentrated his whole vision of life. It sums up the progress he had already made, foretells the progress he was afterwards to make, in a style that is always individual, always masterly in its individuality. Technically, it may be said that the power of ‘A Rebours’ lies in the fact that here for the first time Huysmans has succeeded in uniting the two lines of his literary development: The austere analysis in the novel of commonplace things mostly alien to the writer, and the freer elaboration in the prose-poems of his own more intimate personal impressions (intr. xii).

The main character of *A Rebours* is Duc Jean des Esseintes, a French aristocrat who more boldly than Pater takes the Paterian ideal of sensuality to its logical and perverted conclusion. Esseintes is a victim of over-wrought nerves and suffers from neuralgia and dyspepsia. He retires for a season from Paris to his country house at Fontenay, which he eccentrically decorates in almost cloistral methods according to his complex aesthetic sensations. He hung on the wall the finest painting of Salome by Gustave Moreau. Esseintes sinks into his delights in precious stones and exotic plants which reveal Nature’s most unnatural freaks. He is a sensitive amateur of perfumes and possesses a range of liqueurs to produce harmonies by his “mouth organ” (*A Rebours*

44). It is the fact that *A Rebours* sums up aesthetic ideas and decadence in their pure form and highly influenced Wilde. As Ellis mentions:

The aesthetic attitude towards art which '*A Rebours*' illuminates is that commonly called decadent, Decadence in art, though a fairly simple phenomenon, and world-wide as art itself, is still so ill understood that it may be worth while to discuss briefly its precise nature, more especially as manifested in literature.

Technically. A decadent style is only such in relation to a classic style. It is simply a further development of a classic style, a further specialization, the heterogeneous, in Spenserian phraseology, having become heterogeneous. (*intr.* xiv)

Following Ellis's notes on Huysmans' style, Wilde presents in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* a more precise impact of this fatal "yellow book", which Lord Henry sent to Dorian. Wilde informs readers that "Dorian had been poisoned by a book. There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a made through which he could realise his conception of beautiful" (*Dorian* 168). Dorian refers to the book's content, which included things which he had dimly dreamed of that were suddenly made real to him and the things of which he had never dreamed followed by a description of style of this book:

It was a novel without a plot, and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian, who spent his life trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own, and to sum up, as it were, in himself the various moods through which the world-spirit had ever passed, loving for their mere artificiality those renunciations that men have unwisely called virtue, as much as those natural rebellions that wise men still call sin. The style in which it was written was that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of argot and of archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterizes the work of some of the finest artists of the French school of *Symbolists*. There were in it metaphors as monstrous as orchids, and as subtle in colour. The life of the senses was described in the terms of mystical philosophy. One hardly knew at times whether one was reading the spiritual ecstasies of some medieval saint or the morbid confessions of a modern sinner. It was a poisonous book. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad, as he passed from chapter to chapter, a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and the creeping shadows" (*Dorian* 145).

It seems that Huysman's *A Rebours* was a model for the "yellow poisonous book". Comparing the content of *A Rebours* to Dorian's description of the "yellow book" which he was given by Lord Henry, we could arrive at a clear and predictable conclusion. As in the previous quotation, Huysman's book also has only one main curious character, which is Duc Jean des Esseintes. The sentence where Dorian describes the book of one character which is trying to realize "in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own" (*Dorian* 145) corresponds with Esseintes' disappointment with a society which does not accept his eccentricity and ancient style:

His scorn of humanity grew by what it fed on; he realized in fact that the world is mostly made up of solemn humbugs and silly idiots. There was no room for doubt; he could entertain no hope of discovering in another the same aspirations and the same antipathies, no hope of joining forces with a mind that, like his own, should find its satisfaction in a life of studious idleness; no hope of uniting a keen and doctrinaire spirit such as his, with that of writer and a man of learning (*A Rebours* 6).

We find him sunk in ancient times as its fragments can be seen all around him, in his strange and curious house. This escape from reality let him dream and live another life in his thoughts. All this does not allow him to come back to present reality. Nevertheless, even if he could, he would not return. His state of mind is presented in:

Instinct, sensations, preferences transmitted from his ancestors awake, grow more and more precise and govern his thoughts as masters. He recalls memories of persons and things he had never personally known, and there comes a time when he escapes impetuously from the prison-house of his century, and wanders forth in freedom, in another epoch, with which, by a crowning piece of self-deception, he believes he would have been in better accord (*A Rebours* 169).

Furthermore, the note that "the style in which it was written is that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of argot and of archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterizes the work of some of the finest artists of the French school of *Symbolists*" (*Dorian* 145), also fully corresponds with the content of Huysmans' book. This curious jewelled style is his mastery, as Ellis claims:

“Huysmans took up this form from where Baudelaire and Mallarmé had left it, and sought to carry it yet further” (Ellis in Huysmans, *A Rebours* intr.xi). Argot is another important feature of his elevated style. Using argot is reasonable because *A Rebours* was written for just a dozen devoted people, and Huysmans was himself surprised at the interest the book evoked. Such an interest was not accidental, because the French aesthetic ideals of the second half of the nineteenth century expressed in this book are more precisely written in *A Rebours* than in any other book. Gilman writes: “A novel like *A Rebours*, the ‘bible of Decadence,’ as it was so widely proclaimed, is a structure of the most precise artifice and not a blueprint for a ‘real ‘ life;” (Gilman 105).

The next sentence of the quotation goes: “There were in it metaphors as monstrous as orchids, and as subtle in colour” (*Dorian* 145). This simile, monstrous as orchids, refers to Esseintes’s passion for exotic flowers. He possessed a marvellous collection of tropical plants — Caladioums, Virginales and Aurora Borelis — and was quite fascinated by them. He dreamed of constructing another sort of flora and “He had done with artificial flowers aping true; he wanted natural flowers imitating the false” (*A Rebours* 84). Subtlety in colour can be seen in his incredible sense of colours while decorating his house:

Slowly. One by one, he sifted out the different tones. Blue, by candle light, assumes an artificial green tinge; if deep blue, like cobalt or indigo, it becomes black; if light, it changes to grey; it may be as true and soft of hue as a turquoise, yet it looks dull and cold (*A Rebours* 13).

This play with different effects of light on colours may be seen in Dorian’s claim about the book which he got from Lord Henry and which so corrupted him.

These are the basic features of Esseintes’ main interests; however, we can find other similarities and impacts on Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, as mentioned by Richard Ellmann:

Certain sections had a staggering effect upon Wilde. One was Huysmans’s description of Gustave Moreau’s paintings of Salome, another description of English Pre-Raphaelite paintings as evoking not the month of April, as Wilde had said in America, but October (Ellmann, *Wilde* 253).

In Huysmans's book, Esseintes owns the finest picture by Gustave Moreau, *Salome*. This picture fascinates him, and he finds something more in the picture than just the painting of a girl. Salome is for Esseintes a superhuman creature of supreme beauty and has a strong poisonous influence over him. As in *A Rebours*:

Des Esseintes saw realized at last the Salomé, weird and superhuman, he had dreamed of. No longer was she merely the dancing-girl who extorts a cry of lust and concupiscence from a old man by the lascivious contortions of her body; who breaks the will, masters the mind of King by the spectacle of her quivering bosoms, heaving belly and tossing thighs; she was now revealed in sense as the symbolic incarnation of world-old Vice, the goddess of immoral Hysteria, the Curse of Beauty supreme above all other beauties by the cataleptic spasm that stirs her flesh and steels her muscles,- a monstrous Beast of The Apocalypse, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, poisoning, like Helen of Troy of the old Classic fables, all who come near her, all who see her, all who touch her (*A Rebours* 53).

This description perfectly fits Dorian, who, like Salome, is of supreme "Beauty, the Beast of the Apocalypse, insensible, poisoning." (*A Rebours* 53).

The point where Esseintes meets the young lad Auguste Langlois on the street and offers to have a drink with him is for our purpose also an important factor. Starting with "having fun this evening" (*A Rebours* 67) and taking him to Madame Laure's brothel, explaining the reasons for doing this, to the old lady:

... the plain truth is I am simply trying to train a murderer ... If the worst comes to the worst, he will, I hope, one fine day kill the gentleman who turns up just at the wrong moment as he is breaking open his desk; then my object will be attained, I shall have contributed, so far as in me lay, to create a scoundrel, an enemy the more for odious society that wrings so heavy a ransom from us all (*A Rebours* 68).

Lord Henry's corruption has a similar effect over Dorian which, same as Esseintes' impact upon Auguste, resulted in his bitter end as a murderer.

These are the aspects which may be considered very influential on Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* caused by the strong impact of the French Decadence, particularly by Joris-Karl Huysmans and his novel *A Rebours*. The similarity of Dorian's description of the main character of the book which Lord Henry gave him and the main character of Huysmans' *A Rebours* could be considered proof

that another influential book which had such a great impact on Wilde is Huysmans' *A Rebours*.

In fact, readers may consider the influence as complex and therefore come to the conclusion that the "yellow book" is a synthesis of Pater's *Renaissance* and Huysmans' *A Rebours*. Pater's influence can be considered more philosophical and can be seen in his advice to always search for new experiences. On the other hand, Huysmans' influence is more realistic and gives Wilde's novel a decadent atmosphere. This atmosphere is realized through the decadent decorating which has a great effect in the novel.

6 Oscar Wilde

Oscar Finga O’Flahertie Wills Wilde (see appendix 2) was one of the most outstanding representatives of the English Decadent and Aesthetic movement, and certainly one of the greatest English writers of the nineteenth century; but unfortunately he was also an almost legendary victim of Victorian society.

Wilde devoted himself entirely to literature, writing poems, tales, essays and dramas. His plays were, and still are, remarkably successful. In these, Wilde followed the traditional English conversational comedy and achieved fame for their brilliant form. After his marriage to Constance Lloyd in 1884, he published several children's books, then, five years later an essay, “*Pen, Pencil and Poison*” and in 1890, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* firstly appeared in *Lippincott’s Magazine*.

6.1 “*Pen, Pencil and Poison*”

In the essay “*Pen, Pencil and Poison*”, which first appeared in January 1889, Wilde, using the same biographical technique as De Quincey, concentrated on the character of Thomas Griffiths Wainewright. Apart from the fact that Wainewright was an outstanding writer, he was also known as a notorious murderer and famous forger of the same period as De Quincey. Wainewright wrote under the pseudonyms Janus Weathercock, Egomet Bonmot and Van Vinkvrooms. Wilde was his admirer and in “*Pen, Pencil and Poison*” described Wainewright as:

... though of an extremely artistic temperament, followed many masters other than art, being not merely a poet and a painter, an art-critic, an antiquarian, and a writer of prose, and amateur of beautiful things, and a dilettante of things delightful, but also a forger of no mean or ordinary capabilities, and as a subtle and secret prisoner almost without rival in this or any age (41)

Wilde, as with De Quincey in Williams, showed deep interest in his acts and depicted the aesthetical approach of his activities despite the fact that his activities were murders by poisoning.

Wilde himself showed that life itself is art and that the finest work is a true artist's life. This may also be seen as the main motive in *Dorian* and also found an echo in "*Pen, Pencil and Poison*", where Wilde referred to Wainewright as "... young dandy sought to be somebody, rather than to do something. He recognized that Life itself is an art, and has its modes of style no less than the arts that express it" (43). This approach would perfectly fit Pater's *Renaissance* and in the context of De Quincey, who considers murder as fine art free of any moral or immoral judgments, creates a completely new sphere of art.

Later in the essay, we can find similarities in the decadent concept of art with Huysmans' approach in *A Rebours*. Wilde here describes Wainewright's passion for decadent decorating. As can be seen in:

There is of course much in his descriptions, and his suggestions for decoration, that shows that he did not entirely free himself from the false taste of his time. But it is clear that he was one of the first to recognize what is, indeed, the very keynote and keystone of all modern decorative schemes, I mean the true harmony of all really beautiful things irrespective of age or place, of school or manner. He saw that in decorating a room, which is to be not a room for show but a room to live in, we should never aim at any archeological reconstruction of the past, nor burden ourselves with any fanciful necessity for historical accuracy. In this he was perfectly right. All beautiful things belong to the same age ("*Pen, Pencil and Poison*" 44).

Wilde admired his literary career and his prose style in "To have a style so gorgeous that it conceals the subject is one of the highest achievements of an important and much admired school of modern journalism" (49). Nevertheless, still claiming that "we must not forget that the cultivated young man ... was also, as I said at the beginning of this article, one of the most subtle and secret poisoners of this or any age" (49). Wainewright's curious artistic temperament, which highly influenced his acts, can be seen, when locked up in a cell, he is asked by his friend why he killed Helen Abercorbie; shrugging his shoulders, he answers: "Yes; it was a dreadful thing to do, but she had very ugly ankles" (53). This culminated in Wilde's assumption that "The fact of a man being a poisoner is nothing against his prose" (54) and that "There is no essential incongruity between crime and culture" (54). At the end of the essay, Wilde borrowed De Quincey's arguments concerning morality and immorality. Wilde claims that we cannot implement moral judgments on such great figures, which Wainewright certainly

was. When we apply an historical view and include him in the later context between figures such as Nero, Tiberius or Caesar Borgie, such judgment is not appropriate. Wilde claims:

I know there are many historians, or at least writers on historical subjects, who still think it necessary to apply moral judgments to history, and who distribute their praise or blame with the reckless impartiality of a successful schoolmaster. This however, is foolish habit (*“Pen, Pencil and Poison”* 54).

The reason for not making such a judgment is clear from the following quotation, where Wilde explains that: “They may fill us with terror, or horror, or wonder, but they do not harm us ... They have passed into the sphere of art and science, and neither art nor science knows anything of moral approval or disapproval” (54).

6.2 *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

The main characters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, are Dorian Gray, Basil Hallward, Sibyl Vane and probably the most exceptional, Lord Henry Wotton. Dorian Gray is a handsome, impressionable, and wealthy young gentleman whose portrait Basil Hallward paints. Under the strong influence of Lord Henry, Dorian becomes extremely concerned with the transience of his beauty, and begins to follow his own pleasure above all. He devotes himself to having as many experiences as possible, as Pater advised, whether moral or immoral, elegant or sordid. Basil becomes obsessed with Dorian after meeting him at a party, claiming that Dorian possesses a beauty so rare that it has helped him to realize a new kind of art, arguing that “his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style” (17). Through Dorian, he finds “the lines of a fresh school” (17). Dorian also helps Basil to realize his artistic potential, as the portrait of Dorian that Basil paints proves to be his masterpiece, though no one other than himself, Lord Henry, and Dorian sees the portrait till after the death of both the painter and sitter.

At the beginning of the novel, the artist Basil Hallward meets Dorian Gray. Dorian immediately stimulates Basil’s artistic imagination. This young Adonis, who looks as if he “was made out of ivory and rose-leaves” (9), begins to sit in his house for several portraits, and Basil often depicts him as an ancient Greek hero or a mythological

figure, claiming that: “What the invention of oil-painting was to the Venetians, the face of Antinoüs was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will some day be to me” (17). When the novel opens, the artist is completing his first portrait of Dorian as he truly is; but, as he admits to his friend Lord Henry, the painting disappoints him because it reveals too much of his personal feelings for his subject. Lord Henry — a famous wit who enjoys scandalizing his friends by celebrating youth, beauty, and selfish pleasure — disagrees, claiming that the portrait is Basil’s masterpiece. Dorian arrives at the studio, and Basil introduces him to Lord Henry, whom he legitimately fears will have a damaging influence on the impressionable young Dorian. Lord Henry is a nobleman and a close friend of Basil’s. Urbane and witty, Lord Henry is always armed and ready with well-phrased epigrams criticising the morality and hypocrisy of Victorian society. His pleasure is his philosophy of new Hedonism, which collects experiences that stimulate the senses without respect for conventional morality:

Yes, there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new hedonism that was to re-create life, and to save it from that harsh, uncomely puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly; yet it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be. Of the asceticism that deadens the senses, as of the vulgar profligacy that dulls them, it was to know nothing. But it was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment (*Dorian* 151).

Basil’s fears are well founded because, before the end of their first conversation, Lord Henry has already upset Dorian with a speech about the transient nature of beauty and youth, including Dorian’s. Knowing that his most impressive characteristics are disappearing day by day, Dorian curses his portrait, which he believes will one day only remind him of his lost beauty and youth. He pledges his soul if the painting takes the burden of his age and infamy and allows him to stay forever young and beautiful. In an attempt to appease Dorian, whose mood has suddenly changed because of Lord Henry’s words, Basil gives him the portrait as a gift:

If it were only the other way! If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that - I would give everything! Yes,

there is nothing in the whole world I would not give! I would give my soul for that! (*Dorian* 34).

Over the next few weeks, Lord Henry's influence over Dorian grows stronger, as the young man becomes a disciple of his "new Hedonism" and proposes to live a life dedicated to the pursuit of pleasure. Soon afterwards, Dorian falls in love with Sibyl Vane, a young actress who is performing in a theatre in the London slums. Sibyl's love for Dorian compromises her ability to act, as her experience of true love in life makes her realise that she cannot act true love on the stage any more. He loves her acting, and she calls him "Prince Charming", as in this conversation with her brother:

He is called Price Charming. Don't you like the name? Oh! You silly boy! You should never forget it. If you only saw him, you would think him the most wonderful person in the world. Some day you will meet him: when you come back from Australia. You will like him so much. Everybody likes him, and Ilove him (*Dorian* 80).

Sibyl rejects the warnings from her brother that Dorian will be no good for her. Overcome by her emotions for Dorian, Sibyl decides that she can no longer act on the stage, wondering how she could ever again pretend to be in love on the stage now that she has experienced the real one. Dorian, who loves Sibyl because of her ability to act, cruelly breaks his engagement with her:

Then he leaped up, and went to the door. 'Yes,' he cried, you have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity. You simply produce no effect. I loved you because you were wonderful, because you had genius and intellect, because you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. You have thrown it all away. You are shallow and stupid. My God! how mad I was to love you! What a fool I have been! You are nothing to me now. I will never see you again. I will never think of you. I will never mention your name. You don't know what you were to me, once. Why, once Oh, I can't bear to think of it! I wish I had never laid eyes upon you! You have spoiled the romance of my life. How little you can know of love, if you say it mars your art! What are you without your art? Nothing. I would have made you famous, splendid, magnificent. The world would have worshipped you, and you would have belonged to me. What are you now? A third-rate actress with a pretty face (*Dorian* 102).

After doing this, he returns home only to notice that his face in Basil's portrait of him has changed: "It was perfectly true. The portrait had altered" (111). Frightened that his

wish for his likeness in the painting to bear the ill effects of his behaviour has come true, and that his sins will be recorded on the canvas, he decides not to meet Sibyl the next day. The following afternoon, however, Lord Henry delivers a newspaper article announcing that Sibyl had died under curious circumstances of poisoning, certainly suicide. At Lord Henry's urging, Dorian decides to consider her death as a sort of artistic triumph, which can be seen in Dorian's words: "It seems to me to be simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took a great part, but by which I have not been wounded" (117).

Dorian hides his portrait in a remote upper room of his house, where no one other than he can watch its morbid transformations; transformations helped by a book. After the death of Sibyl Vane, Lord Henry gives Dorian a book that describes the nineteenth-century Frenchman; a book which becomes Dorian's bible as he sinks deeper into a life of sin and corruption.

As a result, Dorian lives a life devoted to collecting new experiences. Eighteen years pass and Dorian's reputation suffers in the polite circles of London. He remains young and beautiful. The figure in the painting, however, grows increasingly hideous and shows its morbid transformations.

On a dark, foggy night, Basil Hallward arrives at Dorian's home to confront him about the rumours that are ruining Dorian's reputation. They argue, and Dorian eventually offers Basil a look at his [Dorian's] soul. He shows Basil the hideous portrait, and Hallward, horrified, begs him to have it repainted. Dorian claims it is too late and kills Basil.

In order to dispose of the body, Dorian sends for the help of an estranged friend, a doctor called Alan Campbell, whom he blackmails. The night after the murder, Dorian makes his way to an opium den, where he meets James Vane, who attempts to revenge Sibyl's death. Dorian with the help of his everlasting beauty manages to persuade James that he is not the man who he has been looking for because of the fact that he still remains young and beautiful. James Vane accepts the explanation and lets Dorian walk away and escape certain death.

Dorian moves to a country house and while entertaining guests he notices James Vane peering in through a window, and he becomes wracked by fear and guilt. When on a hunting party, Vane is accidentally killed and Dorian feels safe again. He resolves to

change his life, but cannot find the courage to confess his crimes to the public. In a fury, Dorian picks up the knife he used to stab Basil Hallward and attempts to destroy the painting. There is a crash, and his servants enter to find the portrait, undamaged, showing Dorian Gray as a beautiful young man. On the floor lies the body of their master — an old man, horribly wrinkled and disfigured, with a knife plunged into his heart.

7 Analysis of *Dorian*

7.1 Morbid Dorian

In the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde claims that “No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything” (*Dorian* 5). What does Wilde mean by this claim? There is certainly more than one answer. When we concentrate on the word morbid as a common term and find the exact definition in the dictionary, it tells us that morbid means: “having or expressing a strong interest in sad or unpleasant things, especially disease or death” (*Oxford Advanced Dictionary* 861). So in this case Wilde would inform the reader that: No artist ever has or expresses a strong interest in sad or unpleasant things, especially disease or death. But as this claim is in the preface of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, was it what Wilde wanted to express? It would certainly be a misleading expression because in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Wilde develops, similarly as De Quincey, the concept of murder as a fine art.

But there might be another way of interpreting this claim. When we do not consider the word morbid as a common term and concentrate on it as a medical term, the conclusion seems to be completely different and would make Wilde’s claim more understandable in connection to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The definition in the dictionary explaining the word morbid as a medical term is as follows:

Morbid adj 1: suggesting an unhealthy mental state; (*Princeton University Dictionary*, webpage)

This definition could be understood as the word morbid meaning “mentally ill”. Wilde would in this case express the statement that “No artist is ever mentally ill. The artist can express everything”. This interpretation fits *Dorian* much better.

In chapter two, Lord Henry begins his dangerous influence over Dorian and refers to his extraordinary beauty and charm. His “romantic olive-coloured face” (28), interesting “languid voice” (28) and “flower-like hands” (28) fascinates him every time he sees him sitting for Basil’s portrait. Lord Henry argues that Dorian’s “Beauty is a form of Genius-is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation” (29). We

may come to the conclusion that Wilde through the mouth of Lord Henry expresses the thought that Dorian's beauty reflects his genius. Under the later fatal influence of Lord Henry, Dorian does not stay merely as a beautiful sitter but becomes an artist in his own right despite the fact that his artistic works are represented by unforgivable sins in the form of murder. Therefore, we may think that Wilde's claim "No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything" (5) could be understood differently and that the word morbid should be presented as a medical term which means mentally ill. Wilde here would probably not refer to Dorian as a genius because geniuses are not mentally ill people.

7.2 Lord Henry's influence

Lord Henry Wotton first meets Dorian at Basil's studio and from the first contact begins his curious and dangerous influence over him. Basil is afraid of Lord Henry's dangerous impact and cries: "Don't spoil him. Don't try to influence him. Your influence would be bad" (21). In chapter eight, after breaking off the relationship with Sibyl, Dorian is informed, with a little comment "don't be frightened" (114), by Lord Henry about Sibyl's death. Lord Henry assures him that he "has no doubt it was an accident" (115) specifying that "it must be put it that way to the public" (115). Disappointed Dorian blames himself for her death, thinking himself a murderer. Following this, he proclaims: "So I have murdered Sibyl Vane, ... murdered her as surely as if I had cut her little throat with knife" (115). But what surprises him is the fact that he does not feel any guilt for her death. Furthermore, in a conversation with Lord Henry he acknowledges that he likes the artistic effect which her death caused. This can be seen in:

And yet I must admit that this thing that has happened does not affect me as it should. It seems to me to be simply like a wonderful ending to a wonderful play. It has all the terrible beauty of a Greek tragedy, a tragedy in which I took great part, but by which I have not been wounded (*Dorian* 117).

When at this point we follow the context and concentrate again on De Quincey's principles of murder, we may find De Quincey's echo in Wilde's work. Apart from his statement that murder is always an immoral mistake, we can still consider it from the

aesthetical point of view. Sibyl Vane killed herself with poison and therefore, if we accept De Quincey's aesthetical approach, it would not be artistically done. As was mentioned before, De Quincey disregarded death caused by poison and for that we can find proof in *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* where he "considers all these poisoning cases, compared with the legitimate style, as no better than a waxwork by the side of sculpture" (14). Lord Henry maintains the same position as De Quincey and tells Dorian that "It often happens that the real tragedies of life occur in such an inartistic manner that they hurt us by their crude violence, their absolute incoherence, their absurd want of meaning, their entire lack of style" (117). The lack of style might be interpreted here by Lord Henry as a lack of artistic principles according to De Quincey.

Furthermore, Lord Henry later argues that Sibyl, after her death, "... passed into the sphere of art" (127). It seems evident that to understand this claim Wilde might have suggested the informed reader be familiar with his essay "*Pen, Pencil and Poison*". Regarding Sibyl, she, due to her death, passed into the sphere of art and as Wilde states in "*Pen, Pencil and Poison*", that "passed into the sphere of art and of science, and neither art nor science knows anything of moral approval or disapproval" (54) and therefore we cannot consider her death, as De Quincey advocated, from a moral or immoral point of view, but only from an aesthetical one which proved to be badly done without high artistic effect.

Lord Henry implements his dangerous effect upon Dorian through teaching him his philosophy of new-Hedonism, claiming: "Be afraid of nothing.... A new Hedonism - that is what our century wants" (30) arguing that Dorian should always search for new sensations and try as many experiences as possible. Lord Henry proclaims: "Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations" (30). Here Wilde echoes Pater but we can also see a similar effect in Huysmans' *A Rebours*. Lord Henry becomes Dorian's corrupter and advises him to search for new sensations regardless of whether they are moral or immoral. This could be interpreted as Lord Henry simply training Dorian to be a murderer. The same effect is found, as was mentioned before, in *A Rebours*, where Des Esseintes influences young Auguste Langlois, claiming that: "the plain truth is I am simply trying to train a murderer" (*A Rebours* 68).

Under the influence of Lord Henry, Dorian collects his triumphs. Besides the death of Sibyl Vane, Dorian is questioned by Basil “Why is your relation so fatal to young men?” (*Dorian* 173) because they all committed suicide. Dorian’s corruption grows deeper and culminates in the actual murder of Basil Hallward. To dispose of the body of a painter, Dorian asked his old friend Alan Campbell to do it. They argue and Campbell summarises Dorian’s life as: “Your life? Good heavens! You have gone from corruption to corruption, and now you have culminated in crime” (197).

Dorian, under the influence of his corrupter, Lord Henry, finds “a pleasure in the ultimate societal crime” (Kaylor 280). Kaylor claims that “Alan assumes that the crime of murder is the ‘culmination’ of Dorian’s corruption: it is not” (Kaylor 280). It is as he [Kaylor] gives us proof “a new selection of pleasures, colours, flavours” (Kaylor 280). Considering Dorian’s sinful development, Kaylor wishes to argue that “Dorian has taken ‘art for art’s sake’ to an extreme which even Decadents like Lord Henry would consider untenable” (Kaylor 282) and that Dorian “has move to ‘crime for crime’s sake’” (Kaylor 282). It seems that Lord Henry was very successful in his irresistible influence over Dorian and that Dorian becomes a slayer, taking pleasure in his activities. It seems that through the murder of Basil he brought his development to “murder for murder’s sake”.

Furthermore, Clausson, in his article on Wilde’s *Dorian*, compares Dorian’s development and degeneration under the influence of Lord Henry to Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He comes to the conclusion that:

In *Jekyll and Hyde*, of course, the experimenter and the subject of the experiment are the same person; Wilde separates them into two characters. He also changes the mode of the transformation from science to art, and the location from the laboratory to the artist’s studio. Art replaces science, hence the dominant role that works of art and books play in Wilde’s novel, especially the ‘poisonous’ book that acts like Jekyll’s mysterious chemical agent (Clausson, website).

7.3 Basil's death

Dorian's murder of Basil seems to be the climax of his career, which affected him very deeply and which caused Dorian's inner wish for change. The later fact that Lord Henry was not really surprised by Dorian's announcement that he had killed Basil was preceded by his [Lord Henry's] sensitive perception in earlier stages. Dorian is questioned by Lord Henry about what he had done on the night Basil was murdered. This is the first time Dorian loses his confidence and replies: "How inquisitive you are Harry!" (209). This "Lord Henry's casual questioning had made him lose nerve for the moment" (209) and deepened his fear that his secret would be revealed.

It seems that at the shooting party at Sir Geoffrey Clouston's, Henry's suspicion that Dorian murdered Basil is almost a certainty because in Dorian's presence he, as usual, provokes with the claim: "I would like to know someone who had committed a real murder" (235). Nevertheless, this comment refers to the accidental death of Sibyl Vane's brother, James. Lord Henry here reacts in a similar way as we imagine De Quincey would. Henry maintains the position that death caused under these accidental circumstances has for him "no psychological value at all" (235) and therefore does not express any artistic effect. This would be different, Lord Henry claims, if "Geoffrey had done the thing on purpose, how interesting he would be!" (235).

It is easy to imagine Wilde's informed readers finding the background connection with De Quincey and his principles of an artistically committed murder. It could be said that Wilde, through Dorian and Lord Henry, finds support in De Quincey. In this case Lord Henry disapproves of Geoffrey's accidental killing of James Vane as artistically interesting. Further interpretation could be presented in a different way which would be more specific. Using Lord Henry's words, the "real murder" should not have any accidental circumstances and should be well prepared in advance. For this interpretation, informed readers would again find an echo in De Quincey's *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* where he [De Quincey] can be seen praising Mr. Williams for his ability. The praise that his murders were prepared in advance could be seen in De Quincey's claim that "For surely he never could be so indiscreet as to be sailing about on roving cruise in search of some chance person to murder? Oh no; he had suited himself with a victim some time before" (35).

7.4 Dorian fulfils De Quincey's principles

Furthermore, informed readers would certainly notice that Dorian's murder of Basil also carries the characteristics of De Quincey's approach, and that Wilde, by killing Basil, let his Dorian fulfil these principles preached by De Quincey. If we put Wilde, Dorian, Basil and De Quincey together, we may find the connection quite clear.

In *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, De Quincey informs the readers that the aesthetics of murder should carry certain principles which De Quincey states as maxims. When we summarize them, we may say that the best person to be killed should be a friend, that the person should be in good health and he or she should not be a person notorious to the public.

When we apply these maxims to Basil's murder, we can find an interesting conclusion. Dorian is Basil's sitter and therefore they have known each other very well from the very beginning and thus may be considered friends. Therefore, we can say that Dorian fulfilled De Quincey's principle. Basil, being a close friend of Dorian, was murdered according to advice from De Quincey that the best person to be killed should be a friend. Concerning the maxim that the person should be in good health, we can say that there is no evidence that Basil was somehow afflicted by any disease except for a fascination and love for Dorian. In addition to that, Wilde informs us that "No artist is ever morbid. The artist can express everything" (5). So if we accept the explanation of the word morbid in the previous chapter of the thesis and take it as evidence, then Dorian would fulfil this maxim, too. Next, the person should not be notorious to the public. We can say that Basil was known to the public as a painter, but we cannot say that he was notorious. He was known to a certain group of people in Lord Henry's circle. So we can again say that Dorian chose the right person which suited De Quincey's principle.

In addition to that, Basil seems to have been an ideal victim from the beginning. During his early conversation with Lord Henry in the studio, Basil, using his own words, informs readers that "When I leave town now I never tell my people where I am going" (10). This "silly habit", as we can find in Henry's answer, makes him the perfect target because nobody would suspect that his disappearance would be something out of the

ordinary for his extravagant customs. It seems that Dorian, knowing this or certainly informed by Lord Henry, took advantage of that and in fact Basil's "silly habit" gives him the perfect alibi for the time of the painter's disappearance.

7.5 Lord Henry's suspicion

It appears that since Basil's disappearance, sensitive Lord Henry suspects Dorian of murdering Basil. This assumption comes out of the major fact that Lord Henry in reference to Basil uses the past tense despite any evidence about the Basil's murder. Lord Henry's hunch about Dorian grows deeper and almost reaches certainty. In chapter nineteen, Dorian holds a conversation with Lord Henry about Basil's disappearance. It seems that at this point Henry is convinced that Dorian murdered Basil. The part where Henry refers to the missing Basil could be considered proof. Henry supposes that "in about fortnight we shall be told that he has been seen in San Francisco. It is an odd thing, but everyone who disappears is said to be seen at San Francisco. It must be a delightful city, and possesses all the attractions of the next world" (242). The word "next world" which Lord Henry uses simply shows his firm belief that Basil is not alive and has found himself in the next world. Following their conversation, we find Dorian asking Henry "did it ever occur to you that Basil was murdered?" (243). Lord Henry yawns and replies that "Basil was very popular ... Why should he have been murdered?" (243). Lord Henry uses the past tense, which means that at this point he is clearly convinced that Basil is dead and that the primary suspect as murderer is, surely, Dorian.

8 After dinner talk

‘Oh! anything becomes a pleasure if one does it too often,’ cried Lord Henry, laughing. ‘That is one of the most important secrets of life. I should fancy, however, that murder is always a mistake. One should never do anything that one cannot talk about after dinner (*Dorian* 244)

What a great sentence which Lord Henry interposed. At the beginning of the conversation, Dorian tries to confess to Lord Henry, with no major effect, that he has killed Basil. Lord Henry’s reaction to his confession is not very strong and does not show any special surprise, claiming that “It is not in you, Dorian, to commit a murder” (244) and that the “crime belongs exclusively to the lower orders” (244). As justification Lord Henry greatly remarks that “crime was to them what art is to us, simply a method of procuring extraordinary sensations” (244).

At this point, Lord Henry may probably realize that his corrupting quest to train Dorian to be a real murderer, in which he found great pleasure, was successful. It seems that this influence over Dorian culminated in Basil’s murder. When we think of that in connection with Ellmann’s claim that “Dorian manages the murder and the disposal of the body, as if De Quincey were right about murder’s being one of the fine arts” (Ellmann, *Wilde* 316), and, if Kaylor was right about the fact that the murders were for Dorian “a new selection of pleasures, colours, flavours” (Kaylor 280) and that “Dorian has taken ‘art for art’s sake’ to an extreme” which “has move to ‘crime for crime’s sake’” (Kaylor 282), all this offers us the opportunity for further reconsideration.

It seems that Wilde’s interpretation of “procuring extraordinary sensations” (244) is done through Dorian’s murders. These murders are the sensations which Dorian is advised by Lord Henry to look for and which he certainly found. Following this Lord Henry laughingly comments: “Oh! anything becomes a pleasure if one does it too often” (244). This is great but for the Victorian reader a very problematic remark. For Lord Henry’s claim we can find an echo in Kaylor’s work and agree with him in his argument that Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* brought it to an extreme and that “anything becomes a pleasure if one does it too often” for Kaylor, “undoubtedly even the pleasure of murder” (Kaylor 283).

It seems convincing that Dorian finds pleasure in murders. If we agree on that, we may find the word “anything” which Lord Henry declares as more specific.

Informed Wilde's readers who surely knew the whole content of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and "*Pen, Pencil and Poison*" would probably understand that as murder. If it is so, the complete unexpressed claim in Henry's mind would sound as "murder becomes a pleasure if one does it too often".

In reality, what would this mean for Victorian readers and public? Such a curious interpretation could be understood as simply praising the serial killer and even showing sympathy with his acts of murders, advising readers to concentrate on the aesthetical manner. This expression of Wilde's seems to be very problematic for the Victorian public, because the whole period, from 1888, was strongly influenced by the fact that London was terrified by the never detected murderer, Jack the Ripper. As Nassaar states: "By early 1890, when Oscar Wilde sat down to write *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the figure of Jack the Ripper was still dominant in the public mind" (Nassaar 217).

In the next sentence of the quotation we can find Lord Henry claiming that "One should never do anything that one cannot talk about after dinner" (244). What does this advice mean for Wilde or Lord Henry or Dorian and how could it be interpreted? In fact we can understand this claim as "one should ever do something that one can talk about after dinner". It seems that this advice which Lord Henry gives to Dorian has a deeper background and gives us the opportunity for further analysis. Wilde's informed readers may realise the connection which Wilde hides in the talk after dinner. Wilde in "*Pen, Pencil and Poison*" writes:

Charles Lamb speaks of 'kind, light-hearted Wainwright, 'whose prose is 'capital.' We hear of him entertaining Macready, John Forster, Maginn, Talfourd, Sir Wentworth Dilke, the poet John Clare, and others, at a *petit-dîner* (43).

and gives us the remark that "De Quincey saw him once. It was at a dinner at Charles Lamb's" (Wilde in Ellmann, *Critical* 324). One can just imagine how affected the dinner would be as Wilde mentions that "Amongst the company, all literary men, sat a murderer" (Ibid. 324). Wilde through the words of Lord Henry advises Dorian that "One should never do anything that one cannot talk about after dinner" (*Dorian* 244). We can simply imagine what the Victorian public would talk about after dinner only two years after the rage of the mysterious murderer, Jack the Ripper. Furthermore,

Wilde at the same time advises to do something that one can talk about after dinner, which could in the whole context be understood as advice to act in the same way as Jack the Ripper.

9 Victorian London

The Picture of Dorian Gray was first published in July 1890 and completely filled moral Victorian London with fear and disagreement. But the reason why it caused such an effect, which Wilde probably expected, that had a great impact on the public, must be considered from wider circumstances. Wilde, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, presented an approach which was quite unacceptable for society because he concentrated on Dorian's murders and considers them, under the influence of De Quincey and Pater, as an artistic triumph. For this we can even find a remark at the beginning of the novel in chapter one, where Wilde through the words of Basil Hallward claims that "There is nothing that Art cannot express" (*Dorian* 17). This may be quite understood in the way that Wilde advocates that even murder could be expressed in an artistic manner and that for such claim finds an echo in the work of De Quincey.

Wilde expected his readers to know the broader context which he presented in "*Pen, Pencil and Poison*". This essay was firstly published in January 1889, which was about 15 months before *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Here, we must emphasize that this time period was undoubtedly influenced by the fact that all of the Victorian public was terrified by the rage of the unknown murderer, later called Jack the Ripper. One must admit that publishing such a work during this period was very brave of Wilde. To bring the topic of murder up again on Victorian London's stage was very unusual and provocative. The public wanted to forget and never be reminded of the summer and autumn of 1888.

That might be one of the reasons why Wilde in "*Pen, Pencil and Poison*" used a biographical style instead of prose. Wilde simply used the biographical facts in the same manner as De Quincey in *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* so as not to provoke Victorian society in such a direct way. Hesketh Pearson writes in his introduction to *De Profundis and Other Writings* that Wilde's "*Pen, Pencil and Poison*", "was the first biographical essay to be written in the modern semi-ironical manner" (14). It seems that usage of this semi-ironical biographical style had deeper reasons. Usage of a biographical style could be understood as an instrument which helped Wilde to avoid accusations of promoting the murder that appeared in London, but still gives him the chance to react and provoke.

But what would have happened if Wilde had not used these biographical facts and included them in *Dorian*? This would not be acceptable because it would certainly be understood as praising the serial killer for his artistic murders and this would be just completely inadmissible to Victorian society.

9.1 Jack the Ripper

From August 1888, Victorian London was terrified by a series of murders committed by an unknown murderer, who was later recognized as Jack the Ripper. It is easy to imagine what the Victorian public would “talk about after dinner” or what would attract their attention in the morning papers during this period, so strongly influenced by the rage of the mysterious serial killer. Readers of *The London Times* were regularly attracted by headlines such as “The murder in Whitechapel” (*The London Times* – August 10, 1888). From September 1888, as the number of cases increased, headlines changed to “Another Whitechapel murder” (*The London Times* – September 1, 1888). The situation in London was that “After their breakfast tables the British were confronted with mechanism of the vilest sexual homicide” (Davenport-Hines, *DNB*).

Jack the Ripper “was known as ‘the Whitechapel murderer’ or ‘Leather Apron’ until on 27 September 1888 the Central News Agency received a red-inked, defiant, semi-literate letter signed Jack the Ripper” (Davenport-Hines, *DNB*). Nevertheless, there was suspicion about the authenticity of this letter signed “Jack the Ripper” (see appendix 3 - 5) and it seems that “This letter was probably a hoax concocted by news agency staff” (Davenport-Hines, *DNB*). Besides that, Jack the Ripper was the subject of media attention and the coincidence that Jack the Ripper would, as did Williams, write letters to the media seems quite improbable.

Further investigation did not show much evidence and the police seemed to be under strong pressure to find the murderer (see appendix 7). The media, in reference to the police, announced:

The murders, so cunningly continued, are carried out with a completeness which altogether baffles investigators. Not a trace is left of the murderer, and there is no purpose in the crime to afford the slightest clue, such as would be afforded in

other crimes almost without exception. All that the police can hope is that some accidental circumstances will lead to a trace which may be followed to a successful conclusion (*The London Times* – November 10, 1888).

From eyewitness accounts which gave police just partial information, they set up the probable likeness of the murderer. As Richard Davenport-Hines describes the person, which the police were searching for:

The Ripper was almost certainly male, probably right-handed, unmarried, and in work, and possessed either anatomical training or sufficient education to study surgical textbooks; he was perhaps a foreigner. Although all his victims (possibly barring one) were destitute and drunken prostitutes, he did not rape or penetrate them; nevertheless, there was a sexual element to his homicidal excitement. He was daring, energetic, hate-ridden, cruel, and perhaps obsessed with wombs. Evidence as to his age and appearance from those who claimed to have seen him is inconclusive and contradictory. Nothing is certain of his life except for a few violent hours during the summer and autumn of 1888 (Davenport-Hines, *DNB*).

The number of victims was constantly growing and the public was regularly and in detail informed about his continuous progress. It might be considered that for this reason Jack the Ripper “was the first criminal to become a figure of international mythology through the medium of global communication” (Davenport-Hines, *DNB*).

From the first killing, the press reported events in stunning details. This procedure gave its Victorian readers the opportunity to taste the tragic bloodthirsty murder almost as real as one could possibly imagine. The fact that the Victorian public was well informed through the media of the deepest details caused great panic in London society. As Davenport-Hines describes:

Though the Victorian public had always revelled in the sanguinary details of murder, and popular journalism had always striven to shock, Jack’s nightmarish mutilations were recognized in 1888 as new and strange (Davenport-Hines, *DNB*).

This detailed description evoked constant discomposure which with the increasing number of innocent victims culminated in great fear. All this was “In an epoch when a glimpse of woman’s ankle could seem indecent, the violence of his mutilations was blasphemous” (Davenport-Hines, *DNB*). Such a description where “His attacks were

reported in an explicit, pitiless detail that would be rendered impossible a generation later by voluntary journalistic self-censorship” (Davenport-Hines, *DNB*), was simply too strong cup of tea for the Victorian public. For that reason Jack the Ripper is considered “the first sexual serial killer commanding international notoriety: he inaugurated the modern consciousness of such crimes” (Davenport-Hines, *DNB*).

9.2 Wilde and press reports

It is easy to imagine Wilde in the year 1888, two years before publishing *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, sitting on an ancient divan and reading the morning newspapers. He would certainly have come across an article announcing the tragedy of a murder which happened in Whitechapel. One could almost be sure that such an article would attract his attention. The manner and the accurate descriptive style in which it was written would have caused primer interest in the topic — a bloodthirsty murder (see appendix 6). Wilde could probably have found in *The London Times* an elaborate description of one of the murders:

Mr. Arnold, having satisfied himself that the woman was dead, ordered one of the windows to be entirely removed. A horrible and sickening sight then presented itself. The poor woman lay on her back on the bed, entirely naked. Her throat was cut from ear to ear, right down to the spinal column. The ears and nose had been cut clean off. The breasts had also been cleanly cut off and placed on a table which was by side of the bed. The stomach and abdomen had been ripped open, while the face was slashed about, so that the features of the poor creature were beyond all recognition. The kidneys and heart had also been removed from the body, and placed on the table by the side of the breasts. The liver had likewise been removed, and laid on the right thigh. The lower portion of the body and the uterus had been cut out, and these appeared to be missing (*The London Times* – November 10, 1888).

If we further reconsider the whole period and concentrate on the effect which was brought by Jack the Ripper, we may come to the conclusion that Wilde, as with Quincey more than half a century beforehand, found deep interest and pleasure in murders which culminated not in execution, as in the case of Wainwright or Dorian, but in his essay “*Pen, Pencil and Poison*” and later but with greater impact in *Dorian Gray*.

It seems that Wilde was surely pleased by the topic and expresses his enjoy through Dorian, who refers to the death of Sibyl, claiming that “There is something to me quite beautiful about her death. I am glad I am living in a century when such wonders happen” (119). Wilde could probably have meant the century when Williams, Dorian or Jack the Ripper showed the artistic potential of death and murders. Furthermore, as Lord Henry claims: “Sin is the only real colour-element left in modern life” (37). In addition to this we can find an interesting remark in Ellmann, where he suggests that “Art may then transmit criminal impulses to its audience” (Ellmann, *Critical* xxi).

10 *Dorian's ending*

At the end of the novel, Dorian, in order to keep secret his morbid transformation revealed on canvas, decides to destroy his portrait. He does not want to confess his crime to the public and the only way to avoid the revelations was to destroy the only evidence against him, which after the death of Alan Campbell was exactly this portrait. Dorian “looked round, and saw the knife that had stabbed Basil Hallward” (255), and, “stabbed the picture with it” (255). Suddenly, a terrible sound was heard by servants, who were woken up by this crash. Two gentlemen who were passing the house summoned a police constable in and:

When they entered they found, hanging upon the wall, a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognised who it was (*Dorian* 256).

This is the end of Dorian Gray, where he took the appearance of all his sins from the portrait.

Wilde let his Dorian die. In fact, Victorian readers and the public would naturally expect that a sinner such as Dorian should certainly die. An individual who committed such crimes on innocents is not worthy of life any more. It seems that the Dorian's bitter end is not very surprising and is more or less expected and justified by readers. It is highly suspicious that Wilde, a literary genius and a curious character in real life, would inform readers about something which would be simply predictable according to Victorian standards of morality. One may ask the question why Wilde let Dorian die and what the reason for doing so was. Furthermore, in what way he wrote the end of the novel.

It appears that such an end for Dorian was written only for moral reasons of the Victorian public. Wilde brought Dorian to his death only in six pages of unusual and almost inartistic writing in the last chapter, which does not correspond to Wilde's elevated prose style shown in the previous ones. On the other hand, it is easy to imagine Wilde, considering Dorian's death from the moral point of view, maintaining the same position and approach as De Quincey. This moral side would be for Wilde, as for De

Quincey, “its weak side” and therefore it seems that Wilde did not intend to spend much effort on such a valueless issue.

The question is how the Victorian public would react and what would happen if Wilde had simply finished the novel earlier and did not include the chapter describing his bitter end as a murderer. What would happen if, after “murdering” Sibyl Vane, her brother James, a number of his young friends, Basil Hallward and Alan Campbell, he [Dorian] would just, calmly as usual, walk away with satisfaction to spend another evening in search of artificial sensations in the opium den? Knowing the circumstances which were brought about by Jack the Ripper two years before *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and that Jack the Ripper might still have been the current topic of what Victorian public would talk about, we may come to the conclusion that it would be just too provocative and unacceptable. If fact, this would mean that Dorian was still on the loose somewhere, walking around in search of his next victim. This, following the fact that Jack the Ripper has never been caught, would probably sound the alarm and the next wave of fear and horror.

11 Reactions

Publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in a magazine on 20th June 1890 “brought Wilde all the attention he could desire” (Ellmann, *Wilde* 320). He presented the “world in which integration is impossible and where all of life’s paths lead to self-destruction” (Gates, website), and suddenly appeared to be under strong attack. He was accused by reviewers of the magazines *Daily Chronicle* and *St James’s Gazette* that “the novel was tedious and dull, that its characters were ‘puppies,’ that it was merely self-advertisement, and that it was immoral” (Ellmann, *Wilde* 320). These accusations also greatly influenced his private family life. As Ellmann describes the reactions of Wilde’s wife: “It brought his wife more than she wanted, and she said, ‘Since Oscar wrote *Dorian Gray*, no one will speak to us’” (Ellmann, *Wilde* 320). Following this, Wilde frequently replied to these magazines in long excellent letters as a reaction to articles concerning the reviews of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. On 25th June 1890, Wilde writes a defence of *Dorian Gray* in *St. James’s Gazette* which was published the next day on 26th June, claiming that he is “quite incapable of understanding how any work of art can be criticised from a moral standpoint. The sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate;” (Wilde in Ellmann, *Critical* 237). Here Wilde advocates his aesthetical approach which he proclaimed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Furthermore, this may be considered a parallel between Wilde and De Quincey. As Wilde did later in *Dorian*, De Quincey strictly separated the moral point of view and the aesthetical point of view. For them, it does not matter the art is expressed so long as it is expressed aesthetically, which in Wilde, De Quincey and *Dorian*’s case, the expression of art can be seen as an aesthetically committed murder. Yet, Wilde in *Dorian* pushes the aesthetical approach far more and strongly advocates the concept of “art for art’s sake” and explains the purpose of art. In the same letter Wilde further writes:

I wrote this book entirely for my own pleasure, and it gave me very great pleasure to write it, Whether it becomes popular or not is a matter of absolute indifference to me” (Wilde in Ellmann, *Critical* 237).

For our purpose, Wilde's remark in the letter sent to editor of the *St. James's Gazette* the next day on 26th June 1890 also seems to be very important. In this letter, Wilde bravely reacts to accusations of bringing out bad and immoral Dorian on the literary stage and his introduction to Victorian readers. Wilde writes:

Romantic art deals with the exception and with individual. Good people, belonging as they do the normal, and so, commonplace, type, are artistically uninteresting. Bad people exasperate one's reason; bad people stir one's imagination. Your critic, if I must give him so honourable a title, states that the people in my story have no counterpart in life; that they are, to use his vigorous if somewhat vulgar phrase, 'mere catchpenny revelations of the non-existent.' Quite so. If they existed they would not be worth writing about. The function of the artist is to invent, not to chronicle. There are no such people. If there were I would not write about them. Life by its realism is always spoiling the subject-matter of art. The supreme pleasure in literature is to realise the non-existent (Wilde in Ellmann, *Critical* 237).

Wilde precisely advocates and explains the reasons why and what make Dorian and "others" — "Jack the Rippers" — the object of his primary artistic interest. He explains that "Good people" (Wilde in Ellmann, *Critical* 237), being normal, are for him too average and without any exceptionality. Because they are "artistically uninteresting" (Ibid. 237), they are not "worth writing about" (Ibid. 237). On the other hand, "bad people" (Ibid. 237) like Dorians and Jack the Rippers, are highly interesting, they carry major characteristics of artistic works of art and "stir one's imagination" (Ibid. 237) and therefore it is the mission of an artist, such as Wilde, to introduce them to the world and bring them into the sphere of art, which Wilde successfully did.

Critics of Wilde claim that the characters in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* have no counterpart in life. It may, at first sight, not be exactly true in Wilde's case. If we concentrate on the circumstances which preceded it, and accept the fact that Wilde was fairly informed by the media about the mysterious acts of Jack the Ripper, we may come to the conclusion that Jack the Ripper, as a "bad person" was for Wilde artistically interesting, stirred his imagination and therefore worth writing about.

It could seem that if we put Dorian and Jack the Ripper into the same space, we may consider that Jack the Ripper was the counterpart in life to the fictional Dorian. But, if we did so, this would not fit Wilde's claim about the fact that he would not write about them if they had counterparts in life. If they had counterparts in life they would

become too real, and, as Wilde advocates that “Life by its realism is always spoiling the subject-matter of art” (Wilde in Ellmann, *Critical* 237). If it is so and Jack the Ripper was considered a counterpart, he would never have written *Dorian*. But was Jack the Ripper recognized by Wilde as a real counterpart in life? It seems not. Jack the Ripper could be considered a counterpart, or better yet, a model to Dorian but not real. Wilde claims: “The supreme pleasure in literature is to realise the non-existent” (Ibid 237). It seems that Jack the Ripper was seen by Wilde as non-existent. The reason for this could be seen in the fact that only his crimes were real. The personality of Jack the Ripper is shrouded in mystery. The reality that he has never discovered or caught, and that police had no evidence of who he was and that all the cases were considered a sort of mystery, all this could make Wilde think of Jack the Ripper as a non-existent figure and therefore he could pass into the literary world through Dorian. Jack the Ripper, as with Dorian, both “bad”, and therefore according to Wilde artistically highly interesting, could for informed readers be considered a model for Dorian.

12 Conclusion

The aim of the thesis was to thoroughly examine the development of the Decadent conception of “murder as a high art” as can be seen in the works of Thomas de Quincey and to depict the major areas of his literary influence on Oscar Wilde’s novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Furthermore, the aim of the thesis was to describe the wider circumstances which affected Victorian readers and which had a strong impact on the creator of the character of Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde.

The thesis affirms that the figure of Thomas de Quincey played a great role in the influence on Oscar Wilde, which resulted in a parallel between the works of De Quincey and Wilde. Besides that, the influence of De Quincey can be considered far more complex. The main significance was put on a careful analysis of *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. The thesis shows that the influence of De Quincey could also be seen in the works of French Decadents, such as Baudelaire and Gautier, and later also in the works of Swinburne, Pater and Wilde.

The complex analysis of the work *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* has shown the main features of the concept of “murder as a high art” and its implication for Wilde’s *Dorian*. The result of the analysis summarizes the principles which, according to De Quincey, an aesthetically committed murder should certainly have, and shows the main features of De Quincey’s approach. He considered murder as a work of art and therefore it should be treated in the same way as any other artistic object.

He advises readers to concentrate on the act of murder not from the moral point of view because murder is always a mistake and surely immoral. On the contrary, he advises them to consider murder from the aesthetical point of view, which is free of moral or immoral disapproval and which gives us a great opportunity to judge the murder aesthetically. De Quincey specifies the principles of an aesthetically committed murder and concentrates on the style and manner of the murder. Firstly, the murder should, according to De Quincey, be committed in traditional way. Traditional way is for him a murder committed by a long pellet-knife. He disapproves of different ways of murder such as poisoning and does not consider aesthetical. Next, the person chosen to be murdered should be a good friend of the murderer’s because it is the only way to avoid unpleasant circumstances such as suspicion or detection of the murderer, which

could easily destroy the overall artistic effect. De Quincey considers as very important the fact that the victim should be in good health because it is highly immoral to choose the old and diseased person. Then he stated that the person should not be notorious to public because murdering such person would be too distant from reality and therefore would lack the desired artistic impact.

By comparing these principles stated in *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* we could find out that the main character of Wilde's novel, Dorian, meets these principles and applies them in the murder of the painter Basil Hallward.

The thesis shows that the influence on Oscar Wilde was very complex and covers various fields. It has been shown that these influences intermesh and culminate in the complex synthesis which is displayed in *Dorian*. Apart from De Quincey, the figures of Walter Pater and Joris-Karl Huysmans are also among these influences.

Walter Pater's impact on Wilde was examined through his influential book *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* which, as has been shown, had a strong effect on Wilde. This influence can be seen mostly in Pater's advice to always look for new experiences. It seems that Wilde brought this concept to an obscure extreme and found interest in the search for new experiences, whether moral or immoral, which Wilde's Dorian certainly did. Pater disagreed and when he realised the fact that he was a model for Dorian's corrupter, Lord Henry, he distanced himself from Wilde's novel.

This implies that the influence of Pater could be considered philosophical. On the other hand, the influence of Huysmans has been shown as being far more practical and realistic. His influence could be seen especially in the Decadent atmosphere in the novel. The main feature is found in the brilliant description of Decadent decorations which Dorian, as with the main character of Huysmans' *Against the Grain (A Rebours)*, Duc Jean des Esseintes, carried out in a similar way. Furthermore, Des Esseintes in the novel trains a young boy, hoping that he will become a murderer one day. This effect of Huysmans' on Wilde seems equally important because as has been pointed out, Lord Henry's corruptive influence on the young Dorian could be understood almost in the same way as Des Esseintes' aim to train a murderer.

The thesis has also shown the similarity between Wilde's essay "*Pen, Pencil and Poison*" and De Quincey's *Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. Similarly to De

Quincey, Wilde concentrates on the concept of murder as a high art form and considers murder from the aesthetical view. With the aid of the biographical technique he describes the “Art” of the notorious poisoner and writer, Thomas Griffiths Wainewright. Wilde suggests that once we consider his personality from the historical point of view, we cannot judge him morally but only aesthetically.

The aim of the thesis was also to analyse the reactions of the Victorian public to the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The thesis has shown that bringing up the topic of murder was quite problematic for them. This was caused by the fact that the period starting in the year 1888 was greatly affected by the rage of the notorious Whitechapel murderer later known as Jack the Ripper. Evidence has been shown that publishing *Dorian* only two years after the Whitechapel murders, and the approach that considers murder from the aesthetical point of view, and which Wilde’s *Dorian* introduced, was not acceptable for Victorian readers. This was mainly induced by the reality that Jack the Ripper was still a dominant issue in the late 1890s.

The thesis has affirmed that publishing *Dorian* under these circumstances brought about a fierce attack against Wilde, who was accused by the media of bringing out the concept of the “murder as a high art” form. Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, similarly as De Quincey in *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*, introduced an aesthetical approach to murder free of any moral or immoral aspects. Reactions of the public to this were strong and emotional and Wilde was accused of writing an immoral novel. In his defence, he tried to explain the concept and wrote that he could not understand how the work of art could be judged from the moral point of view because for him the sphere of art and the sphere of ethics were quite separate (Wilde in Ellmann, *Critical* 237). The thesis has shown that Wilde used the same approach as De Quincey because he also strictly separated the aesthetical and moral point of view.

The end of the thesis has shown what caused Wilde’s deep artistic interest in personalities such as Dorian and Jack the Ripper. Wilde suggests that “good” people are too normal and average and therefore artistically uninteresting. On the other hand, “bad” people such as Dorian and Jack the Ripper are from the aesthetical point of view far more exciting and “stir one’s imagination” (Wilde in Ellmann, *Critical* 237) and therefore may cause the artist’s deep interest in them.

Furthermore, the last chapter has outlined the possibility of whether Jack the Ripper could have been a model for Wilde's Dorian. Wilde and the Victorian public were during summer and autumn 1888 elaborately informed about the brutal Whitechapel murders, which occupied the front pages of the newspapers. This was only two years before the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. When we follow Wilde's claim that "bad" people are artistically highly interesting, and when we include Dorian and Jack the Ripper, we can come to the assumption that Jack the Ripper may have been a model for the literary figure of Dorian. We may also find support for this assumption in Wilde's defence of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* claiming that "The supreme pleasure in literature is to realise the non-existent" (Wilde in Ellmann, *Critical* 237). When we accept this claim and find support for it in the fact that the figure of Jack the Ripper was cloaked in mystery and has never been caught and identified and therefore physically did not exist, we can come to the assumption that Wilde was able to find in Jack the Ripper a model for the literary figure of Dorian Gray.

13 Resumé

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá literárním vlivem Thomase de Quinceyho a jeho pojetím „vraždy jako krásného umění“ na Oscara Wildea jak ho můžeme nalézt v díle *Obraz Doriana Graye*. Toto pojetí, jak ho představuje De Quincey ve svém díle *Vražda jako krásné umění*, je velice pozoruhodné. Nezaměřuje se totiž na pojetí vraždy z morálního hlediska, jak je obvyklé, nýbrž z hlediska estetického. Hodnotíme li vraždu z hlediska morálního, dojdeme stejně jako De Quincey k závěru, že vražda je za jakýchkoli okolností nemorální, a proto špatná. Oprostíme-li se ale od tohoto morálního hlediska a zaměříme se na pojetí vraždy z hlediska estetického, nabízejí se nám nové možnosti hodnocení takovéto události. De Quincey pracuje s vraždou jako s jakýmkoli jiným uměleckým dílem, a proto se při hodnocení vraždy stává kritikem a zaměřuje se na různé umělecké aspekty ovlivňující celkový dojem z uměleckého díla. Tímto neobvyklým pojetím oslovil, a jak se tato práce snaží dokázat, i ovlivnil představitele francouzské dekadence a následně také jednu u hlavních postav britské literatury zastoupené Oscarem Wildem. Tato práce se zejména zaměřuje na analýzu románu Oscara Wildea *Obraz Doriana Graye* a snaží se nastínit sféry De Quinceyho vlivu. Jelikož aspekty, které ovlivnily Wildea, a jejichž známky jsou vidět v jeho románu, můžeme považovat za rozsáhlejší a komplexnější, práce se zabývá také vlivy Waltera Patera a Jorise-Karla Huysmansa. Tyto vlivy společně s vlivy De Quinceyho byly podrobeny analýze a práce podrobně ukazuje jejich konkrétní podoby v románu *Obraz Doriana Graye*.

Wilde, podobně jako De Quincey, představil Viktoriánské Anglii koncept „vraždy jako krásného umění“ v plné jeho formě. Toto pojetí však přineslo silnou odezvu v podobě kritiky a odsouzení Wildeova románu za jeho nemorálnost ze strany veřejnosti a médií. Práce nastiňuje reakce vyvolané publikováním románu obhajujícího pojetí vraždy z estetického hlediska bezmála dva roky poté, kdy byl Londýn terorizován sérií vražd vykonaných nikdy nedopadeným a neidentifikovaným vrahem, Jackem Rozparovačem.

V úvodu se práce zaměřuje na vysvětlení pojmu „Dekadence“ a dekadentního hnutí, jak je vnímána různými autory. Dále popisuje pojetí „Estetismu“ a jeho koncept „umění pro umění samo“, které vychází z francouzského dekadentního hnutí a bylo

zastoupeno takovými postavami francouzské literatury jakými byli Desiré Nisard, Charles Baudelaire, Théophile Gautier, Joris-Karl Huysmans nebo Paul Burget. Mimo jiné, práce zmiňuje situaci Dekadentního hnutí v Británii, jehož reprezentanti jako jsou Charles Algernon Swinburne, Walter Pater, Arthur Symons nebo Oscar Wilde nacházeli podněty v dílech francouzských dekadentů.

Třetí kapitola se podrobně zabývá osobností Thomase de Quinceyho a jeho literární kariérou. Dále pak rozebírá jeho neobvyklou pozici v anglické literatuře a zaměřuje se na jeho zvláštní oblibu v násilí, která může být viděna i v začátcích jeho kariéry, kdy ještě jako editor magazínu projevovat nezvyklý zájem o kriminální rubriku.

Tento zvláštní zájem se postupně stal nedílnou součástí jeho prací a promítl se také do jeho literárních kritik takových velikánů světové literatury jakým byl například Shakespeare.

Následující kapitola je věnována rozboru De Quinceyho díla *Vražda jako krásné umění*. V něm se, jak již bylo zmíněno, zaměřuje na vraždu z hlediska estetického a v hodnocení se naprosto odpoutává od morálních aspektů spojených s vraždou. Práce poukazuje na skutečnost, že důvodem k napsání tohoto díla nebyla jen dlouholetá fascinace násilím, ale i fakt, že v roce 1812 byl Londýn zasažen sérií vražd vykonaných Johnem Williamsem. Z tohoto důvodu se v Londýně rozprostřel strach podobně jako o méně než osmdesát let později při řádění Jacka Rozparovače. De Quincey, fascinován efektem jaký Williams způsobil, se právě v díle *Vražda jako krásné umění* zaměřil na jeho aktivity. Podrobným rozbohem bylo zjištěno, že De Quincey s odvoláním na konkrétní případy vraha Williamse ve svém díle stanovil principy, které, jak se zdá, později Wilde v románu *Obraz Doriana Graye* aplikoval na postavu Doriana a jím vykonanou vraždu malíře Basila Hallwarda.

De Quincey v těchto principech stanovil, že vražda, abychom ji mohli považovat za uměleckou a z tohoto pohledu ji také hodnotit, by měla mít jisté náležitosti a zásady. Zaprvé, aby vrah dosáhl kýženého efektu, měla by být podle De Quinceyho provedena klasickým způsobem. Klasický způsob je v jeho podání vražda provedená nožem. Jiný způsob jako je například travičství odsuzoval a nepokládal ho za umělecký. Dále, že osoba vybraná za účelem vraždy by měla být vrahův důvěrný přítel, neboť jen tak se může vrah vyhnout nepříjemným okolnostem souvisejících s vyvolanou nedůvěrou nebo následným odhalením, které by mohlo zhatit celkový umělecký dojem. Za důležité

De Quincey považoval skutečnost, že vrahova oběť by měla být dobrého zdravý, neboť tvrdí, že je nanejvýš neetické vybrat si za oběť osobu starou a nemocnou. A jako důležitou zásadu stanovil, že osoba by neměla být přespříliš známou a veřejnou, jelikož ta je až příliš vzdálená realitě a její zavraždění by nebylo bráno jako skutečné. Porovnání těchto principů v pozdější části ukazuje, že Wilde skrze Doriana tyto principy ve svém románu dodržel a aplikoval.

Jelikož je patrné, že vlivy, které se promítají do Wildeova románu jsou daleko rozsáhlejší a komplexnější, další kapitola se proto zabývá vlivem Waltera Patera a Jorise-Karla Huysmance. Jak se práce snaží ukázat, Pater ve svém díle nabádal ke stálému hledání nových zkušeností a jejich vlivu na duši. Toto hledání však Wilde přivedl do extrému a aplikoval jej na hledání zkušeností bez ohledu na to, zda jsou považovány za morální či nemorální. Pater s tímto pojetím nesouhlasil a poté, co zjistil, že se stal modelem pro postavu Lorda Henryho se snažil od románu distancovat. Podobný, avšak méně filosofický a více praktický vliv měl na Oscara Wildea Joris-Karl Huysmans. Práce ukazuje, že jeho vliv spočívá spíše v navození dekadentní atmosféry. Ta je realizována prostřednictvím brilantního popisu dekorací, které svou formou vystihují podstatu dekadence. Huysmansův cit pro estetiku naprosto vystihuje tuto podstatu a proto je také jeho román *A Rebours* považován za „Bibli dekadence“, a jak se práce snaží ukázat mohl mít vliv na Oscara Wildea.

Dále je nastíněna podobnost mezi Wildeovou esejí „*Péro, tužka a jed*“ a De Quinceyho *Vražda jako krásné umění*, kde se Wilde, podobně jako De Quincey, zaměřil na pojetí vraždy z estetického hlediska a pomocí biografické techniky popisuje „umění“ známého traviče, ale také spisovatele Thomase Griffithse Wainewrighta. Wilde zde přepokládá, že podíváme-li se na jeho osobnost z historického pohledu, nemůžeme ho soudit z morálního hlediska, ale pouze z hlediska estetického.

V další části se práce zaměřuje na podrobnou analýzu Wildeova románu *Obraz Doriana Graye*, ve kterém nachází a objasňuje spojitosti s De Quinceyho pojetím vraždy. Jelikož De Quincey ve svém díle stanovil principy, podle nichž by měla být vražda vykonána abychom ji mohli považovat za uměleckou, práce se proto snaží v této kapitole ukázat, zda Wilde tyto principy aplikoval na Dorianu Graye, a zda tyto principy naplnil.

Aby byl čtenář informován v celém kontextu, práce zahrnuje také kapitulu rozebírající situaci ve Viktoriánském Londýně. Konec devadesátých let devatenáctého století by značným způsobem ovlivněn skutečností, že Londýn byl terorizován sérií vražd, které měl na svědomí vrah z Whitechapelu, později nazýván „Jack Rozparovač“. Cílem práce je také nastínit co přineslo opětovné představení konceptu vraždy jako krásného umění pouze necelé dva roky poté, co byla Londýnská veřejnost zasažena jeho běsněním a postava Jacka Rozparovače byla stále jedním z hlavních předmětů veřejného znepokojení.

Předposlední kapitola tuto myšlenku dále rozvíjí a zaměřuje se na Dorianův konec, jak je vykreslen v románu. Dorian zničí svůj portrét, který na sebe bere podobu všech jeho hříchů a zemře jako zohavený, vrásčitý stařec. Práce se zabývá myšlenkou, co by se stalo, kdyby Wilde svůj román ukončil o kapitulu dříve a nenechal Doriana zemřít. Ten by zřejmě po spáchání Basilovi vraždy odešel a trávil večer hledáním umělých pocitů v opiovém doupěti. Práce nastiňuje, že takovýto konec by ve Viktoriánské Anglii vyvolal ještě větší nevoli, neboť Wilde by tím veřejně dával najevo, že Dorian, stejně jako nikdy nedopadený Jack Rozparovač jsou stále někde mezi námi, a že by Wilde jednoduše oceňoval sériového vraha za jeho jednání, což by bylo pro tehdejší veřejnost nepřijatelné.

Poslední kapitola se zaměřuje na reakce Viktoriánské veřejnosti vyvolané publikováním *Doriana Graye*. Tyto reakce byly silné a emotivní a Wilde byl obviněn médii, že jeho román je nemorální. Následně mezi ním a médii proběhla série dlouhých dopisů, kde Wilde obhajoval *Obraz Doriana Graye*, a kde se snažil vysvětlit své principy a pojetí vraždy jako krásného umění. Wilde nemohl pochopit, jak někdo může hodnotit umělecké dílo z morálního hlediska. Podle jeho názoru je umělecké hledisko jasně oddělené od hlediska morálního, a proto jej ani není možné z morálního pohledu spravedlivě hodnotit. Práce poukazuje na to, že Wilde zde použil stejný přístup jako De Quincey, neboť i on jasně odděloval hledisko morální a umělecké.

Následně se práce zaměřuje na důvody, proč se stal Dorian jeho hlavním předmětem uměleckého zájmu ve kterém obhajuje koncept vraždy jako krásného umění.

Wilde byl médii obviněn že představil světu „špatného“ Doriana. Na svou obranu Wilde vysvětluje a zastává názor, že „dobří lidé“ jsou z uměleckého hlediska nezajímaví, příliš průměrní a že nevzbuzují žádný umělecký zájem. Na druhou stranu

„špatní“, mezi které Dorian nebo Jack Rozparovač patří, jsou z uměleckého hlediska velice zajímaví, výjimeční a rozdmýchávají lidskou představivost.

V závěru se práce zabývá myšlenkou, zdali mohl být Jack Rozparovač modelem pro postavu Doriana Graye. Wilde, stejně jako celá Viktoriánská Anglie, byl v létě a na podzim roku 1888 pečlivě seznamován s případy brutálních vražd, které byly do nejmenších detailů popsány v tisku a zaujímaly první stránky novin. Ty se odehrály pouze dva roky před publikování Dorianu Graye. V návaznosti na Wildeovo tvrzení, že „špatní“ jsou mnohem více umělecky zajímaví, a pokud mezi ně zahrneme Jacka Rozparovače či Dorianu, můžeme dojít k domněnce, že Jack Rozparovač mohl být modelem pro Dorianu. Pro podporu tohoto tvrzení se naskýtá i fakt, že Wilde ve své obhajobě Dorianu v dopisech zaslaných médiím píše, že nejvyšším posláním literatury je vyjádřit neexistující. Pokud toto tvrzení přijmeme a nalezneme pro něj podporu ve faktu, že osoba Jacka Rozparovače je zahalena tajemstvím a nebyla nikdy identifikována ani dopadena, a tedy fyzicky neexistovala, můžeme dojít k názoru, že Wilde mohl v Jacku Rozparovači najít model, který vyjádřil v literární postavě Dorianu Graye.

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15 Table of appendices

Appendix 1: “ <i>De Quincey, Thomas</i> “.....	64
Appendix 2: “ <i>Wilde, Oscar</i> “	65
Appendix 3: “ <i>Dear Boss</i> ” letter p.1	66
Appendix 4: “ <i>Dear Boss</i> ” letter p.2	67
Appendix 5: “ <i>Dear Boss</i> ” letter - transcription.....	68
Appendix 6: “ <i>Illustration – Jack the Ripper’s victim</i> ”	69
Appendix 7: “ <i>Cartoon criticizing the police for their inability to find the Whitechapel murderer</i> ”	70

Appendix 1: “*De Quincey, Thomas*”



Thomas de Quincey.

Source: <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/1/6/0/2/16026/16026-h/16026-h.htm>>, [viewed 22 March 2006]

Appendix 2: “Wilde, Oscar”



Source: <http://theatre.msu.edu/Academics/TheatreArchive/Wilde_Oscar/theatre.msu.edu/images/ta/Wilde_Oscar-001.jpg>, [viewed 22 March 2006]

Appendix 3: "Dear Boss" letter p.1

Received on September 27th, 1888 at the Central News Agency, Evans, S.P./ M.E.P.O., page 1.

Dear Boss
25 Sept. 1888.

I keep on hearing the police have caught me. but they wont fix me just yet. I have laughed when they look so clever and talk about being on the right track. That joke about Leather Apron gave me real fits. I am down on whores and I shant quit ripping them till I do get buckled. Grand work the last job was. I gave the lady no time to squeal. How can they catch me now. I love my work and want to start again. you will soon hear of me with my gunny little games. I saved some of the proper red stuff in a ginger beer bottle over the last job to write with but it went thick like glue and I cant use it. Red ink is fit enough. I hope ha, ha. The next job I do I shall clip the lady's ears off and send to the

Source: <http://www.casebook.org/images/dearboss1_big.jpg>, [viewed 22 March 2006]

Appendix 4: "Dear Boss" letter p.2

Received on September 27th, 1888 at the Central News Agency, Evans, S.P./ M.E.P.O., page 2.

Police officers just for jolly wouldnt
you. Keep this letter back till I
do a bit more work. then give
it out straight My knife's so nice
and sharp I want to get to work
right away if I get a chance.
Good luck.
yours truly
Jack the Ripper
Dont mind me giving the trade name

want good enough
to post this before
I got all the red
ink off my hands
course it
No luck yet. They
say I'm a doctor
now- ha ha

Source: <http://www.casebook.org/images/dearboss2_big.jpg>, [viewed 22 March 2006]

Appendix 5: “Dear Boss” letter - transcription

Received on September 27th, 1888 at the Central News Agency, Evans, S.P./ M.E.P.O., Transcription.

Received on September 27th, 1888 at the Central News Agency, this letter was originally believed to be just another hoax. Three days later, the double murder of Stride and Eddowes made them reconsider, especially once they learned a portion of the latter’s earlobe was found cut off from the body, eerily reminiscent of a promise made within the letter. The police deemed the "Dear Boss" letter important enough to reproduce in newspapers and postbills of the time, hoping someone would recognize the handwriting (“Dear Boss ” letter, website).

(Transcription)

Dear Boss,

I keep on hearing the police have caught me but they wont fix me just yet. I have laughed when they look so clever and talk about being on the right track. That joke about Leather Apron gave me real fits. I am down on whores and I shant quit ripping them till I do get buckled. Grand work the last job was. I gave the lady no time to squeal. How can they catch me now. I love my work and want to start again. You will soon hear of me with my funny little games. I saved some of the proper red stuff in a ginger beer bottle over the last job to write with but it went thick like glue and I cant use it. Red ink is fit enough I hope ha. ha. The next job I do I shall clip the ladys ears off and send to the police officers just for jolly wouldn't you. Keep this letter back till I do a bit more work, then give it out straight. My knife's so nice and sharp I want to get to work right away if I get a chance. Good Luck.

Yours truly

Jack the Ripper

Dont mind me giving the trade name

*PS Wasnt good enough to post this before I got all the red ink off my hands curse it
No luck yet. They say I'm a doctor now. ha ha*

Source: Evans, S.P./ M.E.P.O., [viewed 22 March 2006], <<http://www.casebook.org>>

Appendix 6: “*Illustration – Jack the Ripper’s victim*”



Source: <<http://www.london-walks.co.uk/28/jack-the-ripper-photos.shtml>>, [viewed 22 March 2006]

Appendix 7: “Cartoon criticizing the police for their inability to find the Whitechapel murderer”

From Punch, 22nd September 1888, page 134. Artwork by John Tenniel



BLIND-MAN'S BUFF.

(As played by the Police.)

“TURN ROUND THREE TIMES,
AND CATCH WHOM YOU MAY!”

Source: < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Ripper_cartoon_punch.png >, [viewed 22 March 2006]