



CHAPTER II

THE FACTORS LEADING WILDE TO BE INFLUENCED BY THE FRENCH ART FOR ART'S SAKE SCHOOL

Wilde lived in the Victorian Age in which the problems of morality were widely criticized. In this restricted society, the influence of the French literature spread and gave rise to the Art for Art's Sake movement in England. Wilde, as a poet of this movement, produced his works which aroused public criticism because of this obvious influence. From the study of his background, it is evident that there are some factors that encourage him to respond to the influence willingly. This chapter will concentrate on the study of biographical and social factors.

Biographical Factors

Psychologically, one's environment has an important role in affecting one's mind and one's thinking. Oscar Wilde's background formed his personality and his thinking and most of all made him accept easily the Art for Art's Sake School : "... il faut connaître le milieu dans lequel son talent a surgi. La décadence qui domine chez lui est la réaction."¹

¹L.F. Choisy, Oscar Wilde (Paris: Librairie Académique Perrin et Cie, 1927), p. 2.

Biographical Background

Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills Wilde was born on October 16, 1854 at Westland Row, Dublin. His father was Sir William Wilde, knighted in 1864, a celebrated oculist and aurist, a man with a lusty enjoyment of life. His mother, whose maiden name was Elgee, was a clever woman who, when very young, writing as John Fernshaw Ellis, and later under the name of Speranza in a revolutionary paper, had tried to rouse Irish men to the storming of Dublin Castle. She read widely in Latin and Greek. She was in her own estimation, "the acknowledged voice in poetry of all Ireland."¹

Both his father and mother affected him a great deal in his future literary career. The close relationship with his father accustomed Wilde to consider moral principles as something neglected, ridiculous and invented by puritans.² This influence from his father formed his moral concepts which were opposed to those of his contemporaries. Consequently, he was deeply touched when he got to know the French Art for Art's Sake movement which ignored the role of morality in their works, giving importance only to aestheticism, as shown by the declaration of the writer of this movement, Théophile Gautier, who thought that things are beautiful in inverse proportion to their usefulness: "Il n'y a de

¹Martin Fido, Oscar Wilde (London: The Hamlyn, 1973), pp. 10-11.

²L.F. Choisy, Oscar Wilde, p. 4.

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vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien. Tout ce que est utile est laid."¹

In addition, both Sir William and Lady Wilde busied themselves collecting folklore. Wilde in boyhood travelled with his father to visit ruins and gathered superstitions. His childhood must have had a plentiful mythology. Wilde was not excluded from the extravagant conversation of his mother's salon.² He gained his literary heritage mostly from her.

The dandyism of Oscar Wilde was also caused by the way his mother had treated him since his childhood. Disappointed by the second son whom she expected to be a girl, she treated him as she would have the delicate girl baby she had dreamed of through the months of her pregnancy. She dressed him in girl's clothes, let his hair grow long. People who came to her house saw something very wrong in the spectacle of the little boy in ribbons and laces and hung all over with jewels till he looked like a tiny Hindoo idol.³

Educated in a luxury loving and high class family who adored all kinds of jewels and artificial objects, Wilde absorbed little by little the concepts of the beauty and the decadence which appear later in his

¹Théophile Gautier, Mademoiselle de Maupin (Paris: Garnier, n.d.), p. 23.

²Arthur Ransome, Oscar Wilde: A Critical Study (New York: Haskell House, 1971), pp. 27-28.

³Epifanio San Juan, Jr., The Art of Oscar Wilde (Princeton: N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 31.

literary career.

Educational Background

Wilde's experiences concerning art and beauty had begun since his school days and his time at Oxford. The earliest school days began at Portora Royal School at Enniskillen where he behaved well, did not particularly distinguish himself, did not play games, read a great deal. While the other boys were hard at their task or at their particular sports, Wilde was reading poetry, novels or dreaming away his time. He showed much more interest in a literary career than in any other discipline.¹

After leaving Portora, he went to Trinity College, Dublin, where he was elected to a Queen's scholarship. In 1874, he won the Berkley Gold Medal for Greek. Three years later, he travelled in Italy and went to Greece with Professor Mahaffy. This experience had great influence on his attitude towards art. Wilde inherited a lot of knowledge and the love of art from Mahaffy as he said to his close friend, Frank Harris:

I got my love of the Greek ideal and my intimate knowledge of language from Mahaffy and Tyrell. They were Trinity to me; Mahaffy was especially valuable to me at that time. Though not so good a scholar as Tyrell, he had been to Greece, had lived there and had saturated himself with Greek thought and Greek

¹ Sir Edward Sullivan, a contemporary of Wilde both at school and college narrated of the school boy:

He never took any interest in mathematics either at school or college. He laughed at science... The classics absorbed almost his whole attention.

feeling. Besides he deliberately took the artistic standpoint towards everything, which was coming more and more to be my standpoint. He was a delightful talker; a really good talker in a certain way - an artist in eloquent words and vivid pauses.¹

At Oxford, he met Ruskin and Walter Pater and got from them a great deal of knowledge about art and beauty. Both of them had an effect on his future career.

Ruskin, who was an expert in art, architecture, and the history of the Renaissance, lectured at Oxford between 1869 and 1878 and again in 1883 and 1884. During the earlier period Wilde attended his lectures at the Sheldonian Theatre, becoming one of his disciples. Ruskin's passion for beauty was shared by another of the old men at Oxford, Walter Pater, who was destined to have an even stronger influence on the expanding intelligence of Wilde. For although Pater shared Ruskin's aesthetic enthusiasms, he had nothing in common with the latter's sensitive social conscience.² Between Ruskin and Pater, Wilde seemed to admire the latter more.³ He himself agreed with Pater that art was absolutely for art's sake, opposing the doctrine of Ruskin who always

¹Vyvyan Holland, Oscar Wilde: A Pictorial Biography (London: Thames and Hudson, 1960), p. 17.

²James Laver, Oscar Wilde (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1960), p. 9.

³Hesketh Pearson wrote in The Life of Oscar Wilde that Wilde said: Carlyle's stormy rhetoric, Ruskin's winged and passionate eloquence had seemed to me to spring from enthusiasm rather than from art. I do not think I knew then that even prophets correct their proofs.... But Pater's essays became to me 'The Golden book of spirit and sense, the holy writ of beauty.'

preached the function of art in life, linking art with ethics.¹ Wilde attacked Ruskin for his morals, but also praised him for his works as he said to Frank Harris:

There were two or three teachers, Frank, greater than Mahaffy, teachers of the world as well as of Oxford. There was Ruskin for instance, who appeared to me intensely a wonderful man and a most wonderful writer. A sort of exquisite romantic flower; like a violet filling the whole air with the ineffable perfume of belief. Ruskin has always seemed to me the Plato of England, a prophet of the Good and the True and the Beautiful, who saw as Plato saw that the three are one perfect flower. But it was his prose I loved, and not his piety. His sympathy with the poor bored me; the road he wanted us to build was tiresome. I could see nothing in poverty that appealed to me nothing; I shrank away from it as from a degradation of the spirit; but his prose was lyrical and rose on broad wings into the blue. He was a great poet and teacher, Frank, and therefore of course a most preposterous professor, he bored you to death when he taught, but was an inspiration when he sang.²

From Walter Pater, Wilde absorbed a great deal of his concept of Art for Art's Sake, especially from the book History of the Renaissance on a famous passage in which he remarked:

... A counted number of pulses is given us of a variegated dramatic life. How can we see all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How can we pass most quickly 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 ... What we have to do is to be forever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions ... We have an interval and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness; some in high passions - the wisest, in art and song ... for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your movements as

¹Frances Winwar, Oscar Wilde and the Yellow Nineties (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941), p. 22.

²Frank Harris, Oscar Wilde (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1960), pp. 36-39.

they pass, and simply for those moment's sake.¹

This was to profess the doctrine of Art for Art's Sake in its purest form. Wilde found Pater's teaching so much in conformity with his own instincts that he adopted it as his rule of life.

Wilde admired Pater the most as he said to Frank Harris:

Then there was Pater, Pater the classic, Pater the scholar, who had already written the greatest English prose, I think a page or two of the greatest prose in all literature. Pater meant everything to me. He taught me the highest form of art; the austerity of beauty. I came to my full growth with Pater. He was a sort of silent, sympathetic elder brother. Fortunately for me he could not talk at all, but he was an admirable listener, and I talked to him by the hour. I learned the instrument of speech with him, for I could see by his face when I had said anything extraordinary. He did not praise me, but quickened me astonishingly, forced me always to do better than my best, an intense vivifying influence, the influence of Greek art at its supremest.²

Here at Oxford, he had also studied the works of Swinburne, reading his works constantly, and was an intense admirer of his. Swinburne was one of the English poets who had much interest in French literature. Wilde was aware of the existence of the French 'Decadent' school from him because the influence of Baudelaire had reached England through Swinburne long before.³ He published in 1862 the article on Les Fleurs du Mal of Baudelaire in The Spectator.

During his time at Oxford, Wilde learnt a lot from Ruskin, Pater and Swinburne about beauty in literature, the Art for Art's Sake

¹ James Laver, Oscar Wilde, pp. 9-10.

² Frank Harris, Oscar Wilde, p. 39.

³ James Laver, Oscar Wilde, p. 14.

theory. This was the beginning of his acquaintance with French literature.

Personal Life

Not only did Oscar Wilde form his concept of art and beauty from his family life and his education, but he also improved these ideas from his contemporaries with whom he was well acquainted. England at the end of the nineteenth century experienced the era of the aesthetic movement. There were many famous artists, for example, Ruskin, Walter Pater, Rossetti, William Morris, Swinburne and Burne-Jones. Most of these artists were worshippers of beauty. Wilde admired their works and tried to follow their thoughts and their behavior. He had the occasion to exchange ideas with them by talking to them or writing to them sometimes. He happened to know Whistler¹ who, at that time, was a great painter and the acknowledged champion of 'Art for Art's Sake.' Whistler protested against the notion that art should be an illustration of an improving anecdote.² He was a kind of aesthete and dandy, used to collect blue china and to adorn his room with Japanese fans and peacock feathers. He was a modern of the moderns. Modern art he felt should be an interpretation and not a representation of reality, and he

¹American artist (1834-1903), who after studying in Paris, in 1862 settled in England and spent the rest of his life there. His method of painting and opinions on art roused a storm of protest from conservative critics (including Ruskin) and from the public.

²James Laver, Oscar Wilde, p. 11.

taught the golden rule of the artist that the half is usually more expressive than the whole. He went about London, preaching new schemes of decoration and another Renaissance of art.¹ He influenced Wilde a great deal, especially on the point of his dandyism. Wilde behaved as an aesthete, letting his hair grow long, claiming that the cavalier costume was the perfect clothing for men, and wearing breeches and velvet jackets to evening parties.² He filled his room with ancient furniture and curious objects, and like Whistler, decorated the walls with peacock feathers and collected blue china.

William Morris³ was another artist whom Wilde knew well and admired very much. Wilde used to write to him, "It is pure art; everything that you do ... I have loved your work since boyhood: I shall always love it."⁴ The works of Morris decorated Wilde's room as well as the ones of Rosetti and Burne-Jones. Ernest and Ada Levenson, visiting Wilde after his imprisonment,⁵ recorded the scene: "The drawing room was full of Burne-Jones and Rosetti pictures, Morris wall paper and curtains,

¹ Frank Harris, Oscar Wilde, p. 48.

² Martin Fido, Oscar Wilde, p. 30.

³ English poet, artist, manufacturer and socialist, started the Kelmscott Press at Hammersmith in 1890.

⁴ Rupert Hart-Davis, ed. The Letters of Oscar Wilde (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 291.

⁵ Wilde was arrested on charges of homosexuality with Lord Alfred Douglas. See appendix, biographical table.

in fact an example of the decoration of the early eighties, very beautiful in its way, and very like the aesthetic rooms Oscar Wilde once loved."¹

Owing to his aesthetic taste, Wilde had a great love of flowers and perfume that raised an odourous cloud when he burned them in his room. Writing to Reginald Harding, Wilde told him:

I have a childish longing for some flowers - I don't care what - only not wallflowers. If you have any spare moments and can get me a few you will be doing as benevolent an action as giving groundsel to a starving canary would be . . . Could you steal a branch of that lovely red blossoming tree outside the new building for me? ²I am sick at heart for want of some freshness and beauty in life.

In another letter he wrote, "If there is anything that could console me for being ill, it is your charming basket of flowers and delightful letter . . . The roses have quite given me a sense of swift beauty and light of Spring: they are most exquisite . . . I can bury my face in them and dream how nice it would be to be out again."³

Contacting the great artists and poets was the custom of Wilde. Both Wilde and his wife had a salon so that they would have occasions to meet the important artists of the day. Vyvyan Holland, the younger son of Wilde, recalled the old days, "To my mother's receptions came people of such widely different interests as Henry Irving, Sir William Richmond, R.A. . . . John Ruskin, Lily Langtry, Mark Twain . . . Swinburne,

¹Rupert Hart-Davis., ed. The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 563

²Ibid., p. 50.

³Ibid.

etc."¹

In addition to the English artists, Wilde was also acquainted with the French men of letters. On frequent visits to Paris, he came in contact with many famous French writers, such as André Gide, Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé, Edmond de Goncourt, Victor Hugo, Alphonse Daudet. Wilde had a close relationship with some of them, writing to them and visiting them fairly frequently, especially André Gide, Edmond de Goncourt and Mallarmé. Wilde read their work a great deal. In the letter to Julia Ward Howe, he wrote that he could not travel without Balzac and Gautier.² Another one was the letter to More Adey, "I have been reading much of Maupassant lately, and I now find much tenderness in him - a great pity for life."³ Vyvyan Holland also described his father's study, "... most of the wall space was occupied by bookshelves, filled with copies of the Greek and Latin, French literature, and presentation copies of the works of contemporary authors."⁴

The above discussion proved that he was a great admirer of the French writers. In addition to reading their works, he sometimes imitated some passage of the French writers in his works, or more than that, quoted them. He was always conscious of the work of French

¹ Vyvyan Holland, Son of Oscar Wilde (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1957), p. 42.

² Rupert Hart-Davis, ed. The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 122.

³ Ibid., p. 784.

⁴ Vyvyan Holland. Son of Oscar Wilde, p. 34.

writers, for example, he sometimes quoted them when he wrote to some friends. He wrote to Lord Alfred Douglas when he was at Reading Goal:

Art had made us myriad-minded. Those who have the artistic temperament go into exile with Dante and learn how salt is the bread of others and how steep their stairs: they catch for a moment the serenity and calm of Goethe, and yet know but too well why Baudelaire cried to God:

O seigneur, donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon corps et mon coeur sans dégoût.¹

This is the extract from 'un voyage à Cythère' which Baudelaire wrote in Les Fleurs du Mal.

Wilde was interested in the Symbolists, both French and English writers. He also showed much interest in the work of an American writer, Edgar Allan Poe, whom he admired very much. Writing to his friends, Wilde declared his admiration of Poe, "I see no limit to the future in art of a country which has already given us Emerson, that master of moods, and those two lords of romance, Poe and Bret Harte."²; "I wonder are you including Edgar Allan Poe's sonnet "To Science." It is one I like very much."³ The influence of Poe was largely marked in France. Poe's short novel Arthur Gordon Pym was very widely read. Huysmans' hero has a copy of Arthur Gordon Pym under his table.⁴ The French

¹Rupert Hart-Davis, ed. The Letters of Oscar Wilde, p. 480

²Ibid., p. 169.

³Ibid., p. 182.

⁴Huysmans, A Rebours (Paris: Garnier - Flammarion, 1978),

symbolists, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Valéry were greatly influenced by him. Baudelaire read Poe, wrote a biography of Poe, and even translated his tales. From Poe, Baudelaire appropriated the idea of musicality, supernal beauty and the heresy of the didactic. In turn, these ideas were present in Baudelaire when Wilde read him and therefore were available to Wilde.

Art was everything to him. He himself said to André Gide as follows:

Comprenez qu'il y a deux mondes: celui qui est sans qu'en parle; on l'appelle le monde réel, parce qu'il n'est nul besoin d'en parler par le voir. Et l'autre, c'est le monde de l'art; c'est celui dont il faut parler, parce qu'il n'existerait pas sans cela.¹

Vyvyan Holland emphasized this idea, declaring, "My father lived in the world of his own; an artificial world perhaps, but a world in which the only things that really mattered were art and beauty in all their forms."²

Like other aesthetes, Wilde had a strong belief in beauty and was a great worshipper of it. He adored beauty in every form and had a horror of ugliness, and one epigram of his ran, "It is better to be beautiful than to be good, but it is better to be good than to be ugly."³

To him, art was absolutely separated from ethics. Art existed only for art's sake. It was surely the idea of aesthetes of the day.

¹André Gide, Oscar Wilde: in memorium (souvenir) (de profundis) (Paris: Mercure de France, 1948), p. 18.

²Vyvyan Holland, Son of Oscar Wilde, p. 46.

³Vyvyan Holland, Oscar Wilde: A Pictorial Biography, p. 43.

In addition, the artists of this school had praise for the uncommon and the artificial. "Lying for its own sake; or the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the privilege and proper aim of art," said Wilde in his book The Decay of Lying.

Frank Harris said about him:

Early in our friendship, I was to see that the love of the uncommon, his paradoxes and epigrams were natural for him, sprang immediately from his taste and temperament ... he lived for the beautiful and extraordinary, but not for the Good and still less for the whole; he acknowledged no moral obligation; ... he cared nothing for the common wealth; he held himself above the mass of the people with an Englishman's extravagant insularity and aggressive pride. Politics, social problems, religion - everything interested him simply as a subject of art; life itself was merely material for art."¹

These are the beliefs and the reactions of Oscar Wilde, the perfect example of an English aesthete, who did not adapt to his society. The English literary domain at that time was in the age of confusion and contradiction. There were some conservative poets who wanted to preserve the conventional way of thinking while a certain group turned to a different one. The French influence was one cause of this tendency. Consequently, it is interesting to study the English and French literary movements responsible for this influence in England.

Social Background

The French Literary Movements

'L'école parnassienne' and the revolt against Romanticism

In the second half of the nineteenth century, there occurred many

¹ Frank Harris, Oscar Wilde, pp. 67-68.

important literary movements in France: the Art for Art's Sake School or 'L'école parnassienne,' Symbolism, the Decadents. The poetic tradition in this era began since 1830, which was the period of the triumph of Romanticism, which at that time, was largely accepted by the public. The conflicts of the romantic doctrines were terminated, especially, the principles of the plays. In fact, Romanticism was the source of later movements in spite of the contradiction of many points of view. P. Martino commented in his book, Parnasse et Symbolisme, "Romantisme, Parnasse, Symbolisme; c'est en réalité une même tradition poétique, un effort continu, malgré des piétinements et des retours, pour la réalisation d'une grande ambition d'art sans cesse élargie."¹

During the glory of Romanticism, another new literary movement, the Art for Art's Sake School, began. The poets of this new school revolted against the concepts of Romanticism, especially, the moral point of view. The romantic poets always preserved the traditional ideas which declared that art and morality were inseparable as Hugo, in the preface to his play Lucrèce Borgia, performed in 1833, wrote, "Il y a beaucoup de questions morales dans les questions littéraires. Le théâtre est une tribune, le théâtre est une chaire. Le drame sans sortir des limites impartiales de l'art, a une mission sociale, une mission humaine."

The romantic tradition was later violated. The disciples of the new literary school reunited and called themselves 'Les Jeunes-France' or

¹P. Martino, Parnasse et Symbolisme (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1970), p. 4.

'Bouzingos.' For them, art was everything as they were criticized, "L'art, pour ces messieurs, c'est tout, la poésie, la peinture, etc. Ces messieurs, sont amoureux de l'art, ces messieurs méprisent quiconque ne travaille pas pour l'art, et ils passent leur vie à parler art, à causer art."¹

At first, there was Pétrus Borel as the chief of the group accompanied by his contemporaries: Gérard de Nerval, Théophile Gautier, Philothée O'Neddy. They criticized the romantic poets for their pretentious sentiments, their lack of the perfect form in creating and, especially, for their moral point of view. Gautier was one who opposed violently this concept, declaring in the preface of Mademoiselle de Maupin, the notorious novel which appeared in 1835: "Il n'y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien. Tout ce qui est utile est laid. . . . -et j'aime mieux les choses et les gens en raison inverse des services qu'ils me rendent."² The Preface stands in the same relation to the Art for Art's Sake School as the Preface to Hugo's play Cromwell stands to the Romantic Movement.

Gautier as well as Leconte de Lisle wanted to restore Art to its purity and its dignity. The cult of pure splendour, impassivity, the cult of the past (goût du passé) and the cult of intelligence (des recherches érudites) were the common traits of the Art for Art's Sake

¹La Revue de Paris, janvier 1833 quoted in P. Martino, Parnasse et Symbolisme, p. 10.

²Théophile Gautier, Mademoiselle de Maupin. pp. 23-24.

poets. Gautier declared in L'Artiste:

Quant à nos principes, ils sont suffisamment connus: nous croyons à l'autonomie de l'art, l'art pour nous n'est pas le moyen mais le but, et tout artiste qui se propose autre chose que le beau n'est pas un artiste à nos yeux; nous n'avons jamais pu comprendre la séparation de l'idée et de la forme, pas plus que du moins dans notre sphère de manifestations; une belle forme est une belle idée, car que serait-ce qu'une forme qui n'exprimerait rien.¹

The cult of erudition and historical research interested the public and the writers because the unknown countries, Greece, India, and China appeared exotic. Consequently, they were the themes and the inspiration of the poetry of the fifties.

Indian studies started in France about the eighteenth century. In 1840, the studies of literature and history and translations were known: the Indian epics, the Indian lyrics and the religious doctrines. There were translations of the Mahapharata, Ramayana, Bhagavad Gita. These initiated the readers into the Brahmanic theory and metaphysics.

Greek studies was as important as Indian. The poets admired the beauty in Grecian art. Many poets put the theme of the ancient Greeks in their works, for example, Les Poèmes Antiques of Leconte de Lisle.

During the years 1860 to 1866, the movement was enthusiastic. There were many 'salons' or 'cafés' which gave the poets the opportunity to meet each other frequently. Besides, some collections were published. The first editor of the 'Parnasse' was Catull Mendès who issued the first review, La Revue Fantaisiste. It was an uncommitted review of the young

¹P. Martino, Parnasse et Symbolisme, p. 16.

who believed in the independence of art and the rights of the poetic imagination.

Two years later, there appeared the second editor, L. X. de Ricard who founded La Revue du Progrès Moral, Littéraire, Scientifique et Artistique. It was in contrast to the former. It was more political but finally it turned to the Art for Art's Sake theories, not the social art as before.

In 1886, the new collection appeared, Le Farnasse Contemporain which accumulated the works of the great poets of the Art for Art's Sake School: Gautier, Banville, Leconte de Lisle, Heredia, Daudelaire, Louis Ménard, François Coppée, Catull Mendès, Sully Prudhomme, Paul Verlaine, Stéphane Mallarmé. The 'Farnasse' was popular for a certain period till 1878 when this aesthetic became unpopular and was replaced by the Decadents and the Symbolists.

About 1886, there was reaction against the solemnity of the 'Farnasse.' The Decadents¹ formed their group and the new cult of bohemianism spread in many 'cabarets' at the Latin Quarter or at Montmartre. There were, consequently, the reunions of the 'Hydropathes,' 'Hirsutes,' 'Chat Noir,' 'Zutiste.' The tendencies of this school were rather

¹'Decadents' was the new word, given after the sonnet of Verlaine which portrayed the image of the Roman decadence:

"Je suis l'Empire à la fin de la décadence."

Jules Laforgue used this word to characterise the mind of the young of that time.

philosophical than literary. They did not pay much attention to the poetic arts.

In 1877, the study of German philosophy became marked in France. There were some translations of the works of the two great German philosophers: Schopenhauer and Hartmann who were famous for their pessimism. The Decadent, especially, Jules Laforgue, inherited their pessimism from these philosophers. They veered toward mysticism, and at the same time there was always melancholy and bitterness. They detested the modern society. In the review La Revue Indépendante, Zola, Goncourt, Huysmans, Alexis, Gérard, Mirabeau met Mallarmé, de L'Isle-Adam, Verlaine. They confirmed the ugliness of life and the will to reject the bad conditions of life, to revolt against instinct and to escape from the great trap of existence.

There was another school, developing simultaneously about the same period, Symbolism, which was also influenced by the pessimism of the German philosophers. Gradually, the Decadents merged with the Symbolist movement.

In 1886, the manifesto of Jean Moréas, published in Le Figaro was devoted to this new school: Gustave Khan, Stuart Merrill, Viele Griffin, René Ghil returned to the works of Baudelaire, Verlaine and Rimbaud. They collaborated on many reviews, La Vogue, Le Flume, Le Mercure de France. In 1891, Jules Huret, the journalist, made these tendencies widely known among the public.

The Symbolists, like the Decadents, hated society. They thought that they could not tolerate the materialistic world where people ignored

spiritual values. The poets escaped from society and created their own world in dreams and returned to the past. They did not want to face reality. In the works of Verlaine, Mallarmé, Rimbaud and many Symbolist writers, we could find the common belief which was well established; the present or the past reality and the transformation of reality were more and more scorned. Mallarmé, like Baudelaire, suffered from the ugliness and the monotony of reality. This reaction against society led them to take refuge in the literary domain and form the Symbolist movement which expressed all their ideals. "Le Symbolisme est essentiellement, l'idéalisme appliqué à la littérature."¹ Baudelaire looked at man's life as a series of symbols. In 'Correspondances,' we find his idea of symbolism:

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers
 Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;
 L'homme y passe à travers des forêts de symboles
 Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.²

The word 'Symbolism' is generally used to describe any mode of expression which, instead of referring to something directly, refers to it indirectly through the medium of something else. However, it is not the mere substitution of one object for another, but the use of concrete images or what T.S. Eliot called 'objective correlatives': a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events to express abstract ideas and emotions.

¹Pierre Castex et Paul Surer, Le Manuel des Etudes Littéraires Françaises (Paris: Hachette, 1954), p. 295.

²Baudelaire, "Correspondances," Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Pléiade, 1968), p. 11.

Mallarmé had defined Symbolism as the art of "evoking an object little by little so as to reveal a mood, or conversely, the art of choosing an object and extracting from it an 'état d'âme'." As Symbolism is the art of suggestion, consequently, this object should not be revealed openly and clearly, but should merely be hinted at and suggested. So Symbolist poetry inevitably has a certain built-in obscurity.

The second aspect is sometimes described as 'transcendental symbolism,' in which concrete images are used as symbols, not of particular thoughts and feeling within the poet, but of a vast and general ideal world of which the real world is merely an imperfect representation. The aim of the transcendental symbolist is to go beyond reality but use reality as his starting-point in order to make the transition from the real to the ideal so that the imagery in symbolist poetry of this kind is often obscure or confused. The various symbols are partial and inadequate manifestations. Based on the example Mallarmé himself used, if a poet wants to present to the reader the ideal flower, he must not draw too clearly the specific image of a rose or a lily, but must confuse the two images so that the essence of them both may be perceived.

Following the idea of musicality in Poe's Poetic Principle (1850), the Symbolists emphasized music in their poetic theory. Pater, in his essay on Giorgions, published in 1873, wrote "all art aspires toward the condition of music" and Verlaine began his Art Poétique, written in 1874: "De la musique avant toute chose."

To build the musical quality, words are precisely chosen for the power of their sonority. Therefore, no form can be fixed to express all

poetic ideas in order to attain the fluidity of music. The kind and the degree of freedom practised by the Symbolist writers varies with the individual: Baudelaire was no great innovator in this respect, Verlaine was hardly bold enough to go beyond 'vers libérés' to 'vers libres.' Rimbaud, on the other hand, went so far, adapting the form of the prose poem.¹

The English Literary Movements

In the Victorian Age, there appeared many literary movements which were inspired both by the social conditions and by foreign influence, especially, the French influence. Romanticism rose in the Pre-Victorian Age because of the adverse conditions of the society. There grew out of the economic crisis and depression of 1874, a long period of wage reduction, unemployment and industrial depression accompanied by strikes and mass demonstrations. It was not only economic break down that gave rise to a new social perspective but also more important, perhaps, the threat of war. Deterioration of the cities and degradation of human beings accompanied the industrial revolution. Morally, in the period of supreme prosperity, England forgot art and beauty, "L'Angleterre victorienne ne se préoccupe guère d'art désintéressé. Dans tous les domaines elle cultive et enseigne la religion des réalités concrètes, des bénéfices immédiates, du bien-être tangible."²

¹ Charles Chădwick, Symbolism (London: Methuen & Co., 1971), pp. 1-7.

² Albert J. Farmer, Le Mouvement Esthétique et 'Décadent' en Angleterre (1873-1900), p. 170.

The Victorian society was a bourgeois, materialist society. The Victorian era was an era of anxiety and discouragement. People who tried to escape from this, searched for many outlets in order to compensate for their sense of desperation. In the field of literature, poets escaped from society and reacted against Victorian rationalism, materialism and the utilitarian tradition. Reaction against Victorianism by the group was seen in the Oxford movement, and by the individual, in Charles Dickens. Besides, there was another important movement, the Pre-Raphaelite,¹ a group of poets who dedicated themselves to art and beauty. They varied on the moral value of art. The leaders of the group were Ruskin, Morris and Rossetti who tended exclusively toward fine aesthetics and were never interested in ethics. The Pre-Raphaelites had much sympathy with French culture. In the French fashion, they founded a magazine The Germ in which to set forth their aesthetic aims. Similar to the poets of

¹The term 'Pre-Raphaelite' came to be used when Holman Hunt and J.E. Millais adversely criticized Raphael's Transfiguration, challenged the classical doctrines expound by Sir Joshua Reynolds, and extolled the superior purity and simplicity of the Italian primitives. And the movement began, at the close of the 1840's as an attempt to introduce into visual art, not only the qualities of medieval Italian painting but the naturalistic accuracy of detail thought appropriate to the dawning age of science. But by the 1850's what is now associated with Pre-Raphaelite painting - the merely decorative neo-Medievalism, the Subjectivity, the dreaminess had become its dominant style.

the Romantic Age, they revolted against society. Swinburne, especially, could not adapt himself to the social conditions.

Of all the great Victorian poets, it was he [Swinburne] who made the most attack upon the idols of his time, upon the sentimental conception of love, upon bourgeois democracy, upon the institutional expression of the Christian religion . . . his work has always had about it the aroma of heresy, revolt and evil. He is the poet of passion, the poet of absolute liberty, the poet of evolution, the poet of tumultuous music.¹

The Pre-Raphaelites aroused a great deal of opposition and adverse criticism. They were accused of being morbid, affected, as well as conceited.

In the 1890 s another movement 'The Decadents' simultaneously rose. The word 'Decadents' is generally used to characterize the literary and artistic temper of the nineties. This movement was very close to the Pre-Raphaelite. Its writers declared themselves aesthetes and devotees of the cult of Art for Art's Sake, disdaining traditional values, revolting against social order, rejecting the dominant values of age. The tendencies of the Decadents were widely criticized among their contemporaries. According to Max Nordau, the Decadents were nihilists, mystics and ego-maniacs with psychological aberrations: ineptitude for attention, clear thought, and control of emotions, and other abnormalities of the instinct leading to negative, immoral attitudes. "Exhaustion, melancholia and disease are qualities found in the works of Pater, Wilde, Beardsley, and their French contemporaries; qualities that tend to vitiate whatever

¹Austin Wright, ed., Victorian Literature (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 295.

positive moral or aesthetic values 'decadent art' may have."¹

Max Beerbohm, in the first volume of the Yellow Book wrote that the most distinctive quality of the Decadents was artifice. Arthur Symons in an essay of 1893 entitled "The Symbolist Movement in Literature," clearly illuminated the contemporary impression of the Decadence that it was rather the expression of an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an extreme refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity. Holbrook Jackson, in the Eighteen-Nineties, presented the chief characteristics of the Decadents: perversity, artificiality, egoism and curiosity.²

The movement was inspired by the French influence which spread widely in the English literary domain of this age. In the early years of the nineteenth century interest in French literature among the English was almost non-existent. Then by 1820, the works of Chateaubriand, Atala, Le Génie du Christianisme, Voyage en Orient, had been translated into English. Many writers showed much interest in French literature. Thomas Moore, writing in the Edinburgh Review in November 1820, claimed that although the State of France might be favourable for commerce, it was lamentable in the realm of literature. Most English writers agreed with his contempt for French literature. After this, articles on French literature began to appear in other magazines: The Foreign Quarterly Review,

¹ Shiv K. Kumar, ed., British Victorian Literature (New York: New York University Press, 1969), p. 18.

² Russell M. Goldfarb, "Late Victorian Decadence" Journal of Aesthetics and Art criticism 20 (Summer, 1962), pp. 369-373.

The Foreign Review, The Westminster Review, The Athenaeum and The Literary Gazette. In the 1830 s, many periodicals were founded in England which studied French literature and interpreted it to English readers: The Critic, The Foreign Monthly Review, The British and Foreign Review. In the 1840 s the most highly esteemed novelists at that time in France, George Sand, Balzac, were hardly known in England. On the whole, the best informed English readers interested in French literature, between 1830 and 1850, read philosophical works, such as, those by Cousin, Michelet and Comte. In the 1860 s, the influence of Baudelaire brought a new trend into English literature when Swinburne published his articles on Les Fleurs du Mal in the Spectator in 1862. By 1870 French influence was strongly established in England, and poets were beginning to be inspired by French models. The English poets did not borrow only their subject matter from their French counterparts, but they adopted, as well, some of their poetic forms. Payne published a collection of his own poems in 1877 entitled Songs of Life and Death, which is his most distinguished work. J. A. Symonds, on the model of the French system, composed a whole collection entitled In the Key of Blue.¹

The Pre-Raphaelite and the Decadent movement were, later, the fruit of the French influence. Many artists were influenced by the new ideas: Rossetti, Swinburne, Pater, Morris and Wilde.

In 1894, it acquired the designation of 'yellow' which was the favourite colour of Rossetti, Morris and Burne-Jones. The colour had been

¹Enid Starkie, From Gautier to Eliot (London: Hutchinson, 1962), pp. 17-39.

further popularized by an increasing interest in the work of the French novelists whose books, because of the tone of their paper covers, were commonly known as 'yellow backs.' Then The Yellow Book appeared in April 1894, issued by Matthew and Lane. The book was covered in yellow with a striking black design by Beardsley. It was the book that preached no moralities and stood for beauty and joy of creation. Another book appearing in this decade was The Savoy. It surpassed the Yellow Book as an exponent of la fin de siècle, for Arthur Symons, its founder and editor, had been deeply imbued with the current of French decadence. Then in June 20, 1890 The Picture of Dorian Gray by Oscar Wilde appeared in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine. The public, observing this work, accused it of being immoral. They considered the work dangerous and decadent, unfamiliar to British readers. Wilde was strongly criticized by many contemporaries who were against him. The Daily Chronicle, published on June 30, 1890, reproached him: "It is a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French Decadents - a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with the mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction." Though widely criticized by his society, Wilde was considered one of the great poets of the time whose work was worth studying.