

THE ARTIST, THE DEVIL AND THE DANDY:

DECADENT THEMES IN THE WORKS OF J. K. HUYSMANS
AND OSCAR WILDE

By

Christa Giles

THE ARTIST, THE DEVIL AND THE DANDY:

DECADENT THEMES
IN THE WORKS OF J. K. HUYSMANS
AND OSCAR WILDE

By

Christa Giles



editura universității din bucurești®

2008

© *editura universității din bucurești*[®]
Șos. Panduri 90-92, București – 050663; Tel./Fax: 410.23.84
E-mail: editura_unibuc@yahoo.com
Internet: www.editura.unibuc.ro

Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României

GILES, CHRISTA

**The artist, the devil and the dandy: decadent themes
in the works of J.K. Huysmans and Oscar Wilde /**

Christa Giles – București: Editura Universității din
București, 2008

Bibliogr.

ISBN 978-973-737-476-9

821.133.1.09 Huysmans, J.K.

821.111.09 Wilde, O.

Tehnoredactare computerizată: **Tania Titu**

For my mother

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	9
Chapter One: DANDYISM.....	34
Chapter Two: SATANISM	70
Chapter Three: DREAMS AND FANTASY	110
Chapter Four: ART AND ARTISTS	160
Chapter Five: CONCLUSION	240
NOTES	244
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	269

INTRODUCTION

The central preoccupation of the Anglo-Irish dramatist Oscar Wilde and the French novelist Joris Karl Huysmans – a preoccupation which subsumes all of their work – was the relationship of life and art. Art was opposed to life but paradoxically depended on it. It enabled man to experience life more intensely but simultaneously denied life's validity. Art became a way of escaping life, yet it was also (by making us myriad-minded¹), a means of living life more fully. This series of paradoxes, which helped to clarify the nature of the relations between life and art, transformed the decadent into a modern ironist. His attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable resulted in disillusionment and a perverse reaffirmation of the ideal of art. The focus on these issues also reflected a concern with notions of the self and the problem of identity which emerged in Wilde and Huysmans' work as an interest in Satanism and dandyism. For as the division between art and life was underlined, art became more and more identified with artifice – the anti-natural.

The cornerstone of Wilde's and Huysmans' aesthetic was a radical anti-naturalism. This anti-naturalism was derived in the main from Baudelaire, and in the latter's work the cult of the artificial is inextricably bound to his belief in original sin. Indeed, Baudelaire believed that the eighteenth-century denial of original sin in part accounted for its inability to perceive what he conceived to be "real" beauty:

Tout ce qui est beau et noble est le résultat de la raison et du calcul. Le crime, dont l'animal humain a puisé le goût dans le ventre de sa mère, est originellement naturel. La vertu, au contraire, est *artificielle*, surnaturelle... Le mal se fait sans effort, *naturellement*, par fatalité; le bien est toujours le produit d'un art.²

Thus, he rejected the eighteenth-century belief in the natural goodness of man, claiming rather that man's natural tendency is for destruction and crime, while simultaneously espousing art and the artificial as the source of all good. Further, he claimed that capitalism or commerce (associated by Wilde and Huysmans with the middle classes) was satanic and being "naturelle est donc infâme."³ This reversal is elaborated upon by Huysmans' hero, Des Esseintes, who believes that "the dominant spirit of the age" is an "idiotic sentimentality" combined with a "ruthless commercialism."⁴ In his utter rejections of "bourgeois optics"⁵ we have in embryo Wilde's definition of

beauty as that which the middle classes call ugliness⁶ as well as his belief that deviations from instinct or nature allow for the creation of beauty in art. In the wake of Baudelaire and Huysmans, Wilde felt that natural law and, by extension, certain social and economic realities were abominable. Artifice became the means of defying the materialistic ethos and the determinism of the world of Malthus and Darwin.

Beauty, then, could exist only through man, that is, when created consciously or artificially. A natural corollary of this idea is that nature must be transmuted and re-created by the redemptive powers of the imagination before it could become art. Wilde, then, rejects the classical idea of art as the imitation of nature and suggests rather the subordination of nature to man. Indeed, "nature" in effect becomes, in Wilde's view, "our creation":

It is in our brain that she quickens to life. Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only, does it come into existence.⁷

This idea is, in part, derived from Baudelaire's *Salon de 1859*, where he claims that man's view will be limited since

he can only reproduce the fragment that he happens to see. Therefore, Baudelaire concludes that true realism lies rather in one's own perception of nature. Des Esseintes' favourite philosopher, Schopenhauer, expressed this idea cogently when he said that "The world is my representation. I do not see what is, what is is what I see."⁸ If a landscape is lovely, Baudelaire claims, it is not "par lui même, mais par moi, par ma grâce propre par l'idée ou le sentiment que j'y attache."⁹ The mind becomes the fabricator of beauty and it is in part for this reason that Wilde and Huysmans claim that technique is really personality.

What Wilde and Huysmans are concerned with are ways of seeing how the artist's internal vision transforms nature by imposing order upon it and investing it with meaning, thereby subordinating nature to his own vision. Wilde takes this idea a step further, not merely rejecting nature as an ideal of beauty, but suggesting in a radical reversal that nature is a reflection of art:

The nineteenth century, as we know it, is largely an invention of Balzac. ... Where, if not from the Impressionists, do we get those wonderful brown fogs that come creeping down our streets, blurring the gas-lamps and changing the houses into monstrous shadows? ... the extraordinary change that

has taken place in the climate of London during the last ten years is entirely due to a particular school of Art.¹⁰

Wilde did not merely express this in terms of paradox ("Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life"¹¹) and identify art with the artificial; he also expressed a desire to replace life with art. The idea of replacing life with art was adumbrated in the novel *A rebours* (1884), that "breviary of decadence" which had such an extraordinary influence over Dorian Gray. The very title of the novel evokes the idea of the cult of artificiality, and certainly the hero, Des Esseintes, considers artifice to be "the distinctive mark of human genius."¹² He repeatedly maligns nature ("Nature...has had her day; she has finally and utterly exhausted the patience of sensitive observers by the revolting uniformity of her landscapes and skylscapes"),¹³ and his tone and attitude are echoed by Wilde in "The Decay of Lying":

Enjoy Nature! I am glad to say that I have entirely lost that faculty. People tell us that Art makes us love Nature more than we loved her before; that it reveals her secrets to us; and that after a careful study of Corot and Constable we see things in her that had escaped our observation. My own experience is that the more we study Art, the less we care for Nature. What Art really reveals to us is

Nature's lack of design, her curious crudities, her extraordinary monotony, her absolutely unfinished condition. Nature has good intentions, of course, but, as Aristotle once said, she cannot carry them out. When I look at a landscape I cannot help seeing all its defects. It is fortunate for us, however, that Nature is so imperfect, as otherwise we should have no art at all. Art is our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature her proper place.¹⁴

This perception of nature culminates in an inability to view reality through any other medium but art. Vivian, in "The Decay of Lying," describes moving to the window at his hostess's insistence to view a beautiful sunset, only to find "a very second-rate Turner, a Turner of a bad period, with all the painter's worst faults exaggerated and overemphasised."¹⁵ In A rebours, the inversion of art and nature takes its most extreme form when Des Esseintes obtains artificial flowers which appear real but then, "tired of artificial flowers aping real ones, he wanted some natural flowers that would look like fakes."¹⁶ Further, he attempts to live completely isolated in an artificial world, creating in his house simulacra of various realities.

Wilde emphasised the importance of the individual personality, the centrality of the subjective vision, and, like Huysmans, he also underlined the primacy of the

imagination. The artist realises the non-existent, and therein lies his greatness. Thus, invoking the imagination, Wilde calls for a time when romance will reign:

Out of the sea will rise Behemoth and Leviathan, and sail round the high-pooped galleys, as they do on the delightful maps of those ages when books on geography were actually readable. Dragons will wander about the waste places, and the phoenix will soar from her nest of fire into the air. We shall lay our hands upon the basilisk, and see the jewel in the toad's head. Champing his gilded oats, the Hippogriff will stand in our stalls, and over our heads will float the Blue Bird singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be. But before this comes to pass we must cultivate the lost art of Lying.¹⁷

Facts are the province of the Philistine and Wilde claims that "if something cannot be done to check ... our monstrous worship of facts, Art will become sterile and beauty will pass away from the land."¹⁸ For art exists independent of facts, and while it may use "life and nature" as rough material, these are remoulded by the imagination. Thus Wilde concludes, "As a method, Realism is a complete failure."¹⁹ Similarly, Des Esseintes feels that given full rein,

"imagination could provide a more than adequate substitute for the vulgar reality of actual experience."²⁰

The Sibyl Vane episode in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggests the way in which the veneration of art, in the aesthete's view, supersedes life. For Sibyl Vane exists solely within the domain of her art. "She regarded me," Dorian tells us, "merely as a person in a play. She knows nothing of life."²¹ Indeed, it is because Sibyl speaks the words of Shakespeare and becomes the embodiment of the latter's creations that Dorian falls in love with her. Ironically, when she leaves the realm of art for life seeking what she imagines is "something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection,"²² Dorian, her "Prince Charming," rejects her. Ultimately, it is Lord Henry's view that "acting is so much more real than life"²³ which prevails. Thus, Sibyl Vane becomes less real than Ophelia or Cordelia. In the end art triumphs, and Dorian perceives Sibyl Vane's death in purely aesthetic terms:

"No," said Dorian Gray, "there is nothing fearful about it. It is one of the great romantic tragedies of the age. ... She lived her finest tragedy. ... When she knew its [love's] unreality, she died, as Juliet might have died. She passed again into the sphere of art. ... Her death has all the pathetic uselessness of martyrdom, all its wasted beauty."²⁴

For life, as Wilde suggests in "The Critic as Artist", is "terribly deficient in form,"²⁵ and therefore we must turn to art. Indeed, a sense of form is, in his view, the basis of creative achievement.²⁶ This obsession with form was reflected not only in the complex, eccentric, and ornate style of the decadent artists, but also in Wilde's and Huysmans' concern with the dandy – in their dandaical attempts to transmute life into art. Of course they take the idea to its logical (or illogical) conclusion until life becomes a mere reflection of art, thereby enabling the artist to elude the world while paradoxically remaining of it.

Art, then, becomes a means of both escaping reality and simultaneously asserting a total belief in the powers of the imagination. In *A rebours*, the ideal is attained by means of the deception of the senses. It is for this reason that in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *A rebours* is referred to as a book in which "The life of the senses was described in the terms of mystical philosophy."²⁷ For the decadent, while he endlessly moves between titillation and momentary satisfaction of the senses, is paradoxically a cerebral hero, a product of his society; and despite the fact that may wish to immerse himself in sensualism, is constantly examining his life and intellectualizing. Des Esseintes' and Wilde's use of "the misty upper regions of art"²⁸ in effect becomes the expression of "the unsatisfied longing for an ideal."²⁹ Thus rather than going to England, Des Esseintes can simply go

to an English tavern, as to visit the country in question would simply result in disappointment. For when Des Esseintes does visit Holland, he expects to enter a painting by Bruegel and is disillusioned: reality, he concludes, is a poor second to art. Wilde adopts this idea that the mind is its own place and can make a Holland of Paris and a Paris of Holland if it so chooses, but he modifies it for his own purposes. In order to visit Japan, Wilde maintained, one does not go there, for Japan is the invention of Japanese artists. As creators, artists are the fabricators of the only true reality. Thus, Wilde concludes, to see Japan, one has but to immerse oneself in a Japanese art. Wilde, then, does not advocate a mere deception of the senses, but believes that what we see is due to the medium of art, and "art, very fortunately, has never once told us the truth."³⁰

In rejecting the reality of the external world and attempting to create a new world through imaginative means, the concomitant withdrawal into the self predisposed the decadent to narcissism and introspection. There was a new focus upon man's unconscious as the wellspring of the personality, and the decadent's deliberate search to experience or depict the totality of man's nature also resulted in a new emphasis upon evil as an aspect of man's personality. This interest in the complexity of the self issued in part from a sense that man in the 1880s could embrace no certitudes. Humean scepticism was prevalent,

undermining the reliability of rational and empirical arguments, raising doubts about the existence of an external world, God, and the possibility of attaining truth by either inductive or deductive means. Wilde questioned the validity of scientific reasoning which was preoccupied solely with the objective world, and maintained that "science can never grapple with the irrational. That is why it has no future...in this world."³¹ But decadent art not only grappled with the irrational, it also turned to the unconscious as the only reality remaining to it after a rejection of the external world. It is in part for this reason that the dream and satanism were recurrent themes in Wilde and Huysmans' work.

The emphasis upon sin and vice in Wilde's and Huysmans' work issues from a complex source, stemming not only from an interest in the irrational and unconscious, the desire to obtain self-knowledge, the hope of embracing the totality of life by discovering unimagined and unexperienced sensations, and a desire to shock the bourgeoisie. It is also an assertion of individuality, an attempt to revolt against the realization that possession of the ideal inevitably leads to disappointment. As Philippe Jullian notes, in a sort of perverse fury, decadents focussed on evil and vice in part because they were unable to "find a faith or love to match their illusions."³² But it is also true, however, that the decadents sought and found a new and

different kind of beauty which was entirely dependent on the subjective vision. Thus Wilde considered sin to be "an essential element of progress." Without it, he tells us,

the world would stagnate or grow old or become colourless. By its curiosity, Sin increases the experience of the race. Through its intensified assertion of individualism, it saves us from monotony of type. In its rejection of the current notions about morality, it is one with the higher ethics.³³

Similarly in *Là-bas*, we are told that "one can take pride in going as far in crime as a saint in virtue." As the aesthetic criterion was the sole criterion, and as Wilde believed that sin was "the only real colour element in modern life,"³⁴ it was naturally the province of both the artist and the creative individual to recreate the world by means of "form and colour."³⁵ Wilde's idea that nature is "a collection of phenomena external to man, people only discover in her what they bring to her,"³⁶ ensured that the sole source of beauty was art. But of course, as what constituted art was subjectively determined, the concept of beauty became essentially a rhetorical one. Further, Huysmans felt, like Wilde, that any subject was the province of art: "Green pustules and pink flesh are all one to us; we depict both because both exist, because the criminal deserves to be studied as much as the most perfect of men."³⁷

Wilde's and Huysmans' perception of the hermetic nature of art thereby allowed for evil and vice as appropriate subject matter. Indeed, after Baudelaire, evil was positively identified with beauty. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde transforms this idea so that under Lord Henry's tutelage, Dorian not only sees beauty in sin but "looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception of the beautiful."³⁸ Further, in the wake of Huysmans and Baudelaire, Wilde would adopt sin, vice, and perversion as subject matter simply because their artificiality, their departure from normality, validated them, in his view. His postulate was that we can learn more from the sinner than from the saint,³⁹ and that we can find great beauty in the bizarre and unnatural. "The artist is never morbid," according to Wilde, because he "expresses everything. He stands outside his subject, and through its medium produces incomparable and artistic effects."⁴⁰ By extension, Wilde believes that the creative individual is antinomian. "To be good, according to the vulgar standard of goodness, is obviously quite easy," Wilde concludes. "It merely requires a certain amount of sordid terror, a certain lack of imaginative thought and a certain low passion for middle-class respectability."⁴¹ And Huysmans even goes so far as to define diabolism as an "execration of impotence" and a "hatred of the mediocre."⁴²

Art which deals with vice and perversity, then, has an added function, for it serves to jolt the bourgeois out of his complacency. The world, Wilde felt, "hates Individualism,"⁴³ and therefore he believed that rebellion and disobedience constitute a healthy protest and are man's original virtues, his only means to freedom. "He who would be free," quotes Wilde, "must not conform."⁴⁴

This idea is in part derived from Sade's work, and we are reminded that the world "libertine" is derived from the Latin "liber," that is to say, free. The desire for freedom, both from the prison of the self and from externally imposed social restrictions, was, of course, a remnant of romanticism. But as we have seen the decadent does not resolve this rebellion in action; rather, he withdraws, undermines, or obliquely subverts the existing social order.

This constant tension between the reality and the ideal drains the decadent and results in inaction or withdrawal into a dream world. Des Esseintes claims that "anyone who dreams of the ideal, prefers illusion to reality,"⁴⁵ yet his disengagement from life ends in paralysis and ennui. He dreams of London, but the realization that the London of his imagination is doubtless infinitely superior to the London of actuality leads to paralysis; he no longer wishes to make the trip. Wilde, like Huysmans,

exalts the idea of inaction. Thus, in "The Critic as Artist" Gilbert cries, "Action! What is action? ...It is a base concession to fact. The world is made by the singer for the dreamer."⁴⁶ For the nature of the aesthetic experience involves the "sterile" passive contemplation of beauty, and therefore "to do nothing at all is the most difficult thing in the world, the most difficult and the most intellectual."⁴⁷ The imagination, the ideal, supersedes life, but the bifurcation or attempt to reconcile the ideal and the real results in disillusionment. "It is sometimes said that the tragedy of an artist's life is that he cannot realise his ideal," Gilbert tells us in "The Critic as Artist."

But the true tragedy that dogs the steps of most artists is that they realise their ideal too absolutely. For, when the ideal is realised, it is robbed of its wonder and its mystery, and becomes simply a new starting-point for an ideal that is other than itself.⁴⁸

It is on this same principle that Lord Illingworth informs Gerald Arbuthnot that "One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry."⁴⁹ Similarly, Lord Henry Wotton's wife is described as a woman who fell repeatedly in love but "whose passion was never returned" and consequently "kept all her illusions."⁵⁰ Again, on another level, Lord Henry speaks of the cigarette as being

the most perfect pleasure simply because it both satisfies and leaves one unsatisfied.⁵¹ Paradoxically, then, while the decadent escapes into artifice and searches after the ideal, as art remains an expression of life, or, rather, life is experienced most fully through the artifices of art, the decadent is trapped by his own aesthetic which constitutes an irresolvable paradox. Thus his only possible recourse is the adoption of an ironic stance.

A sense of frustration and ambivalence is continuously articulated by the decadent. For him art becomes not merely a way of escaping boredom, a means of reconstructing a paradise of sensation and thought, the assertion of an ideal, but an attempt to escape reality. Thus the art with which Dorian surrounds himself is his means of "forgetfulness, modes by which he could escape."⁵² Similarly, Des Esseintes feels an ever present desire to escape from a "dull and stupid"⁵³ age, "from the penitentiary of his own time." He requires art to bring him release from "the trivial existence of which he was so heartily sick."⁵⁴ Moreover, a great tension is produced in the decadent between an intensely felt inner world and the refractoriness of social reality: the self as an organic part of society yet in opposition to it. Thus, according to Symons, "to live through a single day with an overpowering

consciousness of our real position would drive man out of his senses." Art, he concludes, is not a solace, but "before all things an escape."⁵⁵

Wilde's work also reflects Huysmans' idea that the escape into art is both an attempt to assert total faith in the powers of the imagination ("it is through Art, and through Art only, that we can realise our perfection")⁵⁶ and a means of escaping the world (it is "through Art and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence").⁵⁷ It is in part for this reason that Huysmans felt the artist is compelled to turn to the dream or other ages for his subject matter:

The fact is that when the period in which a man of talent is condemned to live is dull and stupid, the artist is haunted, perhaps unknown to himself, by a nostalgic yearning for another age. . . . In some cases there is a return to past ages, to vanished civilizations, to dead centuries; in others there is a pursuit of dream and fantasy...⁵⁸

This desire to escape from a social and spiritual wasteland accounts for Wilde's great interest in the exotic, the legendary, and the fantastic as manifested in *Salomé*, *Vera*, or *the Nihilists*, *A_Florentine Tragedy*, and *La Sainte*

Courtisane. In "The Decay of Lying," Vivian expresses the belief that the artist should avoid what he calls

modernity of form and modernity of subject-matter. To us, who live in the nineteenth century, any century is a suitable subject for art except our own. The only beautiful things are the things that do not concern us.⁵⁹

So, following what their master Flaubert adumbrated in *Salammô*, and in *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, Wilde and Huysmans became interested in the blossoming of ancient societies just before their decline. The excesses, perversions, and grandiose passion and intensity depicted in such paintings as Delacroix's 'Sardanapalus' suggested an irrationality and corruption of colourful hedonism and flowering of physical appetites, luxury, and depravity which were extremely seductive when juxtaposed with what they felt be the obsession with science, conformity, and materialism of their own age. In *La Nuit de Cléopâtre*, Gautier expressed an idea which would give rise to Wilde's sphinx and Salomé:

Our world is very small beside the ancient world; our feasts are paltry affairs compared with the terrifying banquets of Roman patricians and Asiatic princes. With our paltry habits, we find it hard to conceive of those enormous existences which made

reality of all the strangest, boldest, most monstrous, impossible inventions of the imagination.⁶⁰

Of course the poem "The Sphinx" is directly derived from an incident in *A rebours*⁶¹ in which Des Esseintes' liason with a ventriloquist allows him to re-enact Flaubert's dialogue between the Chimera and the Sphinx. The emphasis upon sensation and refinement of sensual pleasure which this theme connoted held a particular attraction for Wilde, and the very fact that such subject matter was provocative invested it with great appeal, as it enabled him to "épater les bourgeois."

In his poem "The Sphinx," eroticism, fatality, and exoticism, the emphasis upon the decorative surface, remind one of Moreau's paintings, as does his attempt to create an almost synaesthetic experience for the reader, bringing sound, sight, and scent into play. The sphinx of the poem of that name is an androgyne. The attempt to escape reality in art, the rejection of accepted moral values, and the immersion into an internal world of one's own mind in this poem suggest a kind of auto-eroticism or, in Huysmans' words, "spiritual onanism." The androgyne becomes the supreme symbol of the decadent's ambivalence, suggesting his rejection of nature while at the same time paradoxically waking in him "foul dreams of sensual life."⁶² Huysmans' description of Moreau's

paintings at the Salon of 1889 evokes this self-enclosure, this fascination with the past, this apotheosis of the fantastic:

Spiritual onanism – a soul exhausted by secret thoughts. Insidious appeals to sacrilege and debauchery – goddesses riding hyppogriffs and streaking their lapis lazuli wings . . . exceptional individuals retrace their steps down the century and out of disgust for the promiscuities they have to suffer, hurl themselves into the abysses of bygone ages, into the tumultuous spaces of dreams and nightmares.⁶³

Cerebral lechery is possible only in art, and as the hermaphrodite is a creation of art, it answers the decadent's need to derive pleasure from the imaginary and the artificial. Moreover, the evocation of past ages helps us to

leave the age in which we were born, and to pass into other ages, and find ourselves not exiled from their air. It can teach us how to escape from our experience, and to realise the experiences of those who are greater than we are.⁶⁴

Wilde deliberately evokes a state of inertia or stasis in his poem (by means of the repetition of images and ideas) in order to create a kind of dream-like unreality whereby the

real (the student in his room) and the imaginary (the visitation of the sphinx), myth and actuality interpenetrate. The sphinx, of course, is omnipresent in late nineteenth-century art, and naturally both Wilde and Huysmans would be particularly attracted to this symbol of the unknown as they constantly extolled the value of the mysterious in both life and art.

The poem "The Sphinx" is certainly erudite, elliptical, and deliberately self-conscious, and whether or not one considers it to be successful, is consistent with Gautier's definition of the decadent style in his famous notice of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* in 1868:

The style of decadence...is nothing else than art arrived at that extreme point of maturity produced by those old civilizations which are growing old with their oblique suns— a style that is ingenious, complicated, learned, full of shades of meaning and research, always pushing further the limits of language, borrowing from all the technical vocabularies, taking colours from all palettes, notes from all keyboards, forcing itself to express in thought that which is most ineffable, and in form the vaguest and most fleeting contours; listening, that it may translate them, to the subtle confidences of the neuropath, to the avowals of ageing and depraved passion, and to the

singular hallucinations of the fixed idea verging on madness. This style of decadence is the last effort of the Word (*Verbe*), called upon to express everything, and pushed to the utmost extremity. We may remind ourselves, in connection with it, of the language of the later Roman Empire, already mottled with the greenness of decomposition, and, as it were, gamy (*faisandée*), and of the complicated refinements of the Byzantine school, the last form of Greek art fallen into deliquescence. Such is the inevitable and fatal idiom of peoples and civilizations where factitious life has replaced the natural life, and developed in man unknown wants. Besides, it is no easy matter, this style despised of pedants, for it expresses new ideas with new forms and words that have not yet been heard. In opposition to the classic style, it admits of shading, and these shadows teem and swarm with the larvae of superstitions, the haggard phantoms of insomnia, nocturnal terrors, remorse which starts and turns back at the slightest noise, monstrous dreams stayed only by impotence, obscure phantasies at which the day-light would stand amazed, and all that the soul conceals of the dark, the unformed, and the vaguely horrible, in its deepest and furthest recesses.⁶⁵

Quite apart from the emphasis on style in the sphinx, the poem's subject matter was in large part determined by Wilde's desire to point out the "uselessness" of all useful things, for by deliberately dealing with the imaginary and underlining the idea that all art is amoral, he implicitly upholds his belief that all art is essentially hermetic and "never expresses anything but itself."⁶⁶ The decadents rejected the idea that didacticism had any place in art, and the decadent movement of art towards artifice, or away from nature, suggested not only a rejection of reality, but also the autonomy and self-sufficiency of the new reality created by the work. Thus in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde maintained that "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written or badly written. That is all."⁶⁷ Similarly, Baudelaire wrote that poetry 'must not under the penalty of death or degradation assimilate itself to science or to morality. It does not have truth as its end, it has only itself.'⁶⁸ Gautier in his preface to *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (1834) encapsulates many of the ideas associated with the doctrine of "l'art pour l'art." Art, he perceived, became the means of liberating the self from the constraints imposed upon man by society and by his own animal nature. He insisted upon the autonomy of art and attacked utilitarian and moralistic journalists, while formulating his own artistic credo:

there is nothing really beautiful save what is of no possible use. Everything useful is ugly, for it expresses a need, and man's needs are low and disgusting, like his own poor, wretched nature. The most useful place in a house is the watercloset...though I am not a dilettante, I prefer the sound of a poor fiddle and tambourines to that of the Speaker's bell. I would sell my breeches for a ring, and my bread for jam. The occupation which best befits civilized man seems to me to be idleness or analytically smoking a pipe or a cigar. . . . I am aware that there are people who prefer mills to churches, and the bread of the body to the bread of the soul. I have nothing to say to such people. They deserve to be economists in this world and in the next likewise.⁶⁹

The idea that "as long as a thing is useful or necessary to us...it is outside the proper sphere of art"⁷⁰ became a central tenet in Huysmans' and Wilde's conceptions of art, and of course one corollary of this belief was their concern with the anti-natural or artificial. In *A rebours* Huysmans is concerned with the aestheticization of the external world and therefore a reversal takes place whereby art steps across the boundaries and moves into the world of life, while life moves into the world of art.

Moreover, Huysmans takes the radical position that aesthetics not only supersede art, it becomes a moral principle in itself. Indeed it is for this reason that Wilde speaks of it being the first "duty" of man to be as artificial as possible.⁷¹

The work of both Huysmans and Wilde is at all times concerned with the relationship of man and art; this relationship is expressed in their work as a series of inescapable paradoxes. The note of disillusionment and cynicism in much of Wilde's and Huysmans' writing is met and contrasted with the mourning for a loss of innocence and moments of revelation which seem to compensate in some way for that loss. Whether or not the decadent artist remains trapped in his own subjectivity, unable to reconcile the actual and the ideal, he is at all times engaged in a quest for that ideal. Thus negation, which manifests itself as satanism, rejection of religion and traditional values and modes of perceiving the world, becomes in a sense an affirmation through negation. Artifice, therefore, is not simply the rejection of nature; it is exalted by the decadent to the level of an ideal, albeit an ideal which is unattainable. And this idea, perhaps the crux of Wilde's thought, was his inheritance from the French decadent movement in general and Huysmans in particular.

CHAPTER 1

DANDYISM

Le dandy suprême incarnation de l'idée du beau transportée dans la vie matérielle, celui qui dicte la forme et règle des manières

Baudelaire

*What is eternal? What escapes decay?
A certain faultless, matchless, deathless line,
Curving consummate.*

A. O'Shaughnessy

The reverence for the artificial issued from the "decadent's" desire to be more than natural—to triumph over the material. Baudelaire's dandy would strive to create "une originalité" which was at the same time supposed to be "contenu" within the "limites extérieures des convenances."⁷² Originality, then, was a means whereby the dandy was able to transmute a life "terribly deficient in form"⁷³ into art. The dandy's nobility, his superiority, could be gauged by the artificiality which he created or with which he surrounded himself. In this respect Wilde and Huysmans follow Baudelaire by maintaining (with the customary dandaical inversion) that "absolute materialism" is paradoxically "not far from the purest idealism."⁷⁴ That is to say, a material form becomes the means of containing the original, the spiritual:

In and of itself every idea is endowed with immortal life, just like a person. All forms, even those created by man, are immortal. Because form is independent of matter and it is not molecules that constitute form.⁷⁵

In Wilde's view the artist was the master of form; and like the dandy he gains his inspiration from "the dominance of form."⁷⁶ Beauty, then, was to be derived from form rather than content and the dandy was the logical embodiment of these ideas, being both self-created and a connoisseur of

beautiful things. Wilde's most famous dandy Dorian Gray was, as he himself indicated, "a fantastic variation on Huysmans' over-realistic study of the artistic temperament in our inartistic age."⁷⁷ The structure of *A rebours* suggests the reasons for Wilde's fascination. For the central character in the novel, Des Esseintes, is delineated by means of his interest in the arts and verbal decorations rather than by plot development.

Concomitant with the emphasis on form over content was an emphasis on style ("In all important matters, style, not sincerity, is the essential").⁷⁸ A corollary of this obsession was that the dandaical would have its place even in the realm of language. "I was enchanted," writes Whistler in a letter to Mallarmé (19 November, 1890) "...in reading the delightful sonnet [Billet à Whistler]." He then rhapsodizes over a particular line: "It is really superb and very dandyish at the same time."⁷⁹ Whistler's dandyism issues from the same source as Huysmans' and Wilde's and like theirs is obviously not merely sartorial. In the "Ten O'Clock Lectures" which Huysmans admired, he reiterates a common theme:

that nature is always right is an assertion artistically as untrue as it is one whose truth is universally taken for granted. Nature is very rarely right...⁸⁰

Wilde praises decorative art as a "deliberate rejection of Nature as the ideal of beauty." It follows then that Wilde was to call *The Picture of Dorian Gray* "an essay on the decorative arts."⁸¹ For decorative art, in Wilde's view, fostered in the soul "that sense of form which is the basis of creative no less than critical achievement"⁸² The worship of form was of course one of the central tenets of dandyism.

The concern with the concept of form in Wilde's work is reflected not only in his interest in costume and dress, but also in his appreciation of the complex, eccentric, ornate, and obscure style of Huysmans' novels. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *A rebours* is described as being written in a style "vivid and obscure at once, full of argot and archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases."⁸³ This phrase recalls Gautier's famous "Notice" to *Les Fleurs du Mal*, in which he concentrated on the importance of form in decadent authors. The primacy of form, "the imaginative beauty of the design"⁸⁴ (which could herald Art Nouveau) is also for Wilde and Huysmans synonymous with the dandy. For the dandy is he who suggests an aesthetic mode of being, the one who connects art with life by means of the self-created individual. "There is no art where there is no style," Wilde proclaimed, "no style where there is no unity, and unity is of the individual."⁸⁵ The dandy represents an aspiration

toward the ideal in form and moreover connects the rituals of society with those of art: "The canons of good society" are therefore "the canons of art. Form is absolutely essential to it."⁸⁶ Form is not removed from life, rather it becomes "the secret of life."⁸⁷ An extension of this idea is the dandy's replacement of moral with aesthetic values. Mrs Erlynnes' frivolous statement, "manners before morals,"⁸⁸ in fact has its genesis in Barbey d'Aurevilly's *Du dandysme et de George Brummel*, where it is stated: "Les manières c'est la fusion des mouvements et de l'esprit et du corps."⁸⁹ By extension then, the body becomes a signifying surface, indeed at once "surface and symbol."⁹⁰ It is for this reason that Wilde states that the mystery in the world resides "in the visible not invisible,"⁹¹ and that it is "only shallow people who do not judge by appearances."⁹²

Dandyism not only became the embodiment of the aesthetic mode of being, its very existence functioned as an unspoken reproof to the Philistines. Dandyism as a theory was essentially developed by Jules Barbey d'Aurevilly and Baudelaire, who obviously influenced Huysmans and Wilde a great deal; both were predisposed to view the dandy as a new type of aristocrat. Indeed, he was symbolic of an aristocracy of spirit in a world which was not "moving towards good or evil," but in Renan's view, moving towards "mediocrity."⁹³ Therefore, Baudelaire

concluded that the only reasonable form of government was the aristocratic,⁹⁴ and Barbey saw Brummel as a man who did not work but existed and was therefore "a lesson in elegance to the vulgar mind," as his very existence implied a rejection of materialism and utility.

Thus, in Barbey's *Les Diaboliques*, the dandy tells the Philistine, "My dear fellow, men like me have always existed for the sole purpose of astounding men . . . like you."⁹⁵ Similarly, in "Pen Pencil and Poison" the "young dandy sought to be somebody, rather than to do something. He recognised that Life itself is an art, and has its modes of style no less than the arts that seek to express it."⁹⁶ The dandies in Wilde's plays are significantly all aristocrats, and Des Esseintes comes from an aristocratic family. They possess money because they have inherited it, not because (in contrast with the bourgeois) they have worked for it. Moreover, they value money solely because it enables them to create works of art in every sphere – for the dandy is an artist in all things. The dandy has an obligation, a responsibility, to suggest an unspoken revilement of mediocrity and vulgarity. He is the dedicated, ever-vigilant enemy of the good bourgeois who is the "enemy of art, of perfume, a fanatic of utensils."⁹⁷ It follows, then, that the "first duty of life is to be as artificial as possible,"⁹⁸ and that "to be natural is to be obvious, and

to be obvious is to be inartistic.”⁹⁹ The dandy protects himself from pedestrian minds by remaining aloof and inverting the clichés and beliefs of the bourgeoisie, while at all times remaining conscious of his aristocratic spirit which addresses itself only to those capable of hearing him.

Thus, many of the artists of the period, particularly those termed decadent, did not desire or seek a wider audience. In *La Plume* in 1896 Péladan wrote that Rops (whose work is described in such detail in *A rebours*) was unknown to the public:

Three hundred subtle minds admire and love him, and this approbation of thinkers is all that matters to this master; if a man of the middle classes should happen to show a liking for one of his works, he would immediately destroy it.¹⁰⁰

Des Esseintes similarly finds that the work of art

that appeals to charlatans, endears itself to fools, and is not content to arouse the enthusiasm of a few connoisseurs, is thereby polluted in the eyes of the initiate and becomes commonplace, almost repulsive.¹⁰¹

Huysmans obviously shared this view, for in writing *A rebours* he claimed that he was creating a “hermetic book” which would be “closed to fools.”¹⁰² Wilde, while he displayed a similar contempt for the middle classes,

nevertheless turned to them in order to popularize his ideas. The hatred of the bourgeoisie, the public, the sense that the artist is appealing to an elite, characterizes much of the work of the period, and although Wilde appealed to the masses, his dandyism and the dandyism of many of his characters meant that his inner being remained untouched; he appeared inviolable. The dandy is essentially an outsider, and, as such, is not subject to stiff social regulations but only to his own law. The "culte de soi-même," where the self is transformed into a work of art, is not mere self-indulgence or narcissism, but indeed a religion where the values of form and beauty and, by extension, artificiality, are worshipped in the face of barbarism. The dandy's weapons are his intellect and his person—his external being. Wilde's dandy is considered to be of supreme value, not merely because of his originality, but because he is the embodiment of individualism. Thus:

A man is called affected . . . if he dresses as he likes to dress. But in doing so he is acting in a perfectly natural manner. Affectation, in such matters, consists in dressing according to the views of one's neighbor.¹⁰³

The dandy, in effect, even while existing in society, is nevertheless a nonconformist. In *Lady Windermere's Fan*, when Lord Augustus agrees with Graham, the latter replies,

"Sorry to hear it, Tuppy; whenever people agree with me, I always feel I must be in the wrong."¹⁰⁴ In Wilde's plays, then, the dandy is invariably wicked and possesses the art of pleasing by displeasing: "Dear Lord Darlington," the Duchess of Berwick remarks, evincing a pleased fascination, "how thoroughly depraved you are."¹⁰⁵ Similarly, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry manages to both fascinate and repel simultaneously, and, faithful to Baudelaire's dicta, constantly astounds without betraying his haughty satisfaction at never being astounded himself. The desire of the dandy, like the decadent, is to diverge as far as possible from nature, to abrogate life in favour of art. In *Lady Windermere's Fan* an individual named Hopper has atrocious manners. He is therefore described by the dandy as being "one of nature's gentlemen, the worst type of gentlemen I know."¹⁰⁶ For the dandy strives to overcome nature by working in the realm of forms, by making his own existence a work of art. In Wilde's view, then, one should either "be a work of art or wear a work of art."¹⁰⁷ Art is not, a reflection of life; art is life – replaces life. Therefore Dorian Gray models himself upon the dandy and, to him, life becomes "the first, the greatest of the arts, and for it all the other arts seemed to be but a preparation. Fashion . . . in its own way is an attempt to assert the absolute modernity of beauty."¹⁰⁸ Wilde not only stressed the connection between art and life, but

through a series of ironic inversions, linked the serious and the trivial or frivolous and, in doing so of course, implicitly protested against the dull and earnest mediocrity of the bourgeoisie. "My dear fellow," Graham exclaims to Lord Darlington in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, "what on earth should we men do going on about purity and innocence? A carefully wrought buttonhole is much more effective."¹⁰⁹ In effect, the dandy's greatness lies in his ability to create a freedom out of his imprisonment, to deny nature through his emphasis on the artificial.

It is for this reason that makeup is revered in decadent literature, for it is symbolic of a denial of nature; indeed, the application of makeup is exalted to an artistic function. Thus, in Gray's *The Barber*, the poet significantly dreams he is a barber who alters and transforms nature into aesthetic perfection with monomaniacal fervour:

I moulded with my hands
The mobile breasts, the valley; and the waist
I touched; and pigments reverently placed
Upon their thighs in sapient spots and stains,
Beryls and crysolites and diaphanes,
And gems whose hot harsh names are never said.
I was a masseur; and my fingers bled
With wonder as I touched their awful limbs.¹¹⁰

Symons, too, often focusses on art and artifice in his choice of subject matter. In *Impression: To MC*, "Powder, wig, and pink and lace/And those pathetic eyes of hers" conduce to the ideal in "this miraculous rose of gold."¹¹¹ In Beardsley's work the toilette scene predominates, and the dressing table becomes an altar and beauty or artifice – the absolute good. Des Esseintes possesses an enormous collection of perfume and makeup, and through him artifice is raised to the level of a disciplined idealism. From the constraints of nature, the decadent artist triumphs, crying, like Yeats, "Art is art because it is not nature."¹¹² Thus, Arthur Symons prefaced the second edition of *Silhouettes*, which appeared in 1896, with a short essay which defends his poetry against reviews which had objected to "the faint smell of patchouli about them." In his defence he says,

Is there any 'reason in nature' why we should write exclusively about the natural blush if the delicately acquired blush of rouge has any attraction for us? Both exist: both, I think, are charming in their way: and the latter, as a subject, has, at all events, more novelty. If you prefer your 'new-mown hay' in the hayfield, and I, it may be, in a scent-bottle, why may not my individual caprice be allowed to find expression as much as well as your? ... but I enjoy quite other scents and sensations as

well, and I take the former for granted, and write my poem, for a change, about the latter. There is no necessary difference in artistic value between a good poem about a flower in the hedge and a good poem about the scent in a sachet.¹¹³

In the first volume of *The Yellow Book*, Beerbohm presents these ideas in an extreme form, equating artifice with religion and endowing the artificer with the powers of the creator:

the era of rouge is upon us, and as only in an elaborate era can man by the tangled accrescency of his own pleasures and emotions reach that refinement which is his highest excellence, and by making himself, so to say, independent of Nature, come nearest to god, so only in an elaborate era is woman perfect. Artifice is the strength of the world.¹¹⁴

Thus dandyism represents a conscious, intelligent, artificial beauty which serves to remove the dandy from the animal. This assertion of form is a means of expressing the ideal through the vehicle of the material. For only through the mask of the body can the painter show the mystery of the soul.

Through the aestheticization of the quotidian the dandy consciously *creates* significance. For it is not “merely

in art that the body is the soul. In every sphere of life Form is the beginning of things."¹¹⁵ Baudelaire speaks of the religion of dandyism not only because it was an attempt "to correct and improve on nature,"¹¹⁶ but also because it was a means of forging spiritual values in an age of "idiotic sentimentality combined with ruthless commercialism."¹¹⁷ The self-discipline, the impassivity and controlled behaviour of the dandy, is an outward manifestation of a strict code. Therefore Des Esseintes in his earlier years would receive tailors, etc. in a large hall where he would "ascend an imposing pulpit and preach them a sermon on dandyism."¹¹⁸

Dandyism through its "doctrine de l'élégance et de originalité"¹¹⁹ invests life with significance. Indeed the pose that the dandy adopts implies a philosophy of life, a "formal recognition of the importance of treating life from a definite and reasoned standpoint."¹²⁰ Moreover, as Balzac wrote in his article on dandyism, "Traité de la Vie Elégante": "L'Elégance dramatise la vie."¹²¹ This idea that elegance dramatizes life is suggested by the fact that the dandy exists essentially before his mirror or in the eyes of others. Certainly, Des Esseintes lives in isolation at Fontenay, but his dandyism remains an expression of superiority in the face of an absent rabble, and the spectre of mediocrity and commerciality. The philosophy, the pose

of the dandy, is in fact a creation of values which differ from those of society. For the dandy holds that to accept "the standard of the age" would be a form of "the grossest immorality."¹²² In his creation of the self the dandy adopts a role on "the stage of the world."¹²³ In contrast with Wilde, Huysmans' dandies wear their clothes less as a theatrical costume and more as a barely perceptible sign of inner superiority. Naturally, only the initiated can perceive this superiority on the strength of their apparel. Further, the emphasis in Huysmans' novel is less upon the outward signs than upon the inner workings of the dandy's mind. Indeed Huysmans' dandy's perception—that of the analytical detached observer—is the essence of dandyism.

In both Wilde's and Huysmans' work the dandy is supremely intelligent, conscious of the implications and effects of his own actions. But in Wilde's work the adoption of the role becomes imbued with symbolic significance. When Durtal in *Là-bas* agonizes over 'his mania for thinking, thinking...his heart was dead and could not be revived,'¹²⁴ we are reminded of Lord Henry's encapsulation of the dandaical mentality. "If a man treats life artistically," Lord Henry asserts, "his brain is his heart."¹²⁵ However, Wilde, unlike Huysmans, rather than showing the cerebrations of the dandy uses his adoption of a role as a symbol for the "return of art to life." It is for this reason that

Lord Henry exclaims, "I love acting. It is so much more real than life."¹²⁶

The emphasis on acting and role-playing stems from this interest in psychology and the concept of the self, the philosophical adherence to a conscious artificiality, a hatred of the commonplace, and a desire to replace life with art. In *A rebours* Des Esseintes takes a ventriloquist as a lover in order to have her enact the role of the Sphinx and Chimera. Baudelaire, in a semi-ironic self portrait in "La Fanfarlo" (1847), has his protagonist (Samuel Cramer) take as a lover a dancer who comes to him dressed as Columbine (only one of her many roles) and, it is underlined, highly rouged. Dorian Gray falls in love with an actress, Sibyl Vane, and Durtal in *Là-bas* questions himself as to whether Madame Chantelouve, his mistress, is "after all . . . acting a part – like myself."¹²⁷ It is this penchant for analysis and observation which is evinced by the dandy Dorian Gray as he reveals to the painter Basil Hallward the loathsome parody of the original the painting has become:

The young man was leaning against the mantelshelf, watching him with that strange expression that one sees on the faces of those who are absorbed in a play when some great artist is acting. There was neither real sorrow in it nor real joy. There was simply the passion of the spectator...¹²⁸

Of course, throughout Wilde's and Huysmans' work, the dandy is equated with the artist and the critic – the appreciator of beauty. And as Wilde reiterates, "there is no fine art without self-consciousness...self-consciousness and the critical spirit are one."¹²⁹ The word "self-conscious" refers both to the dandy's analytical cerebral bent and his need to play a role. Lord Henry claims, therefore, that the dandy's aesthetic sense ensures that his feeling for "dramatic effect"¹³⁰ functions to transmute life into a play. "Suddenly," he says, "we find that we are no longer the actors, but the spectators of the play. Or rather we are both. We watch ourselves, and the mere wonder of the spectacle enthralls us."¹³¹ The merciless unceasing dissection of the self and others is first depicted in Baudelaire, and is seen in its most extreme form Huysmans. "Nous nous sommes tellement appliqués à sophistiquer notre coeur," we are told in "La Fanfarlo," "nous avons tant abusé du microscope pour étudier les hideuses excroissances, et les honteuses verrues dont il est couvert."¹³² In Huysmans' dandies we are permitted to see the dissective mental workings of the dandy; in Wilde's work, conversely, the process is simply described.

The detached critical faculty of the dandy results in the "observateur passionné" being jaded and overwhelmed by "ennui." He searches for meaning or attempts to create it "ex nihilo," but by wallowing in the extraordinary and

abnormal (which is of course a product of his assertion of artificiality), by "vivisecting himself,"¹³³ he becomes incapable of attachments to other human beings. "I am too much concentrated on myself,"¹³⁴ Dorian Gray recognizes, and concomitant with this realization is the recognition that he is incapable of love. Even Des Esseintes in a burst of despair longs for a like-minded being while at the same time aware of the impossibility of finding such a person – even were he able to renounce his figurative and metaphorical isolation. For the central characteristic of the dandy is his independence, his autonomy. The "heroism" of the dandy issues in part from the fact that he must cloak his suffering with an impassive countenance. These "boudoir stoics," we are informed by D'Aurevilly in *Du Dandyisme et George Brummel* (a text which both Wilde and Huysmans were familiar with), "boivent dans leur masque leur sang qui coule, et restent masqués. *Paraître c'est être*, pour les Dandys, comme pour les femmes."¹³⁵

The concept of the mask is intrinsic to much of Huysmans' and Wilde's work. For Huysmans the mask is not usually an actual symbol. Rather, it is an idea which manifests itself in the dandy's mode of distancing himself from the Philistine and the bourgeois. In contrast, for Wilde, the mask is a central symbol functioning on a multiplicity of levels, and is closely connected with the idea

of art as a "lie." This is not simply the idea that the obvious is inartistic nor is it merely derived from Baudelaire's feeling "J'ai tellement la haine du commun que la verité m'ennuie."¹³⁶ In "The Decay of Lying," art is perceived as lying – yet art, Wilde maintains, is truth. Therefore, he concludes, with a characteristic inversion, lying is the truth. Wilde's definition of art as a sort of lie and his identification of the dandy with the artist gives validity to the dandy's philosophy, to his belief that "Truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style."¹³⁷ Further, in Wilde's work, the word "lying" is closely connected with the word "insincerity," which is endowed with new meaning: it becomes "a method by which we can multiply our personalities."¹³⁸ The artist/dandy can appear insincere and mocking, invert accepted social "truths" because he is not restricted by any explicit moral code; indeed, he rejects the prevailing morality. Thus the dandy hides behind a mask which is both a defense and a challenge. He is superior, removed from any given situation; he is "l'observateur...un prince qui jouit partout de son incognito."¹³⁹ The mask he wears, paradoxically, like the symbol both reveals and conceals, and we are reminded that, in Wilde's view, "Beauty is the symbol of symbols,"¹⁴⁰ and "dandyism is the assertion of the absolute modernity of Beauty."¹⁴¹ Thus it is the act of concealment, the creation of a mask, which is

significant, not what the mask hides. "What is interesting about people" is therefore "the mask that each one of them wears, not the reality that lies behind the mask."¹⁴² It follows, then, that Wilde would entitle his piece on costume and stage design "The Truth of Masks." Wilde uses the symbol of the stage, the mask and created artifact, to broach the problem of identity and to suggest that both the artist's work and his mask is a lie or a fiction which reveals some truth if only the reader or the audience can perceive it. "A Truth in art," Wilde maintains, "is that whose contradictory is also true. The truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks."¹⁴³

In Huysmans' work the dandy also clearly becomes "the spectator of ... his own life,"¹⁴⁴ but his dandyism is above all else an attempt to protect the inner self. Baudelaire wrote that "sous un dédain léger je voile ma torture,"¹⁴⁵ and Wilde too utilized dandyism to ensure that his inner being remained untouched; he remained inviolable.

"To the world I seem, by intention on my part,
a dilettante and a dandy merely",

he wrote in a letter to Philip Houghton,

it is not wise to show one's heart to the
world—and as seriousness of manner is the
disguise of the fool, folly in its exquisite

modes of triviality and indifference and lack of care is the robe of the wise man. In so vulgar an age as this we all need masks.¹⁴⁶

In addition, however, the mask also allows for the multiplication and intensification of personalities. And if to "reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim,"¹⁴⁷ then the mask becomes a means of multiplying the artist/dandy's artistic voices. "Man is least himself when he talks in his own person," Wilde tells us, "Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth."¹⁴⁸ Thus the mask not only allows the dandy to create himself, it also gives him the freedom to speak truth through a mask of frivolity. The mask suggests the delicate balance between life and art. Further, "au bout d'un certain temps, le masque qu'on porte adhère au visage et ne peut plus se lever,"¹⁴⁹ and art becomes life. The dandy Beerbohm (whose obsession with masks can be seen in his caricatures) takes Wilde's idea in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and inverts it in "The Happy Hypocrite." "The Happy Hypocrite" is the story of Lord George Hell. He falls in love with Jenny, who rejects his suit. Lord Hell then obtains the mask of a saint, and by the end of the story the mask has become his face. Wilde at one point asked Ada Leverson (parodying Beerbohm's parody) if, when she was alone with Beerbohm, the latter ever took "off his face . . . [to] reveal his mask."¹⁵⁰

The bifurcation between the interior and exterior, the man and the mask, was crystallised in one of the most popular figures of the period: Pierrot. In Walter Pater's "A Prince of Court Painters," Pater claims Watteau's creatures

have put on motley for once and are able to throw a world of serious innuendo into their burlesque looks with a sort of comedy which shall be but tragedy seen from the other side.¹⁵¹

The idea of the mysterious sad clown whose external gaiety hides his melancholy was one which efficaciously encapsulated many thematic preoccupations of the time. "The mask," according to Wilde, is to "hide seriousness or to reveal . . . levity"¹⁵² and the figure Pierrot suggests this connection between superficial frivolity and inner seriousness to the dandy's projection of the mask. In *A Woman of No Importance*, Lord Illingworth tells Gerald that in order to be "modern," he must make it "his ideal" to be a dandy. "People nowadays are so absolutely superficial," he continues, "that they don't understand the philosophy of the superficial."¹⁵³ An obvious extension of this idea is that "only shallow people do not judge by appearances."¹⁵⁴ The profound and the trivial not only coexist—they reveal one another by a process of dandaical ironic inversions:

Lady Windermere: Lord Darlington is trivial.

Lord Darlington: Ah, don't say that, Lady Windermere.

Lady Windermere: Why do you talk so trivially about life, then?

Lord Darlington: Because I think that life is
far too important a thing
ever to talk seriously about
it.¹⁵⁵

The idea that there is a discrepancy between the mask and face, and that in fact a sense of despair has been instrumental in the creation of the mask is encapsulated by lord Illingworth's words in *A Woman of No Importance*:

the world has always laughed at its own tragedies, that being the only way in which it has been able to bear them. And that, consequently, whatever the world has treated seriously belongs to the comedy side of things.¹⁵⁶

The dandy uses language as a kind of mask: it is both a weapon and a shield. In his desire to shock he invariably says the opposite of what is expected of him. This is perceived by the undiscerning as triviality, but in actual fact it is quite consistent with the dandy's ironic vision. For the language of the dandy is that of paradox, and the "apparent contradiction" is a means of expressing a truth.

Indeed Wilde was to write that "the way of paradoxes is the way of truth. To test Reality we must see it on the tightrope."¹⁵⁷ The dandy exists within a relativized universe, a universe without absolutes. His ironic distance therefore enables him to function and to retain his sanity. Des Esseintes and Durtal certainly exemplify the need to find meaning in the world, and the countervailing realization that no such meaning is to be found results in irony and self-mockery. As Schlegel points out: "Die Paradoxie ist für die Ironie die *conditio sine qua non*, die Seele, Quell und Princip. ..."¹⁵⁸ Both Wilde and Huysmans view art as a means of investing the moment with significance, of triumphing or attempting to triumph over the "mauvais quart d'heure"¹⁵⁹ that ends in death. Thus towards the end of the century the mask of the Pierrot suggests the skull behind it, or perhaps even nothingness.

In Poe's story, "The Masque of the Red Death," the void is presented in particularly powerful symbolic terms. In an unknown country at an unknown date the Prince Prospero retires with a thousand members of the court to the safety and seclusion of an abbey when his country is visited by the plague. They pass the time with masques and lavish entertainment. At one of these masques a guest appears dressed as the Red Death. At the stroke of midnight, the furious prince attempts to unmask the

intruder and it is revealed that beneath the mask is a dark void. There is a sinister quality associated with the symbol of the mask in this story, a sense that the mask is terrifying primarily because of its inexplicability and irreducibility. The impossibility of grappling with this nothingness, the abyss, or the void is what Durtal faces in *Là-bas* and Mallarmé focusses on in his poetry and is one important aspect of the symbol of the mask. Existing in a relativized universe, man cannot ascertain what is reality and what is illusion as reality may be a mere projection of his consciousness. This can be translated into an epistemological problem, a questioning of the very possibility of attaining knowledge in a refractory world. As Schopenhauer maintained, things appear "as in a mask, which allows us merely to assume what is concealed beneath it, but never to know it."¹⁶⁰

The Pierrot figure efficaciously encompasses a pensive sorrow, an ironic detachment issuing from despair and disillusionment – the comic mask beneath which lurks a profound pessimism. In Huysmans' *Pierrot sceptique*, a pantomime written in collaboration with Leon Hennique after seeing a production by the English mimes the Hanlon-Lees, we are presented with an essentially ironic vision. *Pierrot sceptique* begins with an image of death – that of Madame Pierrot facing the audience in a coffin. Later, after

the funeral, Pierrot gravely meets the guests holding his dead wife's syringe in one hand. Following the funeral he emerges from a bar and falls in love with a mannequin behind the glass in a wigmaker's store. After several failed attempts he finally brings the statue to dinner and then attempts to rape her. During his "suit" there are two interruptions – significantly from a tombstone-cutter and a dandy. The dandy kisses the mannequin twice and Pierrot's saber falls upon her, and the dandy, assuming she is dead, covers her with a sheet and leaves. It transpires that the mannequin is not quite dead, and Pierrot attempts again to rape her. She is unresponsive, and in an ironic attempt to "heat her up," he sets fire to the room. He then goes to a dressmaker's shop, rapes a dummy, and escapes with her.

In the dandy/Pierrot we are presented with an attempt to subvert the connection between illusion and reality – a deliberate transgression of the line between the two. Pierrot, historically the clown, the outcast, the disinherited, the beaten, becomes in Huysmans' hands a parody of the dandy, a savage ironist whose actions suggest his complete cynicism. He is also in some degree the artist figure toying with death and artificiality. He becomes the embodiment of a "modernity" which, in Wilde's words:

put Tragedy into the raiment of Comedy, so
that the great realities seemed commonplace

or grotesque or lacking in style. . . . Our very dress makes us grotesques. We are the zanies of sorrow. We are clowns whose hearts are broken.¹⁶¹

It is interesting that Huysmans and Hennique had originally planned to continue creating pantomimes, one of which was to have been a "Tentation de Saint-Pierrot." The Pierrot, like the dandy, masks his ironic detachment, his despair, but in the Pierrot's case this mask manifests itself as a frenetic joy. He is a parody of the dandy, and like the dandy is a kind of mythic figure, encompassing both the devil and the saint, joy and sorrow. On the title-page for the *Pierrot sceptique* (Paris Rouveyre, 1881), we are presented with a frenetically smiling and dancing dandy/Pierrot. His cravat and coat-tails are flowing and prodigious and a tailor stands by with enormous menacing scissors and a bill of a thousand francs in his hand. The reason for the choice of Chéret as illustrator becomes clear upon examining Huysmans' description of Chéret's work in *Certains*:

M. Chéret a d'abord le sens de la joie, mais de la joie telle qu'elle se peut comprendre sans être abjecte, de la joie frénétique et narquoise, comme glacée de la pantomime, une joie que son excès même exhause, en la rapprochant presque de la douleur.

Plusieurs de ses affiches l'attestent. Qui ne se rappelle, parmi ses nombreuses illustrations, celles qui célèbrent le Pierrot, ce Pierrot en habit noir qu'il arbora le premier et qu'a repris, à sa suite, M. Willette? Qui ne se rappelle l'incompressible gaieté de son Agoust conduisant la pantomime des Hanlon-Lees, dans *Do mi sol do*?

Yet, significantly, this Agoust

devenait presque satanique dans ce dessin qui bondissait, étoffé de rouge sur un fond verdâtre pointillé d'encre, surmonté d'éclatantes lettres blanches, doublées de noir.¹⁶²

The "joie démentielle, presque explosible"¹⁶³ has the quality of demonic parody so evident in Beardsley's work. Indeed Arthur Symons recognised in Beardsley the "0 or nothingness behind the elegant artifice and compared the artist to Verlaine's Pierrot gamin:

And so he becomes exquisitely false, dreading above all things that "one touch of nature" which would ruffle his disguise, and leave him defenceless. Simplicity, in him being the most laughable thing in the world, he becomes learned, perverse, intellectualising his pleasures, brutalising his intellect; his

mournful contemplation of things becoming a kind of grotesque joy, which he expresses in the only symbols at his command, tracing his Giotto's O with the elegance of his pirouette.¹⁶⁴

This "grotesque joy" is obviously the hallmark of Huysmans' Pierrot, and in a bizarre passage in his essay on Rops and satanism, he describes a Japanese erotic print in which a woman is embraced by an octopus. Her face is depicted as that of a Pierrot, and simultaneously exhibits an 'hysterical joy and superhuman anguish':

C'est une Japonaise couverte par une pieuvre; de ses tentacules, l'horrible bête pompe la pointe des seins, et fouille la bouche, tandis que la tête même boit les parties basses. L'expression presque surhumaine d'angoisse et de douleur qui convulse cette longue figure de pierrot au nez busqué et la joie hystérique qui filtre en même temps de ce front, de ces yeux fermés de morte, sont admirables!¹⁶⁵

Huysmans connects the admixture of joy and sorrow, the satanic, and death with the Pierrot figure, a figure who, like Durtal or Dorian Gray, can never meet or satisfy his metaphysical desires. This results in an essentially ironic perspective which is exhibited by all of Wilde's dandies. For the dandy accepts, recognises, and

often manifests evil. He is paradoxically simultaneously both insider and outsider; devoid of belief in absolutes he "plays with life,"¹⁶⁶ and as Wilde says of the "flawless dandy" Lord Goring: "He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage."¹⁶⁷

In Huysmans' review of Redon's series *Homage to Goya* he describes a Pierrot-like figure who possesses a "douleur ambiguë se fondait dans l'ironie d'un affreux sourire."¹⁶⁸ Like the dandy's mask the Pierrot's smile is essentially the expression of a recognition of dichotomies. This expression of irony encompasses both an acknowledgment of human imitations and a refusal to entirely accept these I imitations accounting in part for the satanic associations of the Pierrot figure.

In "Cauchemar" Huysmans describes in detail a plate from *Homage to Goya* called "The Marsh Flower: A Sad, Human Face," which consists of a flower growing from a body of water and possessing the face of a Pierrot:

Une douleur immense et toute personnelle émana de cette livide fleur. Il y avait dans l'expression de ses traits, tout à la fois du navrement d'un pierrot usé, d'un vieux clown qui pleure sur ses reins fléchis, de la détresse d'un antique lord rongé par le spleen, d'un avoué condamné pour de savantes

banqueroutes, d'un vieux juge tombé, a la suite d'attentats compliqués, dans le préau d'une maison de force!¹⁶⁹

This flower, or Pierrot, becomes a creature "d'ignominie et de souffrance."¹⁷⁰ Through the humiliation of his position, through the recognition of suffering and evil, the Pierrot-like dandy becomes related both to the Christ figure, and the satanic, and the alienated artist. This "Méphisto simiesque"¹⁷¹ is associated with the moon, which suggests sterility, and by extension with art which, according to Wilde, is "superbly sterile."¹⁷² The Pierrot, in effect, symbolizes both the narcissism and/or martyrdom of the artist. The Pierrot/dandy who exists both within and outside society is both spectator and participant, alienated not only from life but from himself.

Dorian Gray is perhaps the best exemplar of this alienation as it is translated into concrete terms: the man and his double – the portrait. The idea of the multiplicity of man's selves and the belief that man could be both beast and angel, Satan and Christ (as Durtal in *Là-bas*) preoccupied both Huysmans and Wilde. The apparent contradiction of man's many-sidedness finds its expression in art, which in both Wilde's and Huysmans' belief was the expression of personality. The internal division necessitates

that there should be an observer and observed within one being—which accounts in part for the dandy's interest in acting and role playing as well as his ironic stance. Dorian watches the portrait revealing to him another self even as, in *Là-bas*, Gilles de Rais becomes a reflection of Durtal's inner refractoriness. The dandy as dispassionate cerebral observer comments on his own affective life thereby through his dissective powers generating a consciousness of his internal division. The supernatural in Huysmans' work often becomes a means of concretizing the inner divisiveness of man. This is suggested in Huysmans' article "Les Monstres" in which he looks at the history of the beast, focussing in particular on Goya's paintings. This interest in the bestial or dark side of man is a tremendous source of creative energy, as Wilde indicates:

People thought it dreadful of me to have entertained at dinner the evil things of life, and to have found pleasure in their company. But they, from the point of view through which I, as an artist in life, approached them, were delightfully suggestive and stimulating ... Their poison was part of their perfection.¹⁷³

The dandy manages to suggest a subversion of social mores (in part through paradox) as well as a transgression

of them without ever (as in Lord Henry's case) seeming to transgress. In this way he embodies the unconscious fears and desires of other members of society in an acceptable social form. One of his characteristics is narcissism – a relationship of the self to the self. In his essay "On Narcissism," Freud points out that narcissism entails a division of the self in which the ego takes itself as object, thereby splitting and becoming observer and observed. Dorian's narcissism is brought to his attention by Hallward: "You had leant over the still pool of some Greek woodland, and seen in the water's silent silver the marvel of your own face."¹⁷⁴ Later, Dorian kisses his portrait in a "boyish mockery of Narcissus." The two Dorians, the perceiver and the perceived (the painting) suggest the alienated identity. For the portrait is "the most magical of mirrors,"¹⁷⁵ and as such symbolizes not only self-discovery, Dorian's recognition of his many selves, but also art, owing to the mirror's mimetic capabilities. This is effectively encapsulated in one scene in which we are told how Dorian would

stand, with a mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil Hallward had painted of him, looking now at the evil and ageing face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass.

The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken his sense of pleasure. He grew more and more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more interested in the corruption of his own soul.¹⁷⁶

The mirror that Dorian holds, then, is perpetually occupied with his beauty even as the alternate mirror (the painting) is perpetually occupied with his decay. But art reveals the beauty of truth (the painting transmutes ugliness into psychological beauty) while nature merely reveals Dorian's external beauty. Both "art" and nature," then, are the repositories of different kinds of beauty and the interconnection of art and life in this context suggest the dandy/artist's narcissism. The mirror/Narcissus image is further developed in reference to Mallarmé in a passage in *Hérodiade* quoted by Des Esseintes in *A rebours*:

...Oh mirror!
Cold water frozen by boredom within your
frame,
How many times, for hours on end,
Saddened by dreams and searching for my
memories,
Which are like dead leaves in the deep hole
beneath your glassy surface,
Have I seen myself in you as a distant ghost!

But, oh horror! on certain evenings, in your
cruel pool,
I have recognized the barrenness of my
disordered dream.¹⁷⁷

Dualism, symbolized by the mirror image in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, is also a means of articulating a sense of estrangement. Thus Dorian, while he "felt keenly the pleasure of a double life,"¹⁷⁸ is aware of the difficulties of inner divisiveness. He claims at several points throughout the novel that his personality has become a burden to him.¹⁷⁹ In effect, he watches himself even as he watches the figure in the painting decay, rejecting:

the shallow psychology of those who
conceive the Ego in man as a thing simple,
permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To
him, man was a being with myriad lives and
myriad sensations, a complex multiform
creature that bore within itself strange
legacies of thought and passion....¹⁸⁰

While the diversification of the self can be experienced as alienating, it is also a means of growth. Wilde usually defines this growth in terms of art: "Culture has intensified the personality of man. Art has made us myriad-minded."¹⁸¹ Ironically, therefore, a world of fluid roles

enables man to best express his personality (the multiplicity of selves), and thus one is "perhaps never so much at ease as when playing a part."¹⁸² It follows therefore that if the aim of life is self-development, it is possible for the dandy to conclude "that to be good is to be in harmony with oneself"¹⁸³ and that "no life is spoiled but one whose growth is arrested."¹⁸⁴ In this way, all externally imposed moral standards are abrogated.

The process of *becoming*¹⁸⁵ is seen in *A rebours* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, particularly, as being associated with sensory stimulation, which becomes part of the prism of experience at the dandy/artist's disposal. This predisposes him to an analytical and narcissistic preoccupation with the self. The dandy/artist, while functioning within society, by suggesting other categories or extremes of experience, serves to subvert society. The self-consciousness and complexity which are the outstanding characteristics of decadent art are also an expression of the complexity of the problem of identity as is suggested by Wilde's reaction to Robert Browning:

There is something curiously interesting in the marked tendency of modern poetry to become obscure. Many critics, writing with their eyes fixed on the masterpieces of past literature, have ascribed this tendency to

wilfulness and to affectation. Its origin is rather to be found in the complexity of the new problems, and in the fact that self-consciousness is not yet adequate to explain the contents of the Ego.¹⁸⁶

It is for this reason that Wilde appreciates Browning's poetry, for it was not "thought which fascinated him, but rather the processes by which thought moves."¹⁸⁷ Similarly, what attracted Des Esseintes "was the writer's personality, and the only thing that interested him was the working of the writer's brain, no matter what subject he was tackling."¹⁸⁸ The dandy suggested this problem of the self – his analytical bent and his embodiment of the observer and observed connects this self-consciousness with the creation of an artifact – himself. Further, the dandy embodied the ethic of individualism, which both Wilde and Huysmans identified with art and artistic expression. For all of these reasons he became a creature of paradox, a connecting link between art and life – living in both worlds but never fully belonging to either.

CHAPTER II

SATANISM

Certain attainments of the soul and the intellect are impossible without disease, without insanity, without spiritual crime, and the great invalids are crucified victims, sacrificed to humanity and its advancement, to the broadening of its feelings and knowledge...

Thomas Mann

Les natures au coeur sur la main ne se font pas l'idée des jouissances solitaires de l'hypocrisie, de ceux qui vivent et peuvent respirer, la tête lacée dans un masque. Mais, quand on y pense, ne comprend-on pas que leurs sensations aient réellement la profondeur enflammée de l'enfer. Or l'enfer, c'est le ciel un creux. Le mot diabolique ou divin, appliqué à l'intensité des jouissances, exprime la même chose, c'est-à-dire des sensations qui vont jusqu'au surnaturel.

Barbey D 'Aurevilly

The idea of modernity in Wilde's and Huysmans' work is closely connected with the acceptance and recognition of evil. In the wake of Baudelaire, Wilde maintained that dandyism "is an attempt to assert the absolute modernity of beauty."¹⁸⁹ The dandy can admit the originality of sin: he is not bound by moral considerations – he is above them. In Huysmans' novel on satanism, *Là-bas*, the satanic Gilles de Rais is referred to as a "refined and artistic criminal."¹⁹⁰ Wilde adopts a similar stance in "Pen, Pencil and Poison" in his delineation of the dandy Thomas Griffiths Wainright. The man does not confine his talents to being "a poet and a painter, an art critic, an antiquarian . . . an amateur of beautiful things"; he is also "a subtle and secret poisoner almost without rival in this or any age."¹⁹¹ The satanic dandy's sole concern is that of beauty and, like Dorian Gray, he is often the possessor of that very quality. In "Fusée," Baudelaire mentions the dandy and concludes that: "Le plus parfait type de beauté virile est Satan – à la manière de Milton."¹⁹²

By the *fin de siècle* this romantic conception of Satan had altered to some degree. He had become "un gentleman muet et propre, longanime et tenace; il est imparfait, usé, vieux."¹⁹³ However, his distinguishing characteristic was still that of pride. Baudelaire, in the part of *Les Fleurs du Mal*

entitled "La Révolte" (and in particular in the poem "Les Litanies de Satan"), had glorified revolt against the divine will of God. By extension, he believed that the dandy was 'the last representation of what is best in human pride.'¹⁹⁴ The decadent dandy, while still a rebel, did not express his rebellion in direct action. Rather, the dandy's very mode of existence suggests an oblique protest against the established order. On one level the dandy's rebellion manifests itself as an attraction to criminality. Des Esseintes' motive in attempting to "make a murderer"¹⁹⁵ of a young boy by corrupting him becomes apparent when he says with satisfaction: "I shall have contributed, to the best of my ability ... one enemy the more for the hideous society which is bleeding us white."¹⁹⁶ At the end of *A rebours* he shouts in powerless rage: "Well, crumble then, society!"¹⁹⁷ Similarly, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry never actually engages in criminal activities; rather, he does so vicariously, as the tempter. Indeed many critics have seen Dorian as a Faust and Lord Henry as a Mephistophelian figure. The seductive quality of many dandy and satanic figures (such as Madame Chantelouve in *Là-bas* or Lord Henry in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*) is often suggestive of, if not explicitly identified with, demonic powers. Furthermore, the dandy's ability to seduce is closely allied

with his criminal inclinations. Thus in true Sadeian fashion the corruption of unspoilt youth is one mode of revolt, one proof of power. Yet the dandy manages to function within society while secretly infringing upon its laws. The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman who masks his rage, contempt, and despair beneath a blasé exterior. Dorian's beauty symbolically functions as "a mask,"¹⁹⁸ and he not only destroys Sibyl Vane but is also perceived to be a generally pernicious influence, significantly "fatal to young men."¹⁹⁹ The dandy's "exclusive love of domination"²⁰⁰ leads him to employ sex and violence to control others. Of course, aggression against authority – often a source of erotic release – is in some degree a perverse assertion of he self. The abnormal or the perverse becomes through its artificiality a demonstration of free will. For: "La dépravation, c'est à dire l'écart du type normal est impossible à la bête, fatalement conduite par l'instinct immuable."²⁰¹

Most of these ideas can be seen in embryo in De Sade's work. Crime and satanism become in his world an assertion of human freedom, an attempt to break through externally imposed restraints. The central idea, as we have seen, is that, as nature is bad, artificiality must be virtue; and, by extension, different types of artificialities

(perversity, for example) are good. This inversion of values, as Praz points out, is the basis of sadism: "Vice represents the positive active element, virtue the negative and passive."²⁰² In *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*, the suggestion is that the transgression against established laws (particularly of the church) is a source of erotic release for the dandy precisely because it is an intellectual stance – a rejection of pre-existing social structures. Poe's definition of perversity in "Le Chat Noir" evokes this response against the established mores:

Qui n'a pas cent fois commis une action folle ou vile pour la seule raison qu'il savait devoir s'en abstenir. N'avons-nous pas une inclination perpétuelle, en dépit de notre jugement, à violer ce qui est la loi, seulement parceque nous savons que c'est la loi?²⁰³

This idea of breaking the boundaries of experience underlies *Là-bas* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: "Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you," Lord Henry advises Dorian, "Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing."²⁰⁴ An extreme interpretation of these excesses might be the Sadeian notion expressed by Durtal in *Là-bas*: "one can take pride in going as far in crime as in virtue."²⁰⁵

Wilde's and Huysmans' interest in satanism is in part a product of their interest in psychology. It is likely that Wilde read De Sade (we know Beardsley did) and in 1882 Huysmans read *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir*, which his publisher sent him from Brussels. In a letter he wrote to Kistemaeckers (1882), Huysmans expressed his fascination with De Sade:

Thank you first of all for the *Philosophie* that you were so kind as to send. I've just finished reading this document from La Salpêtrière and Mazaz. It is beyond doubt the nadir of debasement, but it is of the greatest interest from the mental point of view. . .²⁰⁶

Similarly, in "The Critic as Artist," Wilde indicates his interest in sin and the darker aspects of human behaviour:

People sometimes say that fiction is getting too morbid. As far as psychology is concerned, it has never been morbid enough. We have merely touched the surface of the soul, that is all. In one single ivory cell of the brain there are stored away things more marvellous and more terrible than even they have dreamed of, who, like the author of *Le Rouge et le Noir*, have sought to track the soul in its most secret places, and to make life confess its dearest sins.²⁰⁷

This concern with sin in both Wilde's and Huysmans' work issued in part from their belief that "the artist is never morbid" and "expresses everything."²⁰⁸ Art became the means of aestheticizing sin. Moreover, because art represented an aspiration towards the ideal, the satanist/artist also dreamt of further and greater crimes. Thus Gilles de Rais

in vain . . . may dream of unique violations, of more ingenious slow tortures, but human imagination has a limit and he has already reached it—even surpassed it with diabolic aid. Insatiable he seethes—there is nothing material in which to express his ideal.²⁰⁹

Dorian too (although in a less extreme manner) in his search for sensations "at once new and delightful" would

abandon himself to their subtle influences, and then, having, as it were, caught their colour and satisfied his intellectual curiosity leave them with ...curious indifference.²¹⁰

This desire for "superhuman passions and superhuman perversities"²¹¹ is characteristic of many of the characters in Huysmans' and Wilde's works, which deal directly or indirectly with satanism. Thus Gilles de Rais is "unresponsive to mediocre passions, he is carried away alternately by good as well as evil, and he bounds from

spiritual pole to pole.²¹² Arthur Symons saw a similar impulse exhibited in Beardsley's drawings. In Symons' view Beardsley's characters

desire more pleasure than there is in the world, fiercer and more exquisite pains, a more intolerable suspense . . . Here we have a sort of abstract spiritual corruption revealed in beautiful form, sin transfigured by beauty...²¹³

The positive identification of sin with beauty is evident in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, but the emphasis is upon the senses as servants to the intellect. In an obvious echo of Huysmans, Wilde's Lord Henry reiterates the idea of a kind of "cerebral onanism": "It is in the brain, and in the brain only, that the great sins of the world take place..."²¹⁴ This is an idea which subsumes Wilde's depiction of Salomé. Her virginity still allows for cerebral lechery – indeed, her cerebral perversity is only facilitated by her continence. As Huysmans pointed out in his essay on Rops, "Les Sataniques," "il n'y a de réellement obscènes que les gens chastes."²¹⁵

What Baudelaire called "la double postulation humaine" (towards God or Satan) becomes at the fin de siècle a blurring of the lines between good and evil, a search for intense passion to fill a void. "From lofty

mysticism to base satanism," we are informed in *Là-bas*, "there is but one step. In the Beyond all things touch."²¹⁶ It is for this reason that Gilles de Rais could "from a pious man... suddenly become satanic, from an erudite and placid man to a violator of little children and a ripper of boys and girls."²¹⁷ In a more oblique fashion, the idea that "to have a capacity for a passion and not to realise it, is to make oneself incomplete and limited"²¹⁸ suggests the ambiguity of good and evil and the reliance on purely aesthetic values already remarked upon in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Nietzsche described the modern artist as the

intermediary species between madman and criminal restrained from crime by weakness of will and social timidity and not yet ripe for the madhouse but reaching out inquisitively towards both spheres with his antennae ²¹⁹

and Wilde, believing evil was an aspect of man to be dealt with by the modern artist, postulated that: "We cannot go back to the saint. There is much more to be learned from the sinner."²²⁰ In *Là-bas* a claim is made that the only people of any interest are "saints, scoundrels and cranks."²²¹ This is consistent with the idea that superhuman passions or obsessions are of value in and of themselves. According to Des Hermies in *Là-bas*, "the cult of the Demon is no more insane than that of God. One is rotten and the other

resplendent, that is all.”²²² In his essay on “Les Sataniques” Huysmans affirms that “all art must gravitate, like humanity which has given birth to it and the earth which carries, to one of these two poles: purity and lust, the heaven and hell of art.”²²³ Or in Dorian Gray’s words, “Each of us has Heaven and Hell in him.”²²⁴

The examination of good and evil as two opposing poles of behaviour, the confusion of moral categories, lends itself efficaciously to Wilde’s deliberate inversion of values in the form of paradox or Huysmans’ use of satire and parody. In Huysmans’ *Croquis Parisiens* one vignette in particular reveals the way in which the demonic often underlies the most ostensibly normal scene. Huysmans describes an evening at the Folies-Bergère in which the masked Pierrot is seen as a diabolical figure. The stage set is significantly that of a cemetery. The atmosphere evoked by the previous comedic scenes is negated upon the entry of two Pierrots dressed in black rather than white:

L’impression produite par l’entrée de ces hommes est glaciale et grande. Le comique tiré de l’opposition de ces corps noirs et de ces visages de plâtre disparaît; la sordide chimère du théâtre n’est plus. La vie seule se dresse devant nous, pantelante et superbe.²²⁵

These demonic Pierrots remind one of the ubiquitous Pierrot in Beardsley's drawings – particularly those for Wilde's *Salomé*. The toilette scene of *Salomé*, for example, with its masked Pierrot adjusting Salomé's hair and the volume of Marquis De Sade on the table, evokes a "froide folie...férocement comique . . . une incarnation nouvelle et charmante de la farce lugubre, de la bouffonnerie sinistre."²²⁶ Symons viewed Beardsley as a Pierrot who

knows his face is powdered and if he sobs it is without tears and it is hard to distinguish under the chalk, if the grimace which twists his mouth is more laughter or mockery and so he becomes exquisitely false...²²⁷

The element of mockery and demonic parody – the empty despair hidden behind the mask – are concomitant with an inability to believe, a loss of innocence. In the drawings religious images are applied exclusively to the erotic, and all masks, makeup, costume conduce to a brilliantly artificial surface, an ornate re-ordering of the natural world. Rops, the artist who perhaps most explicitly juxtaposed and confused religious, satanic, and erotic imagery, was a favourite of both Huysmans and Des Esseintes. Péladan claimed that:

He has conjured up the devil once more, in this age when belief is dead, even in God, and he shows him triumphing over all ridicule, all laughter.²²⁸

"What a queer age," Durtal observes near the end of *Là-bas*, "it is just at the moment when positivism is at its zenith that mysticism rises again."²²⁹ This is reiterated at the end of *Là-bas*: "It's a two-sided age. People believe nothing, yet gobble everything."²³⁰ Much of both Wilde's and Huysmans' interest in diabolism and the occult has its origin in both this loss of faith and rejection of a materialistic and positivistic age. Indeed, Barbey D'Aurevilly claimed that in the writing of *A rebours* Huysmans had written "the nosography of a society destroyed by the rot of materialism."²³¹ The United States came to represent in Huysmans' mind the embodiment of a Philistine, materialistic democracy. In *Là-bas* he identified this materialism with the school of naturalism:

This fetid naturalism eulogizes the atrocities of modern life and flatters our positively American ways. It ecstasizes over brute force and apotheosizes the cash register . . . it defers to the nauseating taste of the mob.²³²

And Wilde echoed Huysmans when he wrote of the

crude commercialism of America, its materialising spirit, its indifference to the poetical side of things...its lack of imagination and of high unattainable ideals.²³³

Both Wilde and Huysmans come to reject naturalism, concluding that: "As a method, realism is a complete failure."²³⁴ Unlike Wilde, however, Huysmans wishes to retain the scientific concern for detail which was so much a part of the school of Zola. In a letter to Abbé Boullan in February, 1890, he reveals the impulse behind the creation of his novel on satanism – *Là-bas*:

I long...to make a work of art of supernatural realism and spiritualistic naturalism. I want to show Zola, Charcot...that nothing has been explained of the mysteries about us.²³⁵

The corollary of the rejection of positivism and the scientific spirit was an interest in the supernatural, which suggested paradoxically, a kind of idealism. Satanism became the expression of a belief in things unseen. Thus Durtal asserts that "the effrontery of the positivists is appalling. They decree that satanism does not exist."²³⁶ Religion was perceived as inadequate and was replaced to some degree by a belief in the supernatural.

An obvious extension of this interest in the supernatural was Wilde's and Huysmans' fascination with mystery; that is to say, the unknown, unexplained, or forbidden. "Mystery," Huysmans maintained, "is everywhere and reason cannot see its way."²³⁷ Mystery, moreover, is explicitly identified (particularly by Wilde) with art. He even rejects paintings that are "too intelligible"²³⁸ on the grounds that they lack mystery. "We are hemmed in by mystery," Huysmans claims in *Là-bas*, "in our homes, in the street – everywhere."²³⁹ The decadent artist uses these mysteries or the mysterious as modes of escape or as seminal to works of art. "Nowadays we have so few mysteries left to us," Gilbert exclaims in "The Critic as Artist," "that we cannot afford to part with one of them."²⁴⁰

Homosexuality is a source of fascination for both Wilde and Huysmans. For not only was it considered to be an artificiality, it was also a crime, and consequently had the charm of being forbidden. A means of rebelling against society's dictates, it is also allied (and indeed often identified) with satanism, allowing access to the mysterious and the unknown. Dabbling with the forbidden inevitably suggests the need for dissimulation. The mask adopted by the dandy is therefore often closely connected with his

satanism. In *Les Diaboliques* Barbey D'Aurevilly relates the idea of the mask with the excesses of demonism:

Les natures *au coeur sur la main* ne se font pas l'idée des jouissances solitaires de l'hypocrisie, de ceux qui vivent et peuvent respirer, la tête lacée dans un masque. Mais, quand on y pense, ne comprend-on pas que leurs sensations aient réellement la profondeur enflammée de l'enfer. Or l'enfer c'est le ciel en creux. Le mot *diabolique* ou *divin*, appliqué à l'intensité des jouissances, exprime la même chose, c'est-à-dire des sensations qui vont jusqu'au surnaturel.²⁴¹

Wilde attempts to delineate these extremes of emotion cloaked behind the social mask of the dandy. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* we are informed that in hypocrisy Dorian "had worn the mask of goodness."²⁴² The novel, quite apart from its debt to *A rebours*, owes something to Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, in which the protagonist, Melmoth, has made a bargain with Satan. In exchange for his soul his life is lengthened, and the possibility of escaping damnation is his if he can persuade someone to take a similar path. While the satanic elements are not dealt with as explicitly as in much of Huysmans' early work, it rapidly becomes apparent that Dorian's powers have a

sinister quality. When Basil Hallward first sees Dorian he is mesmerized and overcome with a disturbing feeling:

I turned half-way round, and saw Dorian Gray for the first time. When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with some one whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul . . .²⁴³

Dorian cannot help but corrupt, and takes a perverse pleasure in doing so. The "devil's bargain"²⁴⁴ is fated to destroy all that is innocent that he comes into contact with. Basil confronts Dorian and makes a revealing accusation:

You corrupt everyone with whom you become intimate . . . it is quite sufficient for you to enter a house, for shame of some kind to follow after.²⁴⁵

He becomes incapable of prayer, and "with a soul hungry for rebellion" perverts the Catholic mass:

the Roman ritual had always a great attraction for him. The daily sacrifice, more awful really than all the sacrifices of the antique world, stirred him as much by its superb rejection of the evidence of the senses as by the primitive simplicity of its elements

and the eternal pathos of the human tragedy
that it sought to symbolise.²⁴⁶

Dorian is enamoured of the "fuming censers" and the "black confessionals,"²⁴⁷ and his approach towards communion suggests a sensual indulgence and a mockery of its meaning. Des Esseintes too indulges in "the nicely calculated scenes of Catholic ceremonial."²⁴⁸ However, his leanings towards sacrilege are studiously blasphemous:

it seemed to Des Esseintes that a frightful glory must result from any crime in open church by a believer filled with dreadful merriment and sadistic joy, bent on blasphemy, resolved to desecrate and befoul the objects of veneration. The mad rites of magical ceremonies, black masses, and witches sabbaths, together with the horrors of demonic possession and exorcism, were enacted before his mind's eye; and he began to wonder if he were not guilty of sacrilege in possessing articles which had once been solemnly consecrated, such as altar cards, chasubles, and custodials. This idea, that he was possibly living in a state of sin, filled him with a certain pride and satisfaction, not unmixed with delight in the sacrilegious acts.²⁴⁹

Of course, sacrilege is a central characteristic of Satanism – a characteristic which paradoxically implies a belief in God; otherwise, blasphemy would be rendered meaningless. “All sins,” Wilde informs us in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, “are sins of disobedience. When that high spirit, that morning star of evil, fell from heaven, it was as a rebel that he fell.”²⁵⁰ Yet the manner in which this “disobedience” manifests itself is rendered deliberately ambiguous in the novel. Thus Wilde could say

Each man sees his own sin in Dorian Gray.
What Dorian Gray's sins are no one knows.
He who finds them has brought them.²⁵¹

In *A rebours* Des Esseintes admires Barbey D'Aurevilly's works and decides that D'Aurevilly “was constantly tacking to and fro between those two channels of Catholic belief which eventually run into one: mysticism and sadism.”²⁵² In a preface to *A rebours* he similarly claimed that sadism was a bastard of Catholicism: “Evil and vice in order to exist must have their opposite poles, virtue and goodness.”²⁵³ Thus Dorian can conclude: “The soul is a terrible reality. It can be bought, and sold, and bartered away. It can be poisoned, or made perfect.”²⁵⁴ Virtue and vice, Satan and God, co-exist and serve to illustrate one another, and both are, Wilde maintained, the province of

the artist. The Manicheism evinced in *Là-bas* was also manifest in *Les Diaboliques*. Indeed, as is made clear by Barbey D'Aurevilly's words in his preface to the 1874 edition, Huysmans' interest in the Middle Ages probably stemmed from the radical nature of this division:

Le Diable est comme Dieu – le manichéisme,
qui fut la source des grandes hérésies du
Moyen Age, le manichéisme n'est si bête.²⁵⁵

And certainly it was the reliance of evil upon good which resulted in the practice of blasphemy. "The truth of the matter," we are informed in *A rebours*,

is that if it did not involve sacrilege, sadism would have no *raison d'être*; on the other hand, since sacrilege depends on the existence of a religion, it cannot be deliberately or effectively committed except by a believer.²⁵⁶

Thus, paradoxically, sadism and sacrilege, the two components of satanism, are a "wholly idealistic, wholly Christian aberration."²⁵⁷

In the novel *Là-bas* Huysmans deals both with satanism in the middle ages and satanism in the nineteenth century. Durtal is writing a book about Gilles de Rais, a fifteenth-century satanist, and is simultaneously examining the nature of satanism in nineteenth-century Paris. Thus, ironically, one chapter ends with Durtal casting his mind

back to the prodigious sins of the fifteenth century and concluding:

Rather petty, my own spiritual conflict regarding a woman whose sin – like my own, to be sure – is commonplace and bourgeois.²⁵⁸

Gilles de Rais embodies the extremes of satanic behaviour. He indulges in necrophilia and vampirism. These crimes are, significantly, crimes which are perpetuated solely against children. Like Dorian Gray's satanic propensities they are exemplified by the corruption and profanation of the pure and the exhibition of "an ardent, a mad curiosity"²⁵⁹ concerning the forbidden. Gilles is "an artist and man of letters"²⁶⁰ who, in a fashion similar to Des Esseintes and Dorian Gray, is a collector of beautiful and unusual items. Yet his depravity still allows for, or rather becomes, the source of his artistry:

He wearies of stuprating palpitant flesh and becomes a lover of the dead. A passionate artist, he kisses, with cries of enthusiasm, the well-made limbs of his victims. He establishes sepulchral beauty contests...²⁶¹

Like Dorian Gray, although on a very different plane and for different reasons, evil becomes his means of realizing his conception of the beautiful. The violent extremes of the Gilles de Rais myth are acceptable because it is the middle

ages that are being dealt with: "For some it's all white and for others utterly black. No intermediate shade."²⁶² Ultimately, however, satanism becomes an expression of "le vide." And Gilles de Rais, we are told, stopped "insatiable" before the void. This sentiment, although it did not result in satanic practices, was expressed in *A rebours* as a

feverish desire for the unknown, the unsatisfied longing for an ideal, the craving to escape from the horrible realities of life, to cross the frontiers of thought, to grope after a certainty.²⁶³

The consciousness of evil and the desire to treat it as subject matter was a central concern to both Huysmans and Wilde. The craving for the impossible, the ideal, often ended in frustration and impotence, and therefore ennui, which frequently led to satanism. In Baudelaire's "Reniement de Saint Pierre," satanism is a means of escaping "un monde où l' action n'est pas la soeur du rêve."²⁶⁴

Wilde's play *Salomé* exemplifies the rejection of the present age in the presentation of a dream world and embodies, perhaps more than any other of his works, his notion of satanism and decadence. *Salomé*, indeed, might be said to be the evocation of a decadent mood. It is

essentially a symbolist work and, as such, reflects Mallarmé's idea that "to name is to destroy, to suggest is to create."²⁶⁵ In *Salomé*, Wilde seeks to create mystery by presenting us with a suggestive art, hoping, like Redon, to "inspire" rather than to offer sterile explanation, and to "place us as music does, in the ambiguous world of the indeterminate."²⁶⁶ The idea that all art should aspire to the condition of music was, of course, Pater's dictum and Wilde echoes his belief, claiming further that music is the perfect type of art, precisely because it "can never reveal its ultimate secret."²⁶⁷ According to Wilde, music appeals to the aesthetic sense alone as well as to our desire for mystery, and consequently reason and recognition have no place in our appreciation of it. Thus, paradoxically, art "becomes complete in beauty" through "its very incompleteness," and "beauty," Wilde maintains, is the "symbol of symbols."²⁶⁸ But if all art is at once "surface and symbol,"²⁶⁹ Wilde's all-pervasive awareness of style and form in *Salomé* suggests a kind of self-consciousness which endows the play with a quality of artificiality, which, quite independent of the subject matter, connotes decadence. The use of repetition, the rhythmic quality of the sentences, the complex web of interconnecting symbols, the incantatory quality of the language, all serve to evoke a sense of stasis, a feeling of

being suspended between two worlds without demanding any logical comprehension. "True music," wrote Baudelaire in his essay on Richard Wagner and Tannhauser,

suggests analogous ideas in different minds...what would be surprising would be to find that sound could *not* suggest colour, that colours could *not* evoke the idea of melody; and that sound and colour were unsuitable for the translation of ideas; things have always been expressed by reciprocal analogy...²⁷⁰

Like the episode of the liqueur casks in *A rebours* in which Des Esseintes listens "to the taste of music,"²⁷¹ Wilde's *Salomé* evinces an interest in Baudelaire's theory of correspondences.

The subject matter of Wilde's *Salomé* was extremely popular among the decadents, but it was almost certainly Huysmans' description of Moreau's painting which most influenced Wilde. Indeed Wilde intended that Moreau should do the illustrations for the play rather than Beardsley. In *Salomé* "L'homme est possédé de la femme, la femme possédée du diable,"²⁷² and Wilde presents *Salomé* as a kind of symbol onto whom each man projects his own secret fears and desires. Thus, Herodias' page sees the moon (which is continuously identified with *Salomé* and

the feminine principle throughout the play) in demonic terms: "a dead woman seeking dead things,"²⁷³ while the young Syrian sees rather "a beautiful princess."

Of course woman, when associated with the devil, becomes the antipodes to male spirituality. In *Là-bas* satanism is an expression of the male psyche while the black mass (to which Chantelouve takes Durtal) is associated with the female principle and the unconscious. Wilde underlines the fact that not only does each man project his subconscious desires and fears onto Salomé, but also that her presence lets loose natural emanations of evil within him. Thus, in contrast with the two soldiers, Herod sees the moon as a naked, drunken "mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers,"²⁷⁴ whereupon Herodias significantly responds, "No, the moon is like the moon. That is all." Even Salomé identifies herself with the moon: "The moon is cold and chaste," she says. "I am sure she is a virgin; she has a virgin's beauty. She has never abandoned herself to men like other goddesses."²⁷⁵ Moreover, these perceptions of Salomé suggest her ambivalent nature. She is associated both with fertility and sterility, with sexuality and death. She is inaccessible, embodying mystery, and her virginity, of course, suggests the consummate form of

feminine mystery. Moreau encapsulated the identification of the femme fatale with the demonic in these words:

Woman in her primal essence, an unthinking creature, mad on mystery and the unknown, smitten with evil in the form of perverse and diabolical seduction...that satanic precinct, in this circle of vices and guilty ardours... women whose soul has gone from them, waiting by the wayside for the lascivious goat to come by, the goat mounted by lust...²⁷⁶

Furthermore, Salomé has never “abandoned herself to men,” and consequently has eluded man. Simone de Beauvoir notes that:

Virgins unsubdued by man who have escaped his power, are more easily than others regarded as sorceresses, for the lot of woman being bondage to another, if she escapes the yoke of man she is ready to accept that of the devil.²⁷⁷

Certainly Huysmans speaks of the woman depicted by Rops as “timeless woman, the naked malignant beast, the handmaid of darkness, the absolute bondswoman of the Devil”,²⁷⁸ and Wilde’s vision of Salomé is consistent with Huysmans’ idea of “femme vierge et lubrique.”

The decadent connection between depravity and continence and withdrawal into the self, then, finds its

supreme expression in the figure of Salomé. For Salomé evinces a cerebral lechery, thereby combining sinfulness with purity, and, like the androgyne, she satisfies her own desires. For her eroticism is cerebral and takes place in her own mind. It is inevitable, then, that she should be identified with narcissism. As we have seen, narcissism is closely related to the self-sufficiency of the dandy who “doit vivre et dormir devant son miroir.”²⁷⁹

Indeed, Wilde suggests Salomé’s self-sufficiency and narcissism in the play through his use of mirror symbolism. Thus, Salomé is “like the shadow of a white rose in a mirror of silver.”²⁸⁰ She is like “a narcissus trembling in the wind.”²⁸¹ The idea of narcissism is closely connected with and rooted in the decadent mentality, for the narcissist revels in her own subjectivity, in a purely internal world. In order to love, it is necessary that the duality of subject and object exist, but the narcissist becomes both subject and object. The mirror allows Salomé to see herself and render herself object through it since she obtains her double. It is for this reason that Wilde’s Salomé is always being gazed at, and why she pursues the one man who eludes her. Of course, it is significant that she seeks Jokanaan as a kind of reflection of herself. Therefore, she is convinced that if he had seen her, he would have loved her. Throughout the

play, Salomé is explicitly identified with the silver flower as is the moon which is also identified with Salomé. The young Syrian says that Salomé is like "a silver flower,"²⁸² and Salomé herself claims that the moon is like "a little silver flower."²⁸³ It is revealing, then, that when Salomé examines Jokanaan, she in effect sees a reflection of herself, for she describes him as an "image of silver."²⁸⁴ Further, she identifies him with the moon which, as we have seen throughout the play, is closely connected only with Salomé herself. "I am sure he is chaste as the moon is,"²⁸⁵ she cries, mesmerized, while attempting to look closer at what she perceives to be a reflection of herself. "He is like a moonbeam, like a shaft of silver."²⁸⁶ Moreover, out of all the men who gazed at her, it is only in Jokanaan's gaze that she sees her mirror image, for his eyes, she says, are like "black lakes troubled by fantastic moons."²⁸⁷

The lunar imagery and symbolism in the play allow Wilde efficaciously to make dramatic connections without the reader or the audience being aware that he is doing so. For while a symbol reveals, it also, like Salomé's veiled presence, paradoxically conceals and shrouds in mystery. Thus, we should be aware that the metal corresponding to the moon is silver, and that moreover it is customarily identified with the occult side of the nature as well as with

the feminine. It is also helpful to know that "lunar objects may be taken as those of a passive or reflecting character, like the mirror; or those which can alter their surface/area, like the fan."²⁸⁸ Manifestly, then, it is for this reason that Wilde uses the fan in his complex of lunar imagery in the play. Thus, the princess hides "her face behind her fan,"²⁸⁹ and Herodias calls for her fan not once but twice.²⁹⁰ In effect, the fan acts both as "surface" and "symbol" in the play, a decorative prop and a link in a network of lunar symbolism.

Wilde also uses symbols to juxtapose various dualities or antithetical forces in the play in order to generate an overriding sense of ambivalence. Thus, not only is Salomé perceived to be both an angel and a devil, but the colours red and white function in the play in a sort of binary pattern. Salomé's feet like "white doves"²⁹¹ or "little white flowers"²⁹² will dance on blood even as the moon later becomes "red as blood,"²⁹³ presaging Jokanaan's death in a kind of demonic apocalypse. In this way, Wilde allows a fusion to take place between physical reality and abstractions or inner mood. Thus, the white moon changes to red on a preter-logical level, even as Salomé was chaste but her virginity is (once again, only on a symbolic level) taken from her by Jokanaan. "I was chaste," she tells

Jokanaan, "and thou didst fill my veins with fire."²⁹⁴ It is interesting that Mallarmé (who rejects love and praises sterility in his poetry) presents us in his poem *Hérodiade* (1867) (which Des Esseintes would read aloud before Moreau's portrait of Salomé) with a combination of ice and snow, suggestive of sterility and destructive sexuality in a way which reminds us of Wilde's *Salomé*:

I love the awe of being virgin and I wish to
live amid the dread my hair fills me with, so
that at night, alone in my bed, inviolate
reptile, I may feel in my unavailing flesh the
cold sparkle of your pale light, you who die,
you who burn with chastity, night aglow with
ice and cruel snow.²⁹⁵

For Wilde not only has Herodias accuse Herod of sterility; he similarly juxtaposes hot and cold, snow with fire in the passage prior to Salomé's dance:

The breath of the wind of its wings is terrible.
It is a chill wind. Nay, but it is not cold, it is
hot. I am choking. Pour water on my hands.
Give me snow to eat. Loosen my mantle.
Quick, quick! Loosen my mantle. Nay, but
leave it. It is my garland that hurts me, my
garland of roses. The flowers are like fire.
They have burned my forehead.²⁹⁶

Here Wilde evokes Herod's hesitation between fear and desire, fear of being in the power of uncontrollable forces and the desire to relinquish himself to them. He feels himself to be possessed by a magic not of himself. The garland of flowers which burns Herod's forehead is, of course, symbolic of Salomé who has been identified both with the white rose and the flower. Thus, Salomé evokes and embodies both a blind sexual destruction and what Baudelaire calls the "la froide majestée de la femme stérile."²⁹⁷ The severed head in *Salomé* (which so often forms the subject matter of Redon's paintings) was suggestive not only of unleashed and uncontrollable sexuality and lust, but also of sterility, death, and castration.

In *Le Vice Suprême*, Péladan wrote that "...la demonialité est une oeuvre de chair qui consiste à s'exalter l'imagination, en fixant son désir sur un être mort, absent, ou inexistant."²⁹⁸ And certainly the mental erethism, which Salomé exhibits, is completely self-reflexive, her love for Jokanaan a kind of necrophilia. ("There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood...? But perchance it is the taste of love...")²⁹⁹ suggest a sterile onanism, for Salomé can only love what is dead or moribund. Thus, in the earlier parts of the play, she is attracted to but hates Jokanaan. It is only upon his death that she "loves" him completely. This

decadent rejection of reality and withdrawal into the self is linked both with the idea of narcissism in the play and mode of self-destruction. Similarly, the emphasis on eating and drinking in *Salomé* suggests love or, rather, lust, which is in actuality an appetite for human flesh associated with satanism. The words Huysmans wrote about Rops could equally apply to the author of *Salomé*: "He has celebrated the spirituality of lust which is Satanism..."³⁰⁰ For Salomé will not eat in the early parts of the play; indeed, she leaves the feast. Herod offers her wine and fruit but she refuses. The reason for her refusal becomes apparent only at the end of the play when we realise that her hunger and thirst are not directed towards food:

Ah! thou wouldst not suffer me to kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. Well! I will kiss it now. I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit... I am athirst for thy beauty; I am hungry for thy body; and neither wine nor fruits can appease my desire. What shall I do now, Jokanaan?³⁰¹

Salomé functioned in Wilde's and Huysmans' work not only as a symbol of evil but also as a symbol of man's desire for the unknown. The femme fatale appeared in various different forms at the *fin-de-siècle*: Salomé, the

Sphinx, Herodias, Salammbô, Helen, Circe, Lamia, and many more. For Wilde and Huysmans, she existed as a complex figure onto whom, in the wake of Baudelaire, man projected his fears, desires, and preoccupations. As has been noted, according to Baudelaire, crime is natural, for man is the slave of nature – nature who commands him to eat, sleep, and drink. Virtue, it follows, therefore, is an artificial creation. What is best in man is consequently the non-natural, and thus the aim of art is to be *against* nature.³⁰² Obviously, since Wilde and Huysmans (like Schopenhauer) viewed woman as the repository of the natural world (encompassing sexuality and death). She is therefore viewed as being essentially evil; that is to say, animalistic—the logical opposite of the dandy:

La femme est le contraire du dandy.

Donc elle doit faire horreur.

La femme a faim et elle veut manger. Soif, et elle veut boire.

Elle est en rut et elle veut être foutue.

Le beau mérite!

La femme est *naturelle*, c'est-à-dire abominable.³⁰³

On one level the idea is an ancient one: woman through sexuality becomes an incitement to sin; she is in league with the devil and is therefore a strong force in the world.

Such misogynistic sentiments are clearly revealed in Rop's etching "Prostitution and Folly Dominate the World." And in Moreau's description of one of his many works dealing with Salomé ("Salomé in the Garden"), he echoes Wilde's and Huysmans' perception of the Salomé figure, recapitulating the prevalent view of the femme fatale:

This woman jaded, whimsical, of an animal nature, giving herself the pleasure, not at all a keen one for her, of seeing her enemy lying on the ground, such is her disgust with any satisfaction of her desires. This woman strolling nonchalantly in a dull and brutish way in the gardens which have just been sullied by this ghastly murder, appalling to the executioner himself, who runs away in bewilderment.³⁰⁴

Yet, paradoxically, the decadent sees the desire to break through the boundaries of knowledge (hence his interest in satanism and psychology) as a positive virtue. Further, his desire to admit the power of the irrational and unconscious forces ensure that the figure of the femme fatale – a concrete embodiment of these preoccupations – should figure prominently in Huysmans' and Wilde's work. For ultimately evil, the satanic, when presented in forms of

beauty, possess the autonomy of art, moving beyond the realm of good and evil.

There were many versions of Salomé available at the time. The Bible, Flaubert's *Trois Contes*, Renan's *Vie de Jesus*, but it was Heine's "Atta Troll" which was Wilde's main source. The poem appeared in a French journal for the first time in 1846 in a French translation by Heine himself. It is not surprising that "Atta Troll" should have interested Wilde. Heine knew Gautier well and followed him in the separation of art from morality. The poem is satirical but complex, often illogical and incoherent. Indeed the dream within the poem, the enigmatic figure of Troll the bear, the confusion of strange animals, all evoke the sense of a bizarre vision. Significantly, the action is set in the dark woods of the Pyrenees. And it is in the nighttime world that the unconscious lets loose an admixture of historical and mythological figures. Whores, nymphs, King Arthur, Shakespeare and many more appear along with the figure of Herodias (in Heine's version it is she who is in love with John the Baptist, and tells Salomé to demand his head) who throws John the Baptist's head in the air like a ball. The night procession is viewed by the narrator Heine in a limbo-like state between dreaming and consciousness. He sees and is greeted three times by Herodias, and the next day longs for

her, but observes that this desire is futile as his yearning for dreams, death, and madness which Herodias embodies cannot be satisfied as she has died long ago.

Given Wilde's and Huysmans' interest in the unconscious and the irrational, it is not surprising that a poem which reflects these concerns should in part inspire *Salomé*. For the figure of Salomé, as we have seen, symbolises both the narcissistic sterility of art and its hermeticism as well as the animal, forces of destruction, and evil. The aura of luxury, of paganism was juxtaposed implicitly and explicitly with the idea of Christian sin, and the sense of ambivalence generated through this juxtaposition greatly enhanced Salomé's complex hypnotic power.

Salomé as an image of beauty and sexual attractiveness is invested with great influence over man. Rops, who frequently depicted woman as the instrument of Satan, the repository of evil and vice, had great vogue at the period. "Rops," wrote Les Goncourts in their journal,

Nous parle de cet étonnement que produit sur lui...l'enharnachement, le façonnage presque fantastique de la Parisienne actuelle (. . .) Il nous parle du moderne qu'il veut faire d'après nature, du caractère qu'il y trouve, de l'aspect sinistre, presque macabre...³⁰⁵

The macabre and sinister aspect of woman issued in some degree, as has been noted, from the belief that while she embodied nature, and by extension sexuality, she also embodied death. Wilde and Huysmans place a great emphasis on disease, decay, and death in their work, which often manifests itself as irony when juxtaposed with the eternity of art. It is for this reason that Wilde goes to the length of equating youth with perfection, claiming: "The aim of perfection is youth." In *Des Esseintes'* nightmare, the image of diseased woman, castration, and death are fused:

He made a superhuman effort to free himself from her embrace, but with an irresistible movement she clutched him and held him, and pale with horror, he saw the savage *Nidularium* blossoming between her uplifted thighs, with its swordblades gaping open to expose the bloody depths.³⁰⁶

In addition to this perception of woman as incarnating evil and the natural world, and by extension decay and death, woman was also perceived as incarnating mystery (Wilde had the frontpiece of the poem "The Sphinx" decorated with the figure of *Melancholia*). Thus the figure of the sphinx is a repeated motif in Wilde's and Huysmans' writings, and appears frequently in decadent literature. Indeed, the

decadent predilection for the dangerous and forbidden was crystallised in the image of the sphinx and the femme fatale. In the short story, "The Sphinx Without a Secret," the sphinx-like woman who is the focal point of the piece is described by the central character in the following way:

It seemed to me the face of some one who had a secret, but whether that secret was good or evil I could not say. Its beauty was a beauty moulded out of many mysterie--the beauty, in fact, which is psychological, not plastic--and the faint smile that just played across the lips was far too subtle to be really sweet.³⁰⁷

What the secret consists of – if it exists – is unimportant, as the woman is transformed into a symbol of the unknown.

The celebration of mystery and evil, the recognition of, and wallowing in, dangerous impulses, resulted in an identification of mysticism with eroticism. In Wagner, in particular, the woman as mysterious siren was popularized. Max Nordau objected strongly to what he claimed was the degenerate eroticism of contemporary mysticism:

Mysticism is, as we know, always accompanied by eroticism, especially in the degenerate, whose emotionalism has its chief source in morbidly excited states of the sexual

centers. Wagner's imagination is perpetually occupied with woman. But he never sees her in relation to man in the form of healthy and natural love, which is a benefit and satisfaction for both lovers. As with all morbid erotics (we have already remarked this in Verlaine and Tolstoi), woman presents herself to him as a terrible force of nature, of which man is the trembling, helpless victim. The woman that he knows is the gruesome Astarte of the Semites, the frightful man-eating Kali Bhagawati of the Hindoos, an apocalyptic vision of smiling bloodthirstiness, in demoniacally beautiful embodiment.³⁰⁸

Huysmans, in his commentary on *Tannhäuser*, sees Wagner's Venus as the incarnation of lust, the messenger of Satan rather than the traditional image of antiquity, Aphrodite:

Telle que Wagner l'a créée, cette Vénus, emblème de la nature matérielle de l'être, allégorie du Mal en lutte avec le Bien, symbole de notre enfer intérieur opposé à notre ciel interne, nous ramène d'un bond en arrière à travers les siècles, à l'imperméable grandeur d'un poème symbolique de Prudence, ce vivant Tannhäuser qui, après des années dédiées au stupre, s'arracha des bras de la victorieuse Démone pour se

réfugier dans la pénitente adoration de la Vierge.

Il semble en effet que la Vénus du musicien soit la descendante de la Luxuria du poète, de la blanche Belluaire, macérée de parfums, qui écrase ses victimes sous le coup d'énervantes fleurs; il semble que la Venus wagnérienne attire et capte comme la plus dangereuse des déités de Prudence, celle dont cet écrivain n'écrit qu'en tremblant le nom: Sodomita Libido.³⁰⁹

The femme fatale and the demonic were vehicles for Wilde and Huysmans to externalize an internal complexity and divisiveness – the opposition of “notre enfer intérieur” and ‘notre ciel interne.” Thus the “satanic” characters in their works can be divided into two types: the satanic dandy (such as Des Esseintes, Durtal, or Lord Henry) or alternatively characters that manifest extremes of satanic behaviour (Dorian Gray, Gilles de Rais). These two kinds of characters concretize two different opposing aspects of the psyche. The obviously satanic characters evince a desire to break out of the social order, a sense of despair and alienation from the self. They attempt to move beyond the norm by means of the artificial or non-natural. They long for intensity of experience in which to lose the self, to

annihilate the boundaries between observer and observed. The satanic dandy, conversely, has absolute control over himself, and is a dispassionate ironic observer. He affirms evil as a source of beauty and his rebellion is more subtle and quietly subversive, being primarily expressed through the manipulation and domination of others. Diabolic imagery and subjects efficaciously allowed Wilde and Huysmans to express this internal complexity within a recognisable framework of imagery and allusion. In effect, the satanic functions in their work as an affirmation of inverted spiritual values in an age of positivism and a desire to transcend the quotidian as well as a recognition of the multiplicity of the self.

CHAPTER III

DREAMS AND FANTASY

Suggestive art is like an illumination of things for dreams, toward which thought is also directed. Decadence or not, it is so.

O. Redon

The emphasis upon the withdrawal into the self, the decadent's narcissism in *Salomé*, is a product of the decadent view that a thing is valuable not because it is good, edifying, or useful, but because we find it pleasant or desirable in itself. Art, according to Wilde and Huysmans, is a process of discovering or inventing that value. Thus, the most valuable things in nature, to an aesthetic thinker, are those which have least to do with process, use, result – the jewel, the sterile flower, the woman who like Salomé refuses sexuality or motherhood simply to exist for her own beauty's sake. The emphasis on dream and fantasy in both Wilde's and Huysmans' work can in part be traced to this. The dreamer contemplates things outside the framework of living reality: it is the operation of this dreamy faculty of imagination, freed from reason or calculation of consequences, which discovers the values which are truly aesthetic. The corollary of this is that the decadent places value on obsessions and fetishisms, in this way foreshadowing the surrealists. The thing itself, the dream, fills the mind with desire, quite apart from any virtue or use it might have. The minute it is brought within the realm of rational consideration – considered not as an end in itself but as a means to something else – its value is lost. Sibyl Vane as an actress is beautiful and desirable. When

considered as a potential mother she loses that quality that rendered her desirable.

It is interesting, then, that the idea of writing *Salomé* supposedly came to Wilde when he and his friend Raynaud were looking into a jeweler's window. The thought was conceived and came to him "wearing a helmet of gold, in a shower of precious stones."³¹⁰ It is not surprising that gems should have helped to inspire the play for they seem to embody many of the decadent's thematic preoccupations. The very crystalline quality of jewels suggests that they escape the vicissitudes of natural things. Further, despite the fact that gems are found in nature, it is man who transforms them and turns them into things of beauty. Des Esseintes identifies jewels with makeup, considering them both to be attempts to "correct and improve on Nature."³¹¹ It is telling, then, that the tortoise which Des Esseintes encrusted with rare and precious stones dies, unable to live under the aegis of artifice. The sense of excess, luxury, and supreme indulgence is evoked by Verlaine when he says that the word "decadent" "emits the brilliance of flames and the gleams of precious stones."³¹² Wilde's and Huysmans' beloved Moreau's paintings reflect this opulence, as well as the concern for form in their jewel-like surface and ornamentation. In A

rebours Huysmans describes Moreau's painting of Salome with particular reference to the jewels which adorn her:

her breasts rise and fall, the nipples hardening at the touch of her whirling necklaces; the strings of diamonds glitter against her moist flesh; her bracelets, her belts, her rings all spit out fiery sparks; and across her triumphal robe, sewn with pearls, patterned with silver, spangled with gold, the jewelled cuirass, of which every chain is a precious stone, seems to be ablaze with little snakes of fire, swarming over the mat flesh, over the tea-rose skin, like gorgeous insects with dazzling shards, mottled with carmine, spotted with pale yellow, speckled with steel blue, striped with peacock green.³¹³

Redon found that Moreau's paintings were filled with "entirely too much jewelry," and concluded that Moreau

produced the works of an elegant bachelor strictly sealed up against the shocks of life; his work is the fruit of it, it is art and nothing but art and that is saying a good deal.³¹⁴

In the same vein, Pater's flame is "gem-like," for the moment is experienced in all its flame-like intensity, but is transmuted in the mind into art, which is "gem-like," that is to say eternal. It was his means of expressing the concept of

eternity in a moment. Huysmans and Wilde also have the tendency to list precious gems in a catalogue, revelling in the exotic sounding words and erudite allusions. Meaning was unimportant; words were used in a painterly fashion – the concern being with surfaces and decorative detail. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian not only catalogues jewels, but discovers “wonderful stories”³¹⁵ about them. And in *Salomé*, Herod tries to bribe Salomé with jewels in an attempt to get her to dance:

I have jewels hidden in this place – jewels that your mother even has never seen; jewels that are marvellous. I have a collar of pearls, set in four rows. They are like unto moons chained with rays of silver. They are like fifty moons caught in a golden net. On the ivory of her breast a queen has worn it. Thou shalt be as fair as a queen when thou wearest it. I have amethysts of two kinds, one that is black like wine, and one that is red like wine which has been coloured with water. I have topazes, yellow as are the eyes of tigers, and topazes that are as the eyes of cats. I have opals that burn always with an ice-like flame, opals that make sad men’s minds, and are fearful of the shadows. I have onyxes like the eyeballs of a dead woman. I have moonstones that change when the moon changes, and are wan when

they see the sun. I have sapphires big like eggs, and as blue as blue flowers. The sea wanders within them and the moon comes never to trouble the blue of their waves. I have chrysolites and beryls and chrysoprases and rubies. I have sardonyx and hyacinth stones, and stones of chalcedony...³¹⁶

Wilde's description of the gems is almost extraneous to the linear movement of the play, engendering only a sense of exoticism and stasis. This focus on detail and elaboration of detail is highly self-conscious, its function purely ornamental and superfluous. But, as in the case of dandyism, the decadent finds that the wrought verbal surface, like the cosmetic, is valuable in itself as well as deeply symbolic. Indeed colour and gems function to create a kind of symbolic network as, for example, in the dream passage in the first chapter of *En rade*:

Partout grimpaient des pampres découpés dans d'uniques pierres; partout flambait un brasier d'incombustibles ceps, un brasier qu'alimentaient les tisons minéraux des feuilles taillées dans les lueurs différentes du vert, dans les lueurs vert-lumière de l'émeraude, prasines du péridot, glauques de l'aiguemarine, jaunâtres du zircon, céruléennes du béryl; partout, du haut en bas,

aux cimes des échalias, aux pieds des tiges, des vignes poussaient des raisins de rubis et d'améthystes, des grappes de grenats et d'amaldines, des chasselas de chrysoprases, des muscats gris d'olivines et de quartz, dardaient de fabuleuses touffes d'éclairs rouges, d'éclairs violets, d'éclairs jaunes, montaient en une escalade de fruits de feu dont la vue suggérerait la vraisemblable imposture d'une vendange prête à cracher sous la vis du pressoir un moût éblouissant de flammes!³¹⁷

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *A rebours* is referred to as being written in "that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once."³¹⁸ It is a book which generated in Dorian a "malady of dreaming,"³¹⁹ and was written in a style that Wilde claimed possessed qualities characteristic of the "French school of Symbolistes."³²⁰ Baudelaire's idea of the whole visible universe as a storehouse of images and signs which the imagination endows with value was a central tenet of the Symbolists, and important to both Wilde's and Huysmans' thought. For this emphasis on the imagination and the dream betrayed an interest in the unconscious. Decadent art, in its utilization of the subjective coupled with the absurd, its focus upon the decorative surface as a kind of

symbolic network, evokes some of the symbolic devices which Freud outlined in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900).

In *En rade* Huysmans utilizes three obscure dream sequences in an attempt to juxtapose dream with reality. In order further to accentuate the difference between the conscious and unconscious life, he chose as his subject matter two peasants, Jack and Louise Marles, contrasting the crudities of country life with a fantastical dreamworld replete with exotic detail. In a letter to Zola, Huysmans claimed that originally he had intended to "divide the book into reality by day and dream by night . . . writing alternately one chapter of reality and one of dreams."³²¹ Instead, he chose a much less effective route and introduced into the text three dream sequences. The ornamental, the patterned, in the dream sequences, Huysmans invested with significance. The surface being symbol was sufficient in itself. Thus, the importance of purely "abstract decoration"³²² and of the "imaginative" and "pleasurable,"³²³ of the "unreal" and "non-existent"³²⁴ is stressed throughout Wilde's essays. Both Huysmans and Wilde emphasised not meaning per se but the importance of form and colour. For beauty (as the "symbol of symbols") "reveals everything because it expresses nothing."³²⁵ It is for this reason that the painter Whistler whom Wilde and

Huysmans so admired entitled his semi-abstract paintings "nocturnes." Huysmans viewed Whistler's landscapes as "paysages de songes"³²⁶ or "rêves fluides"³²⁷ and celebrated Whistler as an "artiste extralucide, dégageant du reel le suprasensible."³²⁸ Wilde approves of the purely decorative arts because they are "suggestive" and because

colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways. The harmony that resides in the delicate proportions of lines and masses becomes mirrored in the mind. The repetitions of pattern give us rest. The marvels of design stir the imagination.³²⁹

Huysmans and Wilde praised music for similar reasons. Indeed, Huysmans's favourite philosopher felt that music was the one art form which could move beyond the merely phenomenal world and express transcendental ideas because it was the only non-representational art form. The French symbolist school was greatly influenced by Schopenhauer's aesthetic theory. It is significant that Wilde referred to *Salomé* as that "beautiful coloured musical thing,"³³⁰ even as Huysmans identified Whistler with Verlaine who moves beyond the confines of poetry to where "l'art du musicien commence."³³¹ In Verlaine's words:

De la musique avant toute chose,
 Et pour cela préfère l'Impair
 Plus vague et plus soluble dans l'air,
 Sans rien en lui qui pèse ou qui pose.

Il faut aussi que tu n'aïlles point
 Choisir tes mots sans quelque méprise:
 Rien ne plus cher que la chanson grise
 Où l'Indécis au Précis se joint

Car nous voulons la Nuance encor,
 Pas la Couleur, rien que la nuance!
 Oh, la nuance seule fiancée
 La rêve au rêve et la flute au cor!³³²

Thus Whistler, according to Huysmans, "dans ses harmonies de nuances, passe presque la frontière de la peinture," entering into Verlaine's realm of nuances in dreams. It is this concentration on dreams which in part connects Wilde's and Huysmans' work with symbolism. In *Vague 28* (1886), Kahn defined and explained the objectives of symbolism:

As to subject matter, we are tired of the quotidian, the near-at-hand, the compulsorily contemporaneous; we wish to be able to place the development of the symbol in any period whatsoever, and even in outright dreams (*the dream being indistinguishable from life*).³³³

Thematically, the dream enabled Wilde and Huysmans to focus on their interest in psychology as well as to affirm their belief in the powers of the imagination and by extension, art. Thus Huysmans and Wilde emphasise the suggestive and mysterious in their work, "dégageant du réel le suprasensible."³³⁴ Their interest in satanism is in part a product of their rejection of the materialistic ethos which denies the life of the unconscious and the impulse towards art. The dream is therefore extolled not only as an escape but as a superior mode of being. Durtal in *Là-bas* encapsulates this idea when he says: "daydream is the only good thing in life. Everything else is vulgar and empty."³³⁵ Similarly, Madame Chantelouve tells Durtal that they should not become lovers, as in any case whatever she would dream would be superior to reality:

I have possessed Byron, Baudelaire, Gérard de Nerval, those I love...I have only to desire them...before I go to sleep... And you would be inferior to my chimera, to the Durtal I adore, whose caresses make my nights delirious!³³⁶

The dream is not only superior to reality, it is the sole province of art for, according to Wilde,

The only beautiful things are things that do not concern us. As long as a thing is useful or

necessary...or is a vital part of the environment in which we live, it is outside the proper sphere of art.³³⁷

This was not an indiscriminate rejection of realism on Wilde's part but rather, like Huysmans, he rejected Zola's naturalism as leading towards a cul-de-sac. He sought to redefine his own preferred type of realism:

The difference between such a book as M. Zola's *L'Assommoir* and Balzac's *Illusions Perdues* is the difference between unimaginative realism and imaginative reality.³³⁸

Huysmans articulates this same view in *Là-bas*, where he invokes a new brand of naturalism, a "spiritual naturalism,"³³⁹ interestingly also citing Balzac as a true proponent of just such a naturalism.

The focus on the dream in Wilde's and Huysmans' work issued from the assertion of the primacy of the imagination, the spiritual, the invisible as opposed to the visible. The new scientific spirit and materialism provoked in reaction subjectivism and concomitant narcissism. Salomé, in her narcissistic solitude and sterility, embodies such decadent preoccupations which are, as we have seen, closely related to the concept of dandyism. In other words, such a turning inward constitutes a rejection of positivism

as well as an affirmation of the aristocracy of art. Wilde was therefore to claim that the materialistic society "never forgives the dreamer. The beautiful sterile emotions that art excites in us are hateful in its eyes."³⁴⁰ Art is perceived as being sterile, inward looking, autonomous, expressing "nothing but itself."³⁴¹ Thus Des Esseintes' favourite poet, Mallarmé, depicts Salomé in terms of her narcissism:

Nourrice: Comment, sinon parmi d'obscures
 Epouvantes, songer plus implacable encor
 Et comme suppliant le dieu que le trésor
 De notre grâce attend! et pour qui,
 dévorée
 D'Angoisses gardez vous la splendeur
 ignorée
 Et le mystère de votre être?

Hérodiade: Pour moi.³⁴²

Art was to be an end in itself and the dreamer/artist concerned only with an interior voyage. It follows that the critic Poizat noted that symbolism was inextricably bound to the dream. Indeed he defined symbolism as:

the entry of the dream into literature, it was the turning of man's gaze from the outside to the inside, the contemplation of things, as they are reflected within us, as in some still pool...³⁴³

The figure of Narcissus suggests the consciousness turned inward upon itself: a rejection of the vulgar world of reality. Narcissus therefore implies an aesthetic ideal in a world of action, a contemplative turning to an inward world of dreams and daydreams. Further, the idea of narcissism evokes the autonomy of art, its complete self-sufficiency. In *A soi-même* Redon, one of Des Esseintes' favourite artists, articulates what is for Wilde and Huysmans at the crux of a work of art – suggestiveness:

All the mistakes which the critics have made when writing about my work stem from the fact that they cannot understand that things must not be defined, understood, limited, made precise, because everything which is sincerely and subtly new like Beauty for instance, carries its own meaning in itself.³⁴⁴

The two themes coexist in decadent art so that the autonomy of art, the turning inward of the artist to his own dream world simultaneously suggests that the aristocrat/artist is trapped within his own consciousness – isolated and alone. This idea was of course outlined in the famous passage in Pater's conclusion to *The Renaissance*:

Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through

which no real voice has ever pierced on its way, to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner in its own dream of a world.³⁴⁵

The androgyne embodies these ideas, being identified, by Wilde and Huysmans, with both narcissism and the self-sufficiency of the dream world. Indeed in *Là-bas* Huysmans explicitly identifies the androgyne with the inward-looking, analysing intellect of the artist/aristocrat:

this cerebral hermaphrodism, self-fecundation, is a distinguished vice at least – being the privilege of the artist – a vice reserved for the elect...³⁴⁶

Further, in *Certains*, he describes the ambiguous figure of Saint Quentin in the painting “A Virgin and Saints” in terms of its power to give rise to dreams:

Et l’aspect entier du saint fait rêver. Ces formes de garçonnnes aux hanches un peu développées, ce col de fille, aux chairs blanches...³⁴⁷

The interconnection of these decadent thematic concerns is underlined when we remember that Barbey D’Aurevilly

claimed that dandies possessed "natures doubles et multiples, d'un sexe intellectuel indécis...Androgynes de l'Histoire non plus de la Fable..."³⁴⁸ The theme of androgyny and homosexuality is, as we have seen, in Wilde's and Huysmans' work also closely connected with and presented as a rejection of narrow and materialistic values. In its divergence from "the natural," homosexuality becomes identified with a perverse art. It is significant, then, that Gustave Moreau was a painter whom both Wilde and Huysmans admired. Moreau's figures are androgynous and asexual while simultaneously evoking an aura of sexual depravity. His paintings are of a dream world and the figures within them, according to Charles Ricketts, illustrator of Wilde's *The Sphinx*:

His creatures would become troubled and shadowy indeed if brought face to face with real facts and passions; they would swoon upon themselves, called back by some faint Lethean murmur or portent. Reality is suggested only by a few fair things fostered in the shadow of palaces, ravines, and by dim rivers, where light, water and air have become resolved into the limpid colours of rare crystals.³⁴⁹

Huysmans also identified Moreau's work with the dream – dreams which save man from an intolerable reality:

il arrive fatalement que quelques êtres, égarés dans l'horreur de ces temps, rêvent à l'écart et que de l'humus de leurs songes jaillissent d'inconcevables fleurs d'un éclat vibrant, d'un parfum fiévreux et altier, si triste! . . . des Gustave Moreau . . . des êtres d'exception, qui retournent sur les pas des siècles et se jettent, par dégoût des promiscuités qu'il leur faut subir, dans les gouffres des âges révolus, dans les tumultueux espaces des cauchemars et des rêves.³⁵⁰

Zola, too, commented on the way in which Moreau's paintings not only evinced a longing for escape into another realm, but also the complexity of the decadent fantasy:

He paints his dreams, not simple, naïve dreams such as we all have, but sophisticated, complicated, enigmatic dreams which are difficult to understand immediately.³⁵¹

Huysmans saw Moreau as a kind of mystic taking refuge in solitude in the middle of Paris and rejecting outright

la vie contemporaine qui bat furieusement pourtant les portes du cloître. Abimé dans

l'extase, il voit resplendir les féeriques visions, les sanglantes apothéoses des autres âges.³⁵²

The artist, trapped by base physical and social determinism, forced to exist within a materialistic society which upholds the tyranny of the majority (democracy) and faced with the indifference of the natural world, seeks solitude. This at any rate was the popular conception of the dilemma which faced artists at the period. Consequently, solitude was considered to be a necessary precondition of artistic creation or pastimes. Thus *A rebours* was born from Huysmans' desire to describe a solitary figure who

a découvert, dans l'artifice, un dérivatif au dégoût que lui inspirent les tracas de la vie et les mœurs américaines de son temps; je le profilais fuyant à tire d'aile dans le rêve, se réfugiant dans l'illusion d'extravagantes féeries, vivant, seul, loin de son siècle, dans le souvenir évoqué d'époques plus cordiales, de milieux moins vils.³⁵³

By concentrating on a solitary inner world, the decadent attempted to escape an unbearable or commonplace reality, often by creating an alternate reality, a dream world through the refinement of the sensations. *Des Esseintes* is

the obvious precursor of this type of decadent protagonist: a "hero," according to Dorian Gray, "in whom the romantic and scientific temperaments were so strangely blended."³⁵⁴ In *Des Esseintes* romantic yearning for the ideal and a scientific determination to conjure up inner paradises by means of the deception of the senses were united. Solitude, then, came to be considered as a superior mode of being, as only through the cultivation of solitude could the artist flee the material world and enter a spiritual realm.

Silence also became associated with this idea of solitude even as inner contemplation was identified with the entry into a world of dreams. Further, silence was not only associated with the condition of reverie; it was also obliquely identified with or symbolised the unconscious from which artistic creation emerged. In 1890 Carlyle's words were translated in the French symbolist review *Entretiens Politiques et Littéraires*:

SILENCE and SECRECY! Altars might still be raised to them (were this an altar-building time) for universal worship. Silence is the element in which great things fashion themselves together...Speech is of Time, Silence is of Eternity.

Bees will not work except in darkness,
Thought will not work except in Silence...³⁵⁵

Khnopff's pastel "Le Silence of 1890," in which a woman her expression remote and otherworldly, crystallises (as does Redon's work on the same subject) this central theme in symbolist and decadent art. The union of Byzantine exoticism with the idea of silence and dreams in the painting has its parallel in Huysmans' conflation of the exotic with the dream in chapter five of *A rebours*. In this chapter it is described how Des Esseintes would stand night after night "dreaming"³⁵⁶ in front of Moreau's painting of Salomé. And it is significant that Moreau's use of mythologies "whose bloody enigmas he compared and unravelled," his "architectonic mixtures" with "sinister quality," should paradoxically suggest to Des Esseintes an "entirely modern sensibility."³⁵⁷ For the flight into the world of dreams suggested by extension a rejection of a positivistic world which attempted to reduce all to the factual. Wilde's fairytale *The Happy Prince* begins with just such a juxtaposition:

"He looks just like an angel," said the Charity Children

"How do you know?" said the Mathematical Master, "you have never seen one."

"Ah! but we have, in our dreams," answered the children; and the Mathematical Master

frowned and looked very severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming.³⁵⁸

Moreau's popularity among decadent artists was in part due to his evocation of dream worlds. Occasionally, this took an obvious form. In Moreau's "The Dream of an Inhabitant of Mongolia," an old man lies sleeping on a couch. From open windows Constantinople can be seen in the distance. Two large floating bubbles contain the old man's dreams. The entire composition is done in light shades with almost transparent watercolours. Of course, Moreau was greatly influenced by Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, and in this novel, infused with an aura of exoticism, the saint's visions and hallucinations are prompted by his own subconscious fears and desires, encompassing the fantastical and hallucinatory. Indeed many of the themes of *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* recur in decadent fiction: exoticism, Sphinxes and Chimeras, yearning, the juxtaposition of paganism and Christianity. The Byzantine Empire particularly held a great fascination at the *fin de siècle* as it was associated with complex symbolism and language—a kind of modern sophistication. Therefore Des Esseintes sought in a novel not only the quality of strangeness but also

Byzantine flowers of thought and deliquescent complexities of style; he demanded a disquieting vagueness that would give him scope for dreaming.³⁵⁹

Flaubert was to give him what he sought through a:

series of vast, imposing scenes, grandiose pageantries of barbaric splendour in which there participated creatures delicate and sensitive, mysterious and proud, women cursed, in all the perfection of their beauty...³⁶⁰

Woman figured prominently in this dream world, being the repository of all mystery. In *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* she both attracts and repels, incarnating at one moment the mysterious sphinx, at another lust and death. Moreau's unfinished painting "The Chimeras" embodies these obsessions. It is a bizarre, chaotic mixture of details: jewels, city, and figures. The painting's themes and symbolic stylization unite woman with the dream landscape. In Moreau's words:

This Isle of Fantastic Dreams encloses all the forms that passion, caprice and fancy take in women.

Woman, in her primal essence, an unthinking creature, mad on mystery and the unknown, smitten with evil in the form of perverse and diabolical seduction. Dreams of children, dreams of the senses, monstrous and melancholy dreams, dreams conveying spirit and soul into the vague inane of space, into the mystery of darkness. Everything must feel the influence of the seven capital sins, everything is to be found in this satanic precinct, in this circle of vices and guilty ardours, from the seed still apparently innocent to the monstrous and fatal flowers of the abyss. Here are processions of accursed queens just coming away from the serpent of spellbinding sermons; here are women whose soul has gone from them, waiting by the wayside for the lascivious goat to come by, the goat mounted by lust that will be worshipped as it passes. Aloof and sombre women, in a dream of envy and unappeased pride, in their brutish isolation; women straddling chimeras that carry them into space, whence they fall back again in bewildered horror and giddiness. Dark, terrible, deadly chimeras, the chimeras of space, of the waters, of mystery, of darkness and dream.³⁶¹

I quote this at length because the passage underlines the decadent preoccupations which became intimately connected with the idea of the dream or nightmare: an escape into the past, a concern with myths, a fascination with extremes of emotion on a grandiose scale and a concomitant interest in sadism, the sinister, and the forbidden. In *En rade*, in the first dream sequence an anonymous girl is presented to the ruler of the palace in an erotic episode redolent of bejewelled luxury and exoticism. The female figure in the dream is implicitly juxtaposed with Jack's diseased and possibly dying wife who is repellent to him. Louise is an ordinary woman, and according to Wilde: "Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination. They are limited to their century."³⁶² Thus Moreau's women possess an otherworldly quality, and are placed within other ages. They are effectively transformed into icons, aloof from reality, even existing in a sleep-like state. It is for this reason that Des Esseintes describes Salomé's eyes as being "fixed in the concentrated gaze of a sleepwalker."³⁶³ This statement is not merely Des Esseintes' projection; it is faithful to Moreau's creations. The latter attempts to evoke a dreamlike mood and, further, explicitly sees a dream as enabling man to transcend reality. Moreau himself says of his painting of Prometheus:

He gazes at the . . . spaces in the distance . . .
all the horizons and smiling in his dream,
while the blood flows from his side under the
thirsty beak of the ever insatiable vulture.³⁶⁴

This suggests a kind of subjectivism, an assertion of the power of man's consciousness to triumph over reality – to create its own reality. An obvious corollary of this subjectivism, this "onanisme mentale,"³⁶⁵ was an inescapable solitude. Moreau projects this sentiment onto the figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel:

All the figures of Michelangelo appear to be arrested in an ideal state of sleep-walking. Throughout the composition, they are seen to be moving and acting almost as if they were unconscious of the movement they are making.

Explain this almost uniform recurrence, in all his figures of something like sleep and self-absorbed reverie, so much so that they appear to be rapt in sleep and borne towards other worlds than ours.

The sublimity of this pictorial contrivance. The powerful means of expression arising from this unique combination, sleep in an attitude of movement.

The self-absorption of the individual rapt in dreams.³⁶⁶

The propensity to turn to a world of dreams resulted not only in extreme subjectivism but also in solipsism. Transcendental idealism rejected the possibility of any knowledge of the external world, for true reality is impossible to apprehend as it is always filtered through the mind of the perceiver. Wilde summarized this clearly in *De Profundis* when he wrote:

Time and space, succession and extension, are merely accidental conditions of Thought. The Imagination can transcend them, and move in a free sphere of ideal existences. Things, also, are in their essence what we choose to make them. A thing *is*, according to the mode in which one looks at it.³⁶⁷

Or as he more cogently put it in *Intentions*, "things are because we see them."³⁶⁸ This view implies that it is within the grasp of each individual to create his own internal reality and even, through the force of the imagination and will, to create an alternate reality. Des Esseintes attempts this on a less exalted plane – primarily through the deception of the senses. For example, he fills his bath with salt and pretends he is bathing in the sea, and goes on

voyages by decorating his room as the interior of a ship. He concludes that

There can be no doubt that by transferring this ingenious trickery, this clever simulation to the intellectual plane, one can enjoy, just as easily as on the material plane, imaginary pleasures similar in all respects to the pleasures of reality.³⁶⁹

Thought in this way supplants, or rather is transmuted into action. Thus, to dream of going to England is as good as, if not preferable to, the reality.

As the phenomenal world came to be considered more and more illusory, the interest in both the subconscious and dreams grew, and these subjects acquired more prominence in literature. Dreams contained symbols that required interpretation and were, like art, symbolic, thereby breaking through mere transient appearances. It is for this reason that Wilde could claim that art became "the supreme reality and life...a mere mode of fiction."³⁷⁰ Further, because the body (form) reveals the soul (idea),³⁷¹ it was underlined that the visible world could be perceived as a series of hieroglyphs, and therefore that there was a "vital connection between form and substance."³⁷² Carlyle outlined this idea in *Sartor Resartus*,

much of which was translated in the 1890s in French reviews. In Carlyle's view:

All visible things are emblems; what thou seest is not there on its own account; strictly taken, is not there at all; Matter exists only spiritually and to represent some idea, and *body* it forth...³⁷³

The symbol represented some idea and had the quality of revelation and therefore mystery so precious to Wilde and Huysmans. Dreams, like art, were perceived as symbolic and therefore requiring interpretation. The idea that symbols were thoughts made sensible allowed for endless interpretative speculation. In *A rebours* Des Esseintes, dreaming before the portrait of Salomé, wonders as to the significance of the lotus-blossom held in Salome's hand:

Had it the phallic significance which the primordial religions of India attributed to it? Did it suggest to the old Tetrarch a sacrifice of virginity, an exchange of blood, an impure embrace asked for and offered on the express condition of a murder? Or did it represent the allegory of fertility, the Hindu myth of life, an existence held between the fingers of woman and clumsily snatched away by the fumbling hands of man, who is

maddened by desire, crazed by a fever of the flesh?

Perhaps, too, in arming his enigmatic goddess with the revered lotus-blossom, the painter had been thinking of the dancer, the mortal woman, the soiled vessel, ultimate cause of every sin and every crime; perhaps he had remembered the sepulchral rites of ancient Egypt, the solemn ceremonies of embalmment, when practitioners and priests lay out the dead woman's body on a slab of jasper, then with curved needles extract her brains through the nostrils, her entrails through an opening made in the left side, and finally, before gilding her nails and her teeth, before anointing the corpse with oils and spices, insert into her sexual parts, to purify them, the chaste petals of the divine flower.³⁷⁴

Art and dreams were perceived as hieroglyphs which evoke intellectual and emotional associations. This perception resulted in works which were both suggestive and tended to be subtle and complex, containing layers of meaning. Not only objects (as in the example cited above) but colour, form and line, etc. were considered to be part of a mysterious vocabulary, an equivalence for ideas, as well as a way of creating mood.³⁷⁵ Moreover, art became a

means of self-analysis through the creation of novel sensations.

Thus even as symbolist poets chose words for their suggestive power and not for their reportorial capacity, so too did Wilde and Huysmans seek in the artist one who could suggest ideas through form. "Only through conventional images can he [the painter] suggest ideas," maintained Wilde, "only through its physical equivalents . . . can [he] deal with psychology."³⁷⁶ Because the "mystery of the soul"³⁷⁷ was being conveyed through form, and because "the one characteristic of a beautiful form is that one can see in it whatever one wishes to see,"³⁷⁸ Wilde concluded that "beauty has as many meanings as man has moods."³⁷⁹ Wilde objected to the Impressionists for the very reason that they were dealing with purely painterly sensory impressions of the external natural world rather than focussing on an intellectual or spiritual element conveyed through line and form. Thus an emphasis was placed more and more on the subjective internal life of the artist, and by extension on his dream life. Huysmans concluded that what he termed a "symbolic science" was the province of other eras. The fantastic, the symbolic had only one refuge in the age of Darwin, in the expression of an internal life. "Dans le domaine du Rêve," he concluded, "l'art demeure seul."³⁸⁰

Perhaps more than any other artist at the period Odilon Redon might be said to be the painter of dreams. The mysticism, the suggestive quality, the rendition of a dream world in his paintings, was unlike that of the fantastical world conjured up by Gustave Moreau. Moreau's use of the symbol evoked sensual and literary correspondences, while Redon's art attempted to express directly the unconscious mind. In Huysmans' view, Goya and Moreau are Redon's forefathers, but it is Edgar Allan Poe who is most nearly Redon's spiritual antecedent. Baudelaire's translation of Poe ensured that he was widely read in France, and in *A rebours* Huysmans repeatedly refers to Poe in connection with Redon. Huysmans quotes Poe: "Toute certitude est dans les rêves"³⁸¹ in his essay on Redon, and we are reminded that Redon illustrated Poe's tales. In *A rebours* we are told that, "Better perhaps than anyone else, Poe possessed those intimate affinities that could satisfy the requirements of Des Esseintes' mind."³⁸² Wilde also read and appreciated Poe and found him to be the "marvellous lord of rhythmic expression."³⁸³ Huysmans' interest had predictable roots. "The monstrous hallucinations"³⁸⁴ and "mechanically devised nightmares of a fevered brain"³⁸⁵ were the qualities which Des Esseintes appreciated in Poe, and which had their counterpart in

Redon's "horrific realms of bad dreams and fevered visions."³⁸⁶ Redon's first series of lithographs entitled *Le Rêve* was perceived as a "fantaisie macabre,"³⁸⁷ a disturbing and unsettling vision. It was the unconscious and nightmarish aspects of these works which intrigued Huysmans. Although the notion of the unconscious had not yet been codified by Freud, his ideas emerged in many writers' works at the time; and as has been pointed out, they are frequently to be found in Schopenhauer's work,³⁸⁸ with which both Wilde and Huysmans were familiar. It is interesting, then, that Huysmans in his explication of Redon's work, should conjure up the memory of childhood anxieties and remembrance of visions experienced when ill with typhoid. He was fascinated by the dream life and the irrational, and delighted in the examination of the working of man's mind – his conscious and unconscious drives.

The abnormal, the irrational, were also considered valuable in art because they functioned as a protest against the materialism and positivism of the period, and for this reason artists often juxtaposed the quotidian world with an internal reality infused with the ambiguity and mystery of the unknown. Like Wilde, Redon asserted that all artistic creation was subjective, but he connected this less with the

creation of the self or the expression of the personality than with the welling up of the unconscious. Redon desired to produce through what Poe termed a spiritual effect, a sense of mystery and uncertainty. He therefore deliberately chose titles which were equivocal and confused his audience, concluding: "My drawings *inspire* and do not offer explanations. They resolve nothing. They place us, just as music does, in the ambiguous world of the indeterminate."³⁸⁹ Huysmans also associated Redon's work with music. He believed that it would be difficult to find Redon's ancestors except "parmi des musiciens peut-être et certainement parmi des poètes."³⁹⁰ When he wrote these lines, he may well have been thinking of Mallarmé, "a man familiar with dreams," given the latter's stylistic affinities with Redon. In a letter to Will Rothenstein, Wilde refers to poetry and prose as "word-music, melody and harmony,"³⁹¹ claiming that, although Rothenstein does not understand his meaning, "Mallarmé would understand it." The suggestive indefiniteness of Mallarmé's poetry was achieved through a symbolic language which suspended the immediate recognition of the image. Similarly, as we have seen, Redon's drawings and lithographs attempted not to define but to "inspire," to be the starting point of a contemplative mental state. Both, therefore, relied on the

spectator's own "imaginative aptitude to enlarge or diminish"³⁹² what he sees. Consequently, Redon asserted his belief in an intellectual art, and like Wilde believed that to contemplate "was the most difficult thing in the world, the most difficult and the most intellectual."³⁹³

Therefore, onto the purely painterly sensory impression was grafted an intellectual symbolic element which conveyed and provoked thought:

We know now that we do not see with the eye or hear with the ear. They are merely channels for the transmission, adequate or inadequate, of sense-impressions. It is in the brain that the poppy is red, that the apple is odorous, that the skylark sings.³⁹⁴

The admixture of the real and unreal enabled the sensory to function as purveyor of thought, to give pictorial form to the world of the psyche. Redon connected the idea with thought, with that of man's unconscious life. In *A soi-même*, his journal, he explains that the expression of life can only exist in the shadows or half lights:

L'homme est un être pensant, l'homme sera toujours là dans le temps, dans la durée, et tant ce qui est de la lumière ne saurait l'écarter. L'avenir au contraire est au monde subjectif.³⁹⁵

Redon not only focussed on the unconscious in terms of subject matter, he also maintained that the imagination was the messenger of the unconscious: "Nothing in art can be done by the will alone. Everything is done by docile submission to the coming of the 'unconscious.'"³⁹⁶ Wilde also came to a similar conclusion although he believed that great artists work both unconsciously and through self-conscious deliberation.³⁹⁷

The interest in the intellectual and in the unconscious also accounts in part for the repeated motif of the severed head in Redon's work. The image possibly has its origin in Moreau's treatment of the Salomé theme. Des Esseintes is fascinated by this new type of fantasy born of "sickness and delirium,"³⁹⁸ and focusses on one lithograph, "Sur la Coupe," from the series *Dans le Rêve* (1879), which he describes as a "Merovingian head balanced on a cup."³⁹⁹ Of course, while this lithograph suggests the head of John the Baptist, it is also presented as an image drawn from the subconscious, and cannot be reduced to one meaning. For even as Wilde reiterated that art has an independent life and "never expresses anything but itself,"⁴⁰⁰ so too did Redon claim that beauty "carries its own meaning in itself."⁴⁰¹

The manifestation of an unconscious life in dreams was of such great interest to Huysmans that he devoted an entire novel, *En rade*, to the subject. His interpretation of Redon in *L'Art Moderne* and *A rebours* foreshadowed the appearance of *En rade*, as did his interest in psychology. Further, the decadent assertion of the supremacy of the imagination served to blur the line between reality and illusion, life and art, so that the two occasionally interpenetrate. In *En rade*, it is what is symbolic (such as the uncontrolled natural world) that becomes concretized on a different plane in the central character Jacques' dream life. As Freud was to articulate, dreams accommodate abstractions, transferring ideas or thoughts into concrete visual terms, which are difficult but possible to decipher – often possessing a multiplicity of meanings. Thus the very title of the novel *En rade* suggests several possible interpretations. For instance, "une rade" means the part of the ocean isolated by the curve of the shore – a kind of harbour (as opposed to a port) offering the opportunity to drift or exist in a state of limbo. "Etre en rade" also signifies to be trapped, or blocked. And finally, the most common meaning, which is of course road or roadstead. The title of the novel, then, manages to encapsulate this necessity of translation, and yet forces us to recognise that there is no

direct translation or interpretation—that all meanings must be fused on a preter-logical level. Thus in the novel, Jacques and Louise travel from the city to the countryside. Jacques' wife is suffering from a nervous condition, and they are both in need of rest and relaxation so they move, penniless, into the ruined castle of Lourps. The external voyage or "road" becomes an internal one into the unconscious – a voyage full of dreams and nightmares. It rapidly becomes clear that the physical travel (leaving the city for the country) is an attempted flight from the self, a flight which is doomed to failure. A tension is generated between Jacques' desire to explore these dark regions and his desire to escape or ignore them (the tension between the "road" and the "breakdown" or "blockage" implicit in the title). Huysmans makes no overt attempt to interpret the "real" landscape with which he presents us. But it becomes apparent that there are close links between the dream and "real life," although Huysmans prefers to leave such connection ambiguous. In this novel the burden of interpretation lies upon the reader; Jacques only attempts to interpret his first dream. Later he seems to avoid the possibility of self-exploration.

This initial dream which Jacques focusses on anticipates Freud's dream analysis. Given the decadent

leaning towards a denial of the external world, their interest in the life of the imagination, it was predictable that they should concentrate more and more upon the self. As usual, Huysmans is caught between his interest in man's cerebrations and his love of mystery and amplification of mystery for its own sake. And while the novel contains only three dream episodes interspersed among quotidian activities, these episodes, despite their briefness, are invested with more significance than the rest of the novel. Or more accurately, the entirety of the novel is read in the light of them. Indeed, the very first words of the novel are, "Le soir tombait..."⁴⁰² obliquely suggesting what is to follow. The first dream is prepared for by the evocation of a sense of "malaise,"⁴⁰³ which haunts Jacques. The dream begins with the dreamer viewing a long road at the end of which is the palace – anticipating the metaphorical and physical voyage which is the symbol of the entire novel. Huysmans beautifully generates a sense of mystery by the deliberate confusion of dream and reality through the evocation of the senses. Thus the "Esther" figure in the dream crouches before the king: "l'auréolait . . . d'un halo d'aromes."⁴⁰⁴ The evocation of the sense within a dream context creates for that moment a confusion between dream and reality and invests the dream with equal validity.

Jacques awakens and the dream is dismissed: "Du coup, il rentra dans l'absolue réalité."⁴⁰⁵ Yet the word "absolue" serves to undercut the statement, indirectly suggesting that there is another alternate reality. And the second sentence functions to deal a final blow to any complacent division between dream and reality: "c'était pourtant vrai, il se trouvait au chateau de Lourps."⁴⁰⁶

Following his dream Jacques had been awoken by the cry of his wife who thought she had heard someone on the stairs. Jacques goes to investigate, but finds nothing. His reaction to the search is described in the following words:

Il s'énervait dans cette tension d'une recherche qui n'aboutissait point; la lamentable solitude de ces chambres le poignait et, avec elle, une peur inattendue, atroce, la peur non d'un danger connu, sûr, car il sentait que cette transe s'évanouirait devant un homme qu'il trouverait tapi dans un coin, là, mais une peur de l'inconnu, une terreur de nerfs exaspérés par des bruits inquiétants dans un désert noir.⁴⁰⁷

The "danger" here is not simply that of a possible intruder; the "désert noir" suggests the unconscious, which Jacques both fears and desires to explore. The search through the

palace becomes a quest into his own secret depths; consequently his fear of the unknown is predominant. Later he does try to "analyse himself,"⁴⁰⁸ but only after emerging from the wood which surrounds the castle, a wood which is described as being a "chaos de plantes et d'arbres."⁴⁰⁹ Within the forest, we are told, he felt sensations analogous to those he experienced the previous night when he dreamt. There is no need for Freud or Jung to make the identification of the wood with Jacques' unconscious nor to emphasise Huysmans' use of threshold imagery – all this is implicit in the text. Jacques' motive in analysing his dream is to create some order from the "chaos." And it is interesting that as Huysmans describes the possible sources of the dream, he moves beyond the prevalent contemporary belief that dreams had a physical origin (such as the disturbance of digestive functions).

Initially, Jacques attempts an exclusively literary interpretation of the dream. Searching his memory, he finds a possible correspondence between the Old Testament story of Esther and the king:

il devait donc croire que cette lecture de la Bible avait été couvée pendant des années dans une des provinces de sa mémoire pour qu'une fois la période d'incubation finie,

Esther éclatât comme une mystérieuse fleur,
dans le pays du songe.⁴¹⁰

He sees and interprets the “symbols” in the dream solely in relation to the biblical myth. But then, significantly, Huysmans moves Jacques beyond this limited interpretation as “l’insondable énigme du Rêve”⁴¹¹ continues to haunt him. He therefore begins to question the very nature of dreams and dreaming, examining old theories and rejecting them. He questions the belief that dreams prophesy the future or warn the dreamer of potential good or evil events. He further examines the contemporary belief that dreams were a mere transmutation of impressions of life, and therefore simply a product of sense impressions.

Jacques finds these explanations unsatisfactory, and in an interesting passage, foreshadowing Freud, speaks of the possibility of dreams connecting with the past, the realm of childhood:

Y avait-il, d'autre part, un nécessaire association des idées si ténue que son fil échappait à l'analyse, un fil souterrain fonctionnant dans l'obscurité de l'âme, portant l'étincelle, éclairant tout d'un coup

ses caves oubliées, reliant ses celliers
inoccupés depuis l'enfance?⁴¹²

These “caves oubliées,” it later becomes apparent, function in the novel as a metaphor for the cavernous depths of the unconscious. In chapter nine Jacques becomes obsessed with the possibility of exploring the caves beneath the castle: “il avait cru découvrir des corridors immenses, des souterrains à perte de vue; tout était clos.”⁴¹³ He approaches the Père Antoine about the possibility of unblocking the entrance to these subterranean corridors, but is refused. Throughout *En rade*, Jacques is faced with endless mazes of corridors, doors, and empty rooms:

la vie terminée de ces lieux que dénonçaient
des fenêtres sans rideaux ouvrant sur des
corridors nus et des chambres vides semblait
prête à renaître.⁴¹⁴

Similarly,

Il aperçut d'immenses corridors, sans fond,
sur lesquels se dégageaient des pièces; c'était
l'abandon le plus complet.⁴¹⁵

And again:

Son étonnement s'accrut; c'était une véritable
folie de portes; cinq ou six ouvraient sur un
long corridor; il poussait une porte et trois

autres se présentaient aussitôt, fermées dans une pièce noire; et toutes donnaient sur des lieux de débarras, dans des niches obscures qui se reliaient entre elles par d'autres portes et aboutissaient généralement à une grande salle éclairée, sur le parc, une salle en loques, pleine de débris et de miettes.⁴¹⁶

The prospective "descent" into the caves, the repeated references to doors and corridors, are elements which function within a network of imagery and symbols which subsume the novel and were to become commonplace in their association with the dream after Freud.

The overriding symbol of the work is naturally that of the voyage. This manifests itself in concrete terms in the dream of the trip to the moon. The symbols are both more concrete (being visual) and although often obscure and ambiguous, possess a universal meaning. Thus Louise and Jacques' "voyage" to the moon in the second dream sequence is described in terms of the vocabulary of a voyage. "Non, je ne me suis pas trompé de route,"⁴¹⁷ says Jacques. Upon their arrival on the moon "avec une sereine certitude, il s'orienta."⁴¹⁸ Later, Jacques consults a map and tells Louise they have the choice between two roads, and so on.

Huysmans does not attempt any direct translation of unconscious into conscious terminology after the first dream episode. Instead, through mere depiction, he moves beyond the logic, language, and syntax of the "rational" world and attempts to convey the "irrational" dream experience which, because of mechanisms such as condensation or regression, bears little relation to Jacques' accustomed mode of thought. Because the unconscious language of the mind differs from normal thought processes, Huysmans is free to conjure up bizarre images and to balance the logical with the contradictory, and single with multiple meanings. Indeed, he introduces the nightmare episode in *A rebours* for just such a purpose: the creation of a symbolic network which provokes interpretation but cannot always be reduced to simple meaning. This "mystère de la psyché devenue libre,"⁴¹⁹ as Huysmans describes the dream, is a mystery because the psyche temporarily moves beyond the world and the principles of reality which dominate it. What Jacques' conscious mind rejects and fears (ambiguity) the dream revels in. Thus the dream in the decadent novel becomes in Huysmans' view in part an attack on rationalism, a dispensing with rigid externally imposed perceptions of reality.

The Surrealists took this a step further, delighting in violent incongruity, distortion, and the ironic perception which resulted from the juxtaposition of dream and life reality. Such an ironic perception was Huysmans', and Breton expressed his identification with him in *Nadja* as well as in the preface to *Le Revolver à cheveux blancs* (which refers to the first dream episode in *En rade*) and *Les Vases communicants*. Indeed, Breton regarded Huysmans as a precursor of the Surrealists:

...Huysmans, avec une clairvoyance sans égale, [a] formulé de toutes pièces la plupart des lois qui vont régir l'affectivité moderne, pénétré premier la constitution histologique du réel et [s'est] élevé avec *En rade* aux sommets de l'inspiration.⁴²⁰

In view of this fact, it is interesting to note that Breton also considered Moreau to be forerunner of the Surrealists, and was first prompted to visit the Musée Moreau after reading *A rebours*. Breton encapsulated the meaning of Surrealism in the manifesto of 1924: "Surrealism rests upon the belief in the higher reality of certain hitherto neglected forms of association, in the omnipotence of dreams and in the disinterested workings of the mind."⁴²¹ The new focus on the unconscious life, the assertion of the importance of

dreams and altered states, and the black humour evinced in Huysmans' work helped to prepare the way for the Surrealist phenomenon of the 1920s.

The focus on the "workings of the mind" and dreams in Huysmans' work had its logical end in solipsism. For not only did Wilde's idea of man as a being trapped in his own subjectivity haunt Huysmans, he was also aware that the end result of such solipsism was an inescapable solitude, as, imprisoned in his own subjectivity, man was incapable of really communicating with others. This is particularly underlined in *En rade*. Upon awakening, Jacques comes to the realization that he is totally alone, that in fact he and his wife are virtual strangers:

Une lucidité parfaite l'éclairait soudain, balayait le vague de ses inquiétudes et de ses frayeurs, accaparait tout le domaine de son esprit par la force de l'idée nette. Il comprenait que, depuis trois ans qu'ils étaient mariés, aucun des deux ne se connaissait.⁴²²

In *A rebours* Des Esseintes is aware of his total alienation from others, and deliberately chooses solitude:

He had to live on himself, to feed on his own substance, like those animals that lie torpid in a hole all winter. Solitude had acted on his brain like a narcotic, first exciting and

stimulating him, then inducing a langour haunted by vague reveries, vitiating his plans, nullifying his intentions, leading a whole cavalcade of dreams to which he passively submitted, without even trying to get away.⁴²³

Solitude was not the only means available to Des Esseintes to enter into a solipsistic dream world; he also used hashish, laudanum, and opium. In Baudelaire's *Poem of Hashish*, he connects the idea of the flight from society and entry into a world of dreams through drugs with an inescapable solipsism:

Ajouterai-je que le haschisch, cornine toutes les joies solitaires, rend l'individu inutile aux hommes et la société superflue pour l'individu, le poussant à s'admirer sans cesse lui-même et le précipitant jour à jour vers le gouffre lumineux où il admire sa face de Narcisse?⁴²⁴

Following Baudelaire's translation of *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, De Quincey was widely read in France, and according to Pierrot, at one point, Huysmans even borrowed from De Quincey's Consul Romanus episode from the *Confessions* for one of Des Esseintes' hallucinations.⁴²⁵ Further, De Quincey's investigations led into areas of the unconscious that the decadent artist was so

eager to explore. Drugs had the advantage of being artificial, inducing sensations and experiences by unnatural means, and after De Quincey such experiences were often linked with the orient and exoticism. Wilde had also read De Quincey, and describes in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* the opium dens which provided Dorian with both a means of escape and new stimuli.

As Dorian climbed up its three rickety steps, the heavy odour of opium met him. He heaved a deep breath, and his nostrils quivered with pleasure...Dorian winced, and looked round at the grotesque things that lay in such fantastic postures on the ragged mattresses. The twisted limbs, the gaping mouths, the staring lustreless eyes, fascinated him. He knew in what strange heavens they were suffering, and what dull hells were teaching them the secret of some new joy.⁴²⁶

This yearning for escape, for complete artificiality, was exemplified by Des Esseintes, who had "at one time...resorted to opium and hashish in the hope of seeing visions,"⁴²⁷ but because he became ill "had been obliged to stop using them...to ask his brain, alone and unaided, to carry him far beyond everyday life into the land of dreams." For it was not merely a desire for escape or a search for novel sensations, but centrally a concern with the

workings of the mind and psychological complexities which accounted for the decadent concern with “les Paradis Artificiels.” Drugs, after Baudelaire, were perceived as a means of self observation and heightening of sensations, and because they were identified with the dream, were also associated with artistic creation. It remains true, however, that in Wilde and Huysmans’ work opium in particular was associated with the decadent atrophy of the will, boredom, and ennui as well as an indulgence in the artificial and novel sensations. In *Certains*, the passage in which Huysmans connects Whistler with De Quincey suggests both the freeing of the imagination as well as paradoxically a kind of limbo:

Invinciblement, l’on songeait aux visions de Quincey, a ces fuites de rivières, a ces rêves fluides que détermine l’opium. Dans leur cadre d’or blême, vermicellés de bleu turquoise et piquetés d’argent, ces sites d’atmosphère et d’eau s’étendaient a l’infini, suggéraient des dodinements de pensées, transportaient sur des véhicules magiques dans les temps irrévolus, dans des limbes. C’était loin de la vie moderne, loin de tout, aux extrêmes confins de la peinture qui semblait s’évaporer en d’invisibles fumées de couleurs, sur ces légères toiles.⁴²⁸

Wilde's and Huysmans' interest in the world of the irrational, the dream, or drug-induced fantasies is a product not only of their interest in altered perceptions through artifice or the workings of the unconscious. For the very assertion of the importance of dreams validated the need to express the free play of the imagination beyond the rules and codifications of society and the principles of reality which dominate it. Moreover, the focus on the dream made it possible to explore and express the inner life of the self, to use it as subject matter. Therefore, the dream functioned in their work not merely as an escape from reality, but also as a means of focussing upon an internal reality.

CHAPTER IV

ART AND ARTISTS

Art is opposed to general ideas, it describes only the individual, wishes only for the unique...It does not classify, it declassifies.

Marcel Schwob

Both Wilde's and Huysmans' work has its foundation in a series of inescapable paradoxes which issue from their view of the interrelationship between life and art. Art is the fulcrum from which all values are derived yet paradoxically art would deny the very life that it relies upon. Thus, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, when Basil remarks that "Love is a more wonderful thing than Art," Lord Henry responds, "They are both simply forms of imitation."⁴²⁹ Life becomes real and meaningful only when perceived within an aesthetic framework. It is in part for this reason that Wilde and Huysmans embrace and write about all the arts (but in particular literature and painting) and see them as closely related.

Huysmans spent three years between the publication of the naturalist novel *En Ménage* (1861) and *A rebours* (1884) writing art criticism. His best work appeared in *Le Voltaire*, *La Reforme*, and *La Revue littéraire et artistique*. In 1883, most of these articles were collected in one volume, *L'Art Moderne*. He also wrote articles on Cézanne, Degas, Moreau, Whistler, Rops, Van Luyken, Goya, Turner, and Richard Wagner, espousing artists who, although known, were not fully recognized. Wilde also expatiated at length on his ideas on the nature of art in his work. What is most striking in these essays on art and art criticism is Wilde's

and Huysmans' repeated emphasis on "style." Style in decadent parlance becomes a quality independent of any concept of utility or ethical considerations. Indeed, content does not precede but follows it and is determined by the form art takes. The idea that style, not subject, was significant, or rather that style transcends subject, was reiterated in Huysmans' art criticism: ". . . les sujets ne sont rien par eux-mêmes. Tout dépend de la façon dont ils sont traités,"⁴³⁰ and Wilde echoed this idea:

To an artist so creative as the critic, what does subject-matter signify? No more and no less than it does to the novelist and the painter... Treatment is the test.⁴³¹

The materials used became the subject matter of the painting or the novel. Thus *A rebours* is described by Dorian Gray as a "novel without a plot" and as being "written in that curious jewelled style, vivid and obscure at once."⁴³² In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde, like Huysmans, takes as the subject of his novel a single individual or painting. The characters of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* move within a circumscribed world which deals centrally with verbal virtuosity. The novel, according to Wilde, consisted of "all conversation and no action." "I can't describe action," he

wrote in a letter (to Mrs. Allhusen, 1890), "my people sit in chairs and chatter."⁴³³ Language serves to describe the psychology of a character but it also becomes its own subject. It functions to create a world through:

un vocabulaire original, une nouvelle langue;
de même, pour exprimer la vision des êtres et
des choses dans l'atmosphère qui leur est
propre...⁴³⁴

This obsession with language is evident in chapter three of *A rebours*, which is devoted to the contents of Des Esseintes' library. Des Esseintes, in his assessment of his novels, confines himself to an analysis of the language utilized by the authors. He appreciates Petronius' *Satyricon* precisely because it is a "story with no plot or action in it, simply relating the erotic adventures of certain sons of Sodom...in a splendidly wrought style."⁴³⁵ This concern with style also dictates the structure of the novels. In his preface to *A rebours*, Huysmans was to say that when he wrote the novel he wanted to leave the naturalistic mode behind:

I had a vague desire to move away from this
suffocating blind alley, but I had no particular
plan; and *A rebours*, which freed me from that
deadening literature is a completely

unconscious work. I wrote it without any preconceived ideas or future intentions. It is a work of the imagination, based on nothing at all.⁴³⁶

Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* (1874) was a novel which both Wilde and Huysmans considered to be a work of genius, and its influence on them is incalculable. In *A rebours* Huysmans referred repeatedly to this novel, and in a letter written to W. E. Henley in 1888 Wilde went so far as to proclaim himself Flaubert's disciple:

to learn how to write English prose I have studied the prose of France. I am charmed that you recognise it: that shows I have succeeded...Yes! Flaubert is my master, and when I get on with my translation of the *Tentation* I shall be Flaubert II, *Roi par grâce de dieu*.⁴³⁷

In the light of this it is important to note Flaubert's description of what he had been trying to achieve in this novel, and recognise that it reflects Huysmans' avowed purpose in writing *A rebours*:

What seems beautiful to me, what I should like to write, is a book about nothing, a book dependent on nothing external, which would be held together by the internal strength of its

style, just as the earth suspended in the void, depends on nothing external for its support; a book which would have almost no subject, or at least in which the subject would be almost invisible, if such a thing is possible. The finest works are those that contain the least matter, the closer expression comes to thought the closer language comes to coinciding and merging with it, the finer the result. I believe the future of Art lies in this direction.⁴³⁸

This concern with language leads in *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* to the use of interminable catalogues and seemingly redundant description. But for the decadent it is not merely a rarefied desire to become intoxicated "with the magical charms of style, to thrill to the delicious sorcery of the unusual epithet which, while retaining all its precision, opens up infinite perspectives to the imagination of the initiate,"⁴³⁹ it is also a means of generating through repetition and elaboration a sense of stasis which forces the reader to focus on the words themselves as independent entities, units only of the whole. As Paul Bourget pointed out:

A similar law governs the development and decadence of that other organism which we call language. A style of decadence is one in

which the unity of the book is decomposed to give place to the independence of the page, in which the page is decomposed to give place to the independence of the phrase, and the phrase to give place to the independence of the word.⁴⁴⁰

Thus the long catalogue of jewels in *A rebours* and its counterpart in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* may seem unnecessary, even gratuitous, but in fact, in the decadent view, this is what endows such a catalogue with value. Indeed the very choice of subject matter for the catalogue (in this case jewels, but it applies equally to Huysmans' catalogue of monsters in the article "Les Monstres") is valuable, as we have seen, because the catalogue exists outside the realm of utility. It is for this reason, also, that Des Esseintes speaks approvingly of Lucan's "enamelled and jewelled verse," his "exclusive preoccupation with form."⁴⁴¹ Thus Ernest, in "The Critic as Artist," uses the vocabulary of jewels when he speaks of the artist re-creating the world through "form and colour":

All subtle arts belonged to him also. He held the gem against the revolving disk, and the amethyst became the purple couch for

Adonis, and across the veined sardonyx sped
Artemis with her hounds.⁴⁴²

The jewels' *raison d'être* is their beauty and therefore inheres in their form. It is interesting, then, that Des Esseintes refers to Moreau's paintings as being exquisitely "bejewelled," and that Huysmans finds Moreau's literary equivalent to be *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* as written by the Goncourts:

S'il était possible de s'imaginer l'admirable et définitive *Tentation* de Gustave Flaubert, écrite par les auteurs de *Manette Salomon*, peut-être aurait-on l'exacte similitude de l'art si délicieusement raffiné de M. Moreau.⁴⁴³

For Moreau speaks of "la beauté d'inertie," and it is this beauty which Huysmans and Wilde sought with their catalogues and the elaborately wrought syntax of their sentences, their revelling in the unusual word or epithet. Indeed, *A rebours* might be said to be a long catalogue or series of decorative units elaborating on the central theme, of art and artifice.

Huysmans at all times stressed the primacy of style and disagreed strongly with those who held the opposing view:

Que le style n'est en art qu'une qualité
secondaire, Je le nie . . . Non, la forme n'est
pas une qualité secondaire en art.⁴⁴⁴

Style, in effect, was the artist's means of reordering life into art even as the dandy transmutes nature into art so that the 'outward is expressive of the inward.' For, "what the artist is always looking for is that mode of existence in which soul and body are one and indivisible . . . in which Form reveals."⁴⁴⁵ And truth and beauty are, according to Wilde, simply matters of style. Thus art is autonomous, inward looking, and self-conscious. If "Truth in Art is the unity of a thing with itself: the outward expressive of the inward,"⁴⁴⁶ art becomes hermetic, never expressing "anything but itself,"⁴⁴⁷ creating its own idiom and standards by which it must be perceived.

Art, ironically, becomes the means whereby the decadent, impotent in life, can actually assert the force of his will, personality, and intellect (as indeed the dandy does) through the creation of an original idiom. In effect, this is the decadent's means of triumphing over reality. In his art criticism, Huysmans repeatedly refers to the artist as one who can create new forms – a new vocabulary. It is his capacity in this area which, in Huysmans' view, constitutes his greatness. Thus, he wrote of Moreau:

il a repris les mythes éculés par les rengaînes des siècles et il les a exprimés dans une langue persuasive et superbe, mystérieuse et neuve. Il a su d'éléments épars créer une forme qui est maintenant à lui.⁴⁴⁸

The emphasis on style, this "over-subtilizing of refinement upon refinement," was popularly viewed at the period as betraying an overdeveloped intellect threatened by inanition and paralysis resulting in narcissism and ennui. However, many of these qualities (examined by Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Huysmans in *A Vau-l'Eau* and *A rebours*) also paradoxically became the very stuff of decadent art. The most obvious manifestation of these propensities lay in the pivotal idea of the use of language as ornament. Ornament, design, as in the case of the dandy, became the means of dominating nature; of creating an independent structure so that this structure, above and beyond the content, conveyed meaning. As Wilde wrote in the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "Books are well written, or badly written. That is all."

The focus on ostensibly superfluous decoration eventually culminated in Art Nouveau, and is manifested in Huysmans' and Wilde's work as verbal virtuosity. Their

admiration for the purely decorative was often explicitly articulated:

Art begins with abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and non-existent. This is the first stage. Then Life becomes fascinated with this new wonder, and asks to be admitted into the charmed circle. Art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates, and refashions it in fresh forms, is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, imagines, dreams and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative or ideal treatment.⁴⁴⁹

The decorative becomes an end in itself and yet, still can convey meaning. It is in a kind of limbo between utter decoration and meaning that the decadent wishes to live. Narcissistic self-consciousness is both a by-product and a motivating force in such art. When Beardsley said, "I have one aim – the grotesque. If I am not grotesque I am nothing,"⁴⁵⁰ he speaks of an excess of artificiality which he identified with beauty; and naturally, both Wilde and Huysmans identified artificiality with beauty and saw it as a means of dominating nature through the temperament of the artist. Style is the form that self-expression takes, but

the end result is entirely hermetic and self-sufficient. By extension, the artist, in his rejection of nature, does not necessarily have to create art which is representational. As Gilbert says, in "The Critic as Artist":

art that is frankly decorative is the art to live with...Mere colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways. The harmony that resides in the delicate proportions of lines and masses becomes mirrored in the mind. The repetitions of pattern give us rest. The marvels of design stir the imagination...By its deliberate rejection of Nature as the ideal of beauty, as well as of the imitative method of the ordinary painter, decorative art not merely prepares the soul for the reception of true imaginative work, but develops in it that sense of form which is the basis of creative no less than of critical achievement.⁴⁵¹

In the same vein, Huysmans speaks of decoration as generating a sense of stasis, the patterns producing a lulling effect. Thus Whistler's paintings evoke "de subtiles suggestions et berce, à d'autres, de même qu'une incantation."⁴⁵² What is produced in the onlooker is a purely aesthetic response as opposed to, say, an ethical one. Thus

Huysmans speaks approvingly of Whistler's series of "harmonies" and "arrangements" named by different colours:

...un village intitulé: vert et opale; une vue de Dieppe: argent et violet; un site de Hollande: gris et jaune; un pastel: bleu et nacre; puis des duos de capucine et de rose, d'argent et de mauve, de lilas et d'or; un solo enfin, chanté par une boutique de bonbons sous ce titre: note en orange.⁴⁵³

Of course, it is not merely a question of surface, but also the symbolic which that surface implies. For, in Wilde's and Huysmans' view, beauty, being symbolic in and of itself, reveals all while expressing nothing.⁴⁵⁴ So the body in art, Wilde and Huysmans maintain, is the soul made incarnate,⁴⁵⁵ and it is for this reason that Huysmans constantly speaks of idioms – "l'idiome symbolique des plantes"⁴⁵⁶ the idiom of essences, the "language of scents."⁴⁵⁷ Accordingly, "thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art."⁴⁵⁸ Style becomes the means of communicating the originality of the artist, which paradoxically issues from the fact that the work of art is autonomous because the artist has created an independent life through the creation of a new idiom. In summation, art, according to Wilde, addresses itself "not to the faculty of

recognition, nor to the faculty of reason, but to the aesthetic sense alone."⁴⁵⁹ These views paved the way towards an appreciation of abstract art through the affirmation of the artist's right to alter nature to conform to subjective standards of truth.

In his article on Whistler, Huysmans mentions the famous trial and refers to the exhibition in which Whistler showed his *Nocturne in Black and Gold* (1875). The painting was shown with seven other works at the Grovesnor Gallery in London in an exhibition designed to express the concept of "art for art's sake." Whistler, Huysmans notes appreciatively, moved – like Verlaine – towards the world of music, and aspired to attain a realm of pure pattern and form which is entirely non-representational. It is interesting that in his poems "Le Panneau" and "Le Jardin, La Mer," Wilde attempts to capture moments in a visual, impressionistic manner reminiscent of Whistler's paintings.

When Huysmans and Wilde asserted the importance of the expression of the individual in art, this idea implied that it was the creation of a new form which constituted that individual statement. For once created, "to reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim."⁴⁶⁰ Thus, while art spoke to its audience and sprang from the artist's personality, it was essentially hermetic in the sense that music is hermetic.

"What is true about music," Wilde claimed, "is true about all the arts. Beauty has as many meanings as man has moods. Beauty is the symbol of symbols."⁴⁶¹ Of course this notion of beauty is quite radical because whatever the artist chose to make his province became beautiful. Further, as beauty was a matter of style and form it became quite independent of any obvious reproduction of nature. The Symbolist painters similarly placed great emphasis on the importance of form, colour, and structure independent of meaning. The artist formed and arranged his work according to his desire to evoke emotion and ideas. Moréas, in his "Symbolist Manifesto" written two years after the publication of *A rebours*, spoke of objectifying the subjective (the externalization of the idea). In 1891 George Albert Aurier referred to these new currents in painting in an article in *Mercure de France* identifying Symbolist painting as "ideist, symbolic, synthetist, subjective, and decorative."⁴⁶² This concern with surface would eventually lead to an extreme self-consciousness, a calling of attention to itself in Art Nouveau.

The focus upon experimentation with forms of compositional arrangement, the importance of what Aurier termed "ideistic," is apparent in Huysmans' and Wilde's thought. Even as the painter placed emphasis on style,

form, and compositional arrangement as structures of beauty, so too did Wilde and Huysmans, identifying a beauty of artificiality and excess with truth. They favoured excessive decoration, precisely because it conveyed a fusion of art and idea, which is of course one of the aims of Symbolism. Due to the concern with form, expressive unity was sought and achieved through the radical fusion of thought and design. Thus Moreau, the artist perhaps most closely identified with the Decadent Movement, wrote:

What a lovely art it is that, beneath a material covering, itself the mirror of physical beauties, yet also reflects the great workings of the soul, mind, heart and imagination . . . A day will come when the eloquence of this mute art shall be understood. To that eloquence, whose character, nature, and power over the mind cannot be defined, I have given every care, every effort: the evocation of my thought through line, arabesque and pictorial means, that is my aim.⁴⁶³

According to Wilde, form comes first and later embodies the idea. Therefore, when a sonnet is composed, it is the controlling structure which "determines or even creates content . . . form suggests what is to fill it and make it

intellectually and emotionally complete."⁴⁶⁴ Design overwhelms subject matter in decadent art but its highly self-conscious and self-mocking style is primarily addressed to the intellect.

It follows that it would be the purely decorative quality of Japanese painting which appealed to Wilde and Huysmans. The interest in Japanese art began in France when Bracquemond found a volume of Hosukai. The Goncourt brothers, Zola and Baudelaire, as well as artists such as Degas, Manet, and Fantin-Latour, became greatly interested in Japanese art. Finally, Whistler began the craze in England, importing it from France. Between 1864 and 1870, his paintings are markedly influenced by Japanese art. His conception of painting changed in this period and he desired to obtain a harmonious balance of colour applied to a decorative surface. Line, arrangement, and form became his primary concern; subject was incidental. Thus he called his paintings "harmonies," "arrangements," "nocturnes," and "symphonies." One of his paintings showed a black figure in the snow moving towards a lighted tavern. He called this painting "Harmony in Gray and Gold," saying:

Now that to me is a harmony of colour only. I care nothing for the past, present, or future of

the black figure—placed there because black was wanted at that spot. All that I know is that my combination of gray and gold satisfies my artistic feeling.⁴⁶⁵

It is interesting that Huysmans perceives Whistler's paintings in precisely the terms the painter would have wished; that is to say, as a "série d'harmonies."⁴⁶⁶ He speaks of Whistler's Portrait of his mother exclusively in terms of his use of colour:

...une vieille dame se découpant de profil, dans ses vêtements noirs, sur un mur gris que continue un rideau noir, tacheté de blanc. C'est inquiétant, d'une couleur différente de celle que nous avons coutume de voir. La toile est, avec cela, à peine chargée, montrant, pour un peu, son grain. L'accord du gris et du noir de l'encre de chine était une joie pour les yeux surpris de ces lestes et profonds accords...⁴⁶⁷

Wilde also felt that Whistler could

teach you the beauty and joy of colour. Take Mr. Whistler's "Symphony in White" which you have no doubt imagined to be something quite bizarre. It is nothing of the sort. Think of a cool grey sky flecked here and there with white clouds, a grey ocean and three

wonderfully beautiful figures robed in white, leaning over the water and dropping white flowers from their fingers. Here is no extensive intellectual scheme to trouble you, and no metaphysics of which we have had quite enough in art. But if the simple and unaided colour strike the right keynote, the whole conception is made clear.⁴⁶⁸

Form, colour, structure – the painted surface – could conjure up ideas and sensations so that, in Wilde's words, the outward is "rendered expressive of the inward."⁴⁶⁹ Whatever the artist chose to use as his material became his idiom. The expressive qualities of the stylistic elements in the hands of a great artist formed a new language:

This boils down to saying that the objects, i.e., abstractedly, the various combinations of lines, planes, shadow, colours constitute the vocabulary of a mysterious but wonderfully expressive language, which one must know in order to be an artist. This language, like every language, has its own handwriting, its orthography, grammar, syntax, even rhetoric, which is the "style!"⁴⁷⁰

The idea that a work was both surface and symbol became widely accepted at the period. Baudelaire's theory of "correspondences," the evocation of one sense by another,

suggested the breakdown of barriers between the arts. The artist moved into the "forêts de symboles" and used the hieroglyphic language of colour, form, and style to express himself. In Aurier's words, the artist uses the "mysterious meanings of lines ... light, and shadows" so that they function "like the letters in an alphabet, to write the beautiful poem of their dreams and ideas."⁴⁷¹ Des Esseintes admires Mallarmé for this reason. He found him to be "sensitive to the remotest affinities, he would often use a term that by analogy suggested at once form, scent, colour, quality, and brilliance to indicate a creature or a thing."⁴⁷² Thus formal equivalents can represent but do not merely imitate:

The whole history of these arts in Europe is the record of the struggle between Orientalism, with its frank rejection of imitation, its love of artistic convention, its dislike to the actual representation of any object in Nature, and our own imitative spirit.⁴⁷³

Wilde goes on to say the art which has transformed "the visible things of life" into artistic convention is valuable. But slavish representation of life and nature has resulted in work which is "vulgar, common and uninteresting." He maintained that formal equivalents were the crystallisation

of thought and emotion and autonomous as such. Therein lay the paradox that the only way to experience life fully was to go to art.

The emphasis on art as an artifice accounts in part for the decadent's fascination with style. Des Esseintes speaks appreciatively of Mallarmé's "precious, interwoven ideas...knotted together with an adhesive style, a unique hermetic language, full of contracted phrases, elliptical constructions, audacious tropes."⁴⁷⁴ The obscure asymmetrical elaborate style, the surprising odd images and metaphors, the lack of congruency between verbal images where "nothing succeeds like excess" was the style of Decadence. The appreciation of pattern, overall formal structure, the excess of ornament were like arabesques over the void or the mask which conceals nothing behind it. What was sought was "un art qui est cependant le plus compliqué, le plus verrouillé, le plus hautain de tous."⁴⁷⁵ Thus elaborate decoration and ornament in the novels became a means of characterization as opposed to development in plot. Des Esseintes is defined as much by the language used to describe him as by his interests. Conversely, in Wilde's work, it is the interest and the structure of the entirety of the novel which revealed Dorian in a single image, that of the work of art as portrait:

une rêverie essentielle et des parfums d'âme
 les plus étranges s'est fait son orage.
 Redevenir poignant à travers l'inouï
 raffinement d'intellect, et humain, et unie
 pareille perverse atmosphère de beauté, est
 un miracle que vous accomplissez et selon
 quel emploi de tous les arts de l'écrivain!
 ...Ce portrait en pied, inquiétant, d'un Dorian
 Gray, hantera, mais écrit, étant devenu livre
 lui-même.⁴⁷⁶

For the portrait functions in the novel in part to blur the dividing line between art and life, and indeed symbolically enters into the realm of life. It is this paradox which subsumes all of Wilde's and Huysmans' work, as according to them both, it is only through the artifice of art that we can experience life intensely. Thus Sibyl Vane's Ophelia is more real than Sibyl Vane herself. Inversely, to "treat life in the spirit of art"⁴⁷⁷ also became the ideal. For life treated in aesthetic terms was endowed with coherence and structure. And decadent art, although it was concerned with self-parody and multiplying complexities, was also an overall controlling structure, a way of creating order from chaos. Manifestly, then, subject matter was not as important as the material used. The style of the artist – his creativity – lay in his ability to "créer avec des matières nouvelles un art

nouveau.”⁴⁷⁸ Wilde similarly believed that art did not have to express feelings through its subject matter.

Indeed art rejects the burden of the human spirit and gains more from a new medium or a fresh material than she does from any enthusiasm for art, or from any lofty passion, or from any great awakening of the human consciousness.⁴⁷⁹

In painting the emphasis on pictorial surface and the way in which the artist arranged that surface freed him from mere imitation of nature. Mauris Denis encapsulated this idea in 1890 when he said, “Remember that a picture—before being a war horse, a nude woman or some anecdote—is essentially a plane surface covered with colours assembled in a certain order.”⁴⁸⁰ The work of art could then function to evoke responses on both emotional and intellectual levels transcending the need for direct representation. Du Jardin expanded on this idea:

In painting as well as literature the representation of nature is idle fancy...On the contrary the aim of painting, of literature is to give the sensation of things...what ought to be expressed is not the image but the character.

The painter, Du Jardin continues, will strive to extract

the intimate reality, the essence of the object he selects. Primitive art and folklore are symbolic in this fashion . . . and so is Japanese art.⁴⁸¹

In effect the image, the metaphor, or painting functions to create moods or evoke ideas. This consciousness of surface, pattern, or design was, as we have noted, particularly evident in Wilde's and Huysmans' appreciation of Japanese art. They were influenced by Edmond de Goncourt's appreciation of Japanese artistry. His books on Utamaro and Hosukai were popular in artistic circles at the time and many artists such as Beardsley, Whistler, Shannon, and Ricketts were collectors of Japanese prints. Ricketts acknowledged his debt to Edmond de Goncourt and encapsulated ideas current at the period when he spoke of the Japanese artist Korin. He particularly appreciated the sense of design of Korin, who like all Japanese artists "reduced facts to symbols of their qualities or aspects." Ricketts also underlined the "pattern making element in his work, which ignores the imitations of fact, and at times sets a wholly arbitrary value on experience."⁴⁸²

In his art criticism Huysmans highlights the Japanese tendency toward decorative pattern making, particularly in reference to Walter Crane's and Kate Greenaway's books for children. He finds these works reminiscent in many ways of O-kou-Sai and he waxes lyrical over Kate Greenaway's "art de la décoration," in particular the "art de la mise en page," the "incessante variété dans les motifs de l'ornement."⁴⁸³ Similarly, it is this art of decoration which Wilde appreciates in Japanese art, and it is for this reason that he felt that William Morris and Walter Crane placed too much emphasis on the naturalistic as opposed to the decorative aspects of such art:

Like Mr. Morris, Mr. Walter Crane quite underrates the art of Japan, and looks on the Japanese as naturalists and not as decorative artists. It is true that they are often pictorial, but by the exquisite finesse of their touch the brilliancy and beauty of their colour, their perfect knowledge of how to make a space decorative without decorating it . . . and by their keen instinct of where to place a thing, the Japanese are decorative artists of a high order.⁴⁸⁴

As Aurier pointed out, artists of the period were decorative because they articulated ideas through forms

and these forms are expressed "after an accepted manner of thinking."⁴⁸⁵ In other words, the forms address themselves to the affective life of the mind. Certainly, not only did Wilde and Huysmans believe that life in the form of art was preferable and superior to reality, but also that life only became meaningful when transmuted by means of an artistic vision. A corollary of this position was that the individual became a spectator or observer, intellectualizing his passions or appreciation. For "nothing refines but the intellect,"⁴⁸⁶ and this cultivated detachment was, as we have seen, the hallmark of the dandy, whose very life is art.

An obvious extension of the idea of life as art was that although art had nothing to do with utility it was an integral part of life: "Art is not something you can take or leave. It is a necessity of human life."⁴⁸⁷ Thus both Wilde and Huysmans had a great interest in interior decoration. The belief that all arts are interdependent and that tasteful surroundings could nourish an artistic sensibility was evinced in Wilde's lecture "House Beautiful," in which he maintained, for example, that: "The school should be the most beautiful house in the village . . . and punishment to children should be *not* to go to school."⁴⁸⁸ Huysmans saw artistic propensities and appreciation as the province of a gifted elite, and had no desire that it should be fostered in

the masses. However, he similarly held, in the Japanese tradition, that a painting did not exist in isolation but had its place on a wall; and therefore the interplay of colour, shape, and form within the room also had to be taken into consideration. These interests were expressed in A rebours, where Des Esseintes, "a connoisseur of colours,"⁴⁸⁹ scent, and style, creates out of his house a refuge and an escape through art. Indeed, the first chapter, which describes the interior of the house Fontenay, ends by focussing on a "magnificent triptych" which contained three works by Baudelaire: two sonnets and in the middle the prose poem entitled, significantly, "Anywhere Out of the World."

That art took the place of religion, or at least was man's only means of salvation, was a commonplace in Huysmans' and Wilde's work. Accordingly, they attempted to escape reality by replacing it with art. The attempt to find ultimate meaning in the world and the inability to light upon such meaning resulted in an essentially ironic perspective. Art became not only a refuge but a means of re-creating life. "Actual life," wrote Wilde, "was chaos, but there was something terribly logical about the imagination."⁴⁹⁰ Form and style therefore invests life with meaning, order. Thus the two supreme and highest arts are "Life and Literature, life and the perfect expression of

life."⁴⁹¹ Of course, as a general rule, Wilde rejects life as "poor, probable, uninteresting."⁴⁹² But he maintains that the temperament of the artist can transform his life into art even as it is only the artistic temperament which can create art. Therefore, according to Wilde, Holbein's portraits "impress us with a sense of their absolute reality" precisely because he "compelled life to accept his conditions, to restrain itself within his limitations, to reproduce his type and to appear as he wished it to appear."⁴⁹³ In effect, only when rearranged and organised does life, or indeed art, possess aesthetic significance. Moreover, only when the artist cultivates his artistic receptivity can he create art.

Because, on one level at least, art, to both Huysmans and Wilde was "a method of procuring extraordinary sensations,"⁴⁹⁴ the cultivation of the artistic temperament often led to spleen and ennui as the hypersensitive nervous system, attuned to the beauties of art, became overtaxed. Sensation became an end in itself as both Des Esseintes and Dorian Gray exemplify. Yet, the search for sensation presupposed that the artist was experiencing intensely while simultaneously remaining detached, disengaged, and analytical. Des Esseintes even maintained that the modern artist needed to be sickly if he wished to deal with a subject "unintelligible to precise or vulgar persons, and

comprehensible only to minds shaken, sharpened, and rendered almost clairvoyant by neurosis."⁴⁹⁵ Both Wilde and Huysmans identified this "mal de l'être" with modernity. And certainly the pessimism which existed in artistic circles at the time coloured Wilde's and Huysmans' view of the function of art:

The artist is like a stretched string, a sheet of sensitized paper, or a chemical reagent, he is bound to react sharply to all sounds, all smells, to a sunbeam striking a wall, the screech of an oar in its oarlock, the delicious trail of fragrance left by a delicately complexioned stranger in her wake . . . Hence the habitual pessimism of most modern French writers from Chateaubriand to Gautier, from Flaubert to Huysmans.⁴⁹⁶

In England, Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Idea* was translated by R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp in 1883. The first French translation did not appear until 1886 but his ideas were disseminated in France in the 1870s and his *Aphorisms* made a great impact in artistic circles when they were first translated into French in 1880. Schopenhauer perceived existence to be based upon the ineluctable operation of the will which was represented by nature. All man's actions and desires are a function of the operation of

the will. Thus Schopenhauer posits a mechanistic existence in which man moves from boredom to desire. The goal of that desire, if attained, proves illusory, and if unattained, results in suffering and anguish. Inevitably man relapses into ennui and the cycle recommences. (Obviously, what is being highlighted here are the aspects of Schopenhauer's work which directly or indirectly influence Wilde's and Huysmans' perception of the function of art.) According to Wilde, "Schopenhauer has analysed the pessimism which characterises modern thought." And Huysmans often refers to Schopenhauer in his earlier work. In *A Vau-l'Eau*, Folantin comes to the conclusion that

Schopenhauer is right . . . Man's existence oscillates like a pendulum between suffering and ennui; nor is it worthwhile trying to accelerate or retard the balance wheel; the only thing to do is to cross your arms and try to sleep.⁴⁹⁷

Only in art, maintained Schopenhauer, can one be freed momentarily from desire through disinterested contemplation. Therefore meaning is derived not from nature but solely from man –he creates meaning in the form of art. When Wilde wrote that "every work of art is the conversion of an idea into an image,"⁴⁹⁸ he encapsulated the concept of a decorative, symbolic art, an art which was

the one means to escape and momentarily reveal what lies beyond the phenomenal world. In effect, art was perceived by Schopenhauer as being opposed to the blind, unthinking, mechanistic forces of a life whose "aim" is death. Thus "art had a soul but man had not." Once man is detached from the real world he could contemplate beauty, entirely freed in that moment from the domination of the will. "Such contemplation," says Kuhn,

is synonymous with the authentic joy in art, the pleasure derived from the perception of a beauty freed of the contingent. The state is that of the "privileged moment" . . . It is this instant alone that, according to both Proust and Schopenhauer, is capable of radically breaking the monotonous cycle of an existence dominated by the recurrence of desire, fulfillment and boredom.⁴⁹⁹

It is this attempt to "kill time" and "boredom," to "escape," which is the function of art for Des Esseintes. Of course, Huysmans often also attributes to art a religious or spiritual function even as Wilde, in the Paterian tradition, apotheosises "the moment." In one of his "poems in prose," he describes how man takes a bronze image of "The Sorrow that endureth for Ever," throws it into the furnace, "and out

of the bronze of the image of the Sorrow that endureth for Ever he fashioned an image of The Pleasure that abideth for a Moment.”⁵⁰⁰ The poem is significantly entitled “The Artist.” “The Moment” was primarily addressed both to the aesthetic sense and artistic temperament and also signified the promise of intensity, an escape from the sense of powerlessness in the face of natural decay and paralysing ennui.

The function of the critic, in the face of contemporary art was, according to Wilde and Huysmans, to cultivate his own aesthetic receptivity and to arrive at his conclusions based on his personal (preferably intense) impressions and responses. Criticism, in their view, precludes impartiality “Fairness,” says Wilde, “is not one of the qualities of the true critic. It is not even a condition of criticism.”⁵⁰¹ For the critic, like the artist, creates initially from his passions, and passion according to Wilde and Huysmans is an indispensable precondition of creation:

car l'on n'a pas de talent si l'on n'aime avec passion ou si l'on ne hait de même; l'enthousiasme et le mépris sont indispensables pour créer une oeuvre; le talent est aux sincères et aux rageurs, non aux indifférents et aux laches.⁵⁰²

It is telling that Wilde in "The Critic as Artist," reiterates Huysmans' position:

It is only about things that do not interest one that one can give a really unbiassed opinion, which is no doubt the reason why an unbiassed opinion is always absolutely valueless...Art is a passion, and, in matters of art, Thought is inevitably coloured by emotion, and so is fluid rather than fixed...One should, of course, have no prejudices; but, as a great Frenchman once remarked a hundred years ago, it is one's business in such matters to have preferences...⁵⁰³

And lack of "fairness" was justified on the grounds that taking a well-thought out position based on a genuine aesthetic response validates any critical stance for "in aesthetic criticism attitude is everything."⁵⁰⁴ This is an extension of Wilde's view that one must adopt a mask or a pose in order to use the paradox and ambiguity which is necessary to treat the complexity and "relativity" of modern life. Huysmans did not take such a clear-cut position although, as we have seen, he too presented characters who adopted masks and attitudes, and deliberate use of ambiguity and undercutting devices such as self-mockery

also subsume his work. In *Intentions*, Wilde used the structure of the piece to allow him to argue various viewpoints which could all, theoretically, be perceived as equally valid. Thus, in "The Truth of Masks," he even goes so far as to disagree with many of his own ideas expounded in the essay. In the world of Art, Wilde, claims, no universal truths exist:

A Truth in art is that whose contradictory is also true. And just as it is only in art-criticism, and through it, that we can apprehend the Platonic theory of ideas, so it is only in art-criticism, and through it, that we can realise Hegel's system of contraries. The truths of metaphysics are the truths of masks.⁵⁰⁵

Similarly, Huysmans believed that "la beauté n'est point uniforme et invariable...elle change, suivant la climature, suivant le siècle."⁵⁰⁶ This relativistic perception of a work of art issued from a critical attitude which depended upon the critic's relationship with that work, his personal responses to it. It did not depend on any external reality or fixed idea as to what was the appropriate sphere of art or constituted beauty or any other criteria superimposed upon it. Instead, the critic tended to examine the piece on a purely aesthetic plane – that is to say, in terms of form or pattern rather

than exclusively subject matter and context. The quality most necessary in the art critic was therefore deemed quite simply to be "the temperament of receptivity."⁵⁰⁷ Because a great work of art is in Huysmans' and Wilde's opinions a purely individual statement, it was necessary that the critic be capable of appreciating originality, the way in which the work of art differed from all that had been produced in the past. Thus

A temperament capable of receiving, through an imaginative medium, and under imaginative conditions, new and beautiful impressions, is the only temperament that can appreciate a work of art.⁵⁰⁸

It is the man who can appreciate that a "new work of art is beautiful by being what Art has never been"⁵⁰⁹ who is the possessor of taste. Huysmans, although he never explicitly articulated this view, took a similar position in his art criticism. In his assessment of Degas, for example, he underlines the artist's personal vision, stressing his originality in a new use of an old medium:

...un peintre qui ne dérivait de personne, qui ne ressemblait à aucun, qui apportait une saveur d'art toute nouvelle, des procédés d'exécution tout nouveaux.⁵¹⁰

Manifestly then, a relativistic approach in the face of such art was thought by Wilde and Huysmans to be an intrinsically modern attitude and the hallmark of the critic. It enabled the critic to relate to the work on an imaginative level in terms of its form and pattern, thereby allowing him to appreciate the work whatever the subject (such as evil), however far removed from his own experience. This recognition of the complexity of art and its mystery was also articulated at the time by Redon in his diary *A soi-même*. Once again the emphasis is placed on the observer as it is his mental state which determines what will be seen:

Le sens du mystère c'est d'être tout le temps dans l'équivoque, dans le double, triples aspects des soupçons d'aspects (images dans images), formes qui vont être, ou qui le seront selon l'état d'esprit du regardeur.⁵¹¹

In effect, Huysmans and Wilde did not identify themselves exclusively with any particular group but instead supported and praised individual artists whether they were Impressionists, Symbolists, decadent, or decorative artists. For whatever artist's work sparks the critic's imagination is worthy; it must simply bring a "new element of pleasure" and suggest a "fresh departure."⁵¹² In

Pater's essay on Coleridge, published in 1866, he explicitly identified the "relative" perception with "modern thought":

modern thought is distinguished from ancient by its cultivation of the "relative" spirit in place of the "absolute." Ancient philosophy sought to arrest every object in an eternal outline, to fix thought in a necessary formula, and the varieties of life in a classification by "kinds" or *genera*. To the modern spirit nothing is, or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions...⁵¹³

In their respective roles of author and critic, both Wilde and Huysmans were attracted to the painter who has become most identified with the Decadent movement. Gustave Moreau's paintings, with their elaborately jewelled and decorated surfaces, their literary allusions and obscurity, and their classical subject matter, deeply appealed to Wilde's and Huysmans' sensibilities. Moreau's art was self-conscious, mysterious, and intellectual: art to be read, interpreted. Wilde and Huysmans extrapolated from Moreau what interested them. They particularly emphasised observer response – the ability of Moreau's paintings to create moods. It is Huysmans' celebrated and extremely subjective readings of Moreau's works which

remain in our minds, partially because it was only after the publication of *A rebours* that Moreau's works became extremely well known. In his art criticism Huysmans focussed on the fact that Moreau had "d'éléments épars créer une forme qui est maintenant à lui."⁵¹⁴ And, as we have seen, this union of a unique and original personality and the expression that personality takes (the form) was, in Wilde's and Huysmans' perception, the hallmark of creative genius.

In *A rebours* Moreau's paintings became synonymous with the idea of an escape from the mediocrity and materialism of the day into an exotic other world. But another world, it is important to note, which utilized ancient myths in a modern way, expressing them in a "langue persuasive et superbe mystérieuse et neuve."⁵¹⁵ In *L'Art moderne* Huysmans stresses the importance of "modernity,"⁵¹⁶ even in terms of subject matter, but eventually comes to the conclusion that a new treatment constituted modernity. Quite apart from his painterly language Moreau's thematic preoccupations appealed to Wilde and Huysmans. The alienated artist figure, the femme fatale, the sense of mystery were all preoccupations of the Decadent artist, and consequently "modern." In *Certains*, Huysmans encapsulates

the decadent loathing of what he referred to in *A rebours* as the "American manners of his time."

...cette honte du goût moderne, la rue; ces boulevards sur lesquels végètent des arbres orthopédiquement corsetés de fer et comprimés par les bandagistes des ponts et chaussées, dans les roues de fonte; ces chaussées secouées par d'énormes omnibus et par des voitures de réclame ignobles; ces trottoirs remplis d'une hideuse foule en quête d'argent, de femmes dégradées par les gésines, abêties par d'affreux négoces, d'hommes lisant des journaux infâmes ou songeant à des fornications et à des dols le long de boutiques d'où les épient pour les dépouiller, les forbans patentés des commerces et des banques, l'on comprenait mieux encore cette oeuvre de Gustave Moreau, indépendante d'un temps, fuyant dans les au delà, planant dans le rêve, loin des excrémentielles idées, secrétées par tout un peuple.⁵¹⁷

Manifestly, Moreau was a vehicle whereby Huysmans could affirm the value of the imagination over reality and suggest a love of the mysterious rather than the concrete. Moreover, the complexity of Moreau's work, its mysticism, his use of fantastic imagery (twilight and sunset, jewels)

and self-conscious use of detail would obviously hold great interest for Wilde and Huysmans. Wilde visited Moreau's studio in 1883 and was extremely impressed. It was unlikely that Wilde, whose aesthetic was "la philosophie de l'irréalité,"⁵¹⁸ would not respond to Moreau's work. For much of Moreau's imagery was derived from Flaubert; indeed, according to Gustave Larroumet, Flaubert was Moreau's favourite author, one

...in whom he found the curious turn of mind and the splendor of form which he achieved himself, and also the haunting memory of the Oriental mirage; the Flaubert of *Salammbô* and *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine*, needless to say, rather than the Flaubert of *Madame Bovary*.⁵¹⁹

The vision of an exotic Orient – mysterious, cruel, and passionate– became a commonplace at the turn of the century. The hunger for the exotic was a product of this desire to abandon oneself to a land of dreams. Further, this concern with myths and dreams allowed for extremes: scenes of debauchery, violence, and passion. The *femme fatale*, in particular, became a kind of icon –cruel, unattainable, and exotic. In *A rebours*, Huysmans describes Flaubert's appeal for Des Esseintes in terms of these preoccupations:

In Flaubert's case, there was a series of vast, imposing scenes, grandiose pageantries of barbaric splendour in which there participated creatures delicate and sensitive, mysterious and proud, women cursed, in all the perfection of their beauty, with suffering souls, in the depths of which he discerned atrocious delusions, insane aspirations, born of the disgust they already felt for the dreadful mediocrity of the pleasures awaiting them.

The personality of the great writer was revealed in all its splendour in those incomparable pages of *La Tentation de Saint-Antoine* and *Salammbô* in which, leaving our petty modern civilization far behind, he conjured up the Asiatic glories of distant epochs, their mystic ardours and doldrums, the aberrations resulting from their idleness, the brutalities arising from their boredom...⁵²⁰

Another element which Flaubert and Moreau held in common was the elaborate use of detail in such a way that the detail was invested with an independent life of its own. This resulted in works which were exceedingly concerned with their own surface and therefore highly decorative and self-referential. Huysmans himself notes how the paintings haunt the memory, resolving themselves into detail:

...dans la morne rue, le souvenir ébloui de ces oeuvres persistait, mais les scènes ne paraissaient plus en leur ensemble; elles se disséminaient, dans la mémoire, en leurs infatigables détails, en leurs minuties d'accessoires estranges.⁵²¹

Complexity, the intellectualisation of the subject through recondite symbols, and the excessive use of detail within a formalised structure characterizes Moreau's work. Apart from the evocation of "more cordial epochs," the preciousity and dreamlike quality of Moreau's paintings, Wilde and Huysmans no doubt appreciated their dramatic quality. For while the surface of his paintings often exhibited an ornate patterning, the overall subject was contained within a dramatic moment which encapsulated the theme. Moreau usually showed figures at a moment of confrontation rather than action. In "Oedipus and the Sphinx," for example, Oedipus faces the Sphinx, immobile, in a moment of tense stillness. Similarly, in "Hercules and the Hydra," we see Hercules posed in a dramatic gesture, hand suspended in mid air, facing the Hydra across a mountain of bodies. This confrontation is juxtaposed with a middle ground of elaborately jutting patterned rocks which look strangely modern beside the classical scene taking place in the

foreground. In "Salome Dancing Before Herod," we see again the immobile figure in the foreground, hand raised, implicitly contrasted with the icon-like Herod in the background and the elaborate, fantastic, repeated forms in the architecture, Moreau's theory of "*la belle inertie et la richesse necessaire*" uniting the whole composition in a tension between the overwrought surfaces and the stark dramatic postures of the figures.

In an article written in 1886, Renan referred to Moreau's ability to capture a single moment in time and claimed that: "A painting can represent only a *moment*; it is true that it must eternalize this moment."⁵²² Wilde wrote, in Paterian tradition, that the purpose of life and art was contemplation: the capacity to dream was all; and Moreau's paintings certainly are faithful to this idea. The figures seem to be frozen eternally in a moment, suspended in a kind of limbo. The lapidary detail and the brilliant colours culminated in a decorative effect which served to crystallise the "moment's" vision. These paintings have their literary counterpart in Wilde's and Huysmans' prose poems in the sense that the authors also attempted to capture a moment in a single impression.

In *A rebours* Huysmans rhapsodizes over Moreau's painting of Salomé entitled "The Apparition":

...never before, in any period, had the art of watercolour produced such brilliant hues; never before had an aquarellist's wretched chemical pigments been able to make paper sparkle so brightly with precious stones, shine so colourfully with sunlight filtered through stained-glass windows...glow so warmly with exquisite flesh-tints.⁵²³

Moreau's technical brilliance leaves Des Esseintes "overwhelmed, subjugated, stunned."⁵²⁴ But the paintings do not simply awaken Des Esseintes' admiration at their virtuosity; upon looking at them he can actually enter into a world which is a conflation of both his and the artist's making. Thus Des Esseintes, while looking at the painting of Salome, exists "amid the heavy odour of these perfumes, in the overheated atmosphere of the basilica." He "hears" the "strings of a guitar," sees the jewels glitter against Salome's "moist flesh." What we are presented with is, in effect, the onlooker's exclusively subjective sentient response to Moreau's paintings. The paintings are a mere starting point for Des Esseintes' imagination, as is consistent with Wilde's dicta. Through the evocation of the senses by literary means Huysmans creates a reality more palpable than the actual material world surrounding Des

Esseintes—more real than the painting itself. To Des Esseintes Moreau's art had a literary quality, it was "an art which crossed the frontiers of painting to borrow from the writer's art the most subtly evocative suggestions."⁵²⁵ It is important to note that while the paintings' details were infused with symbolic meaning and consequently became texts provoking in the viewer a desire to interpret, the colours and forms of the works also functioned simultaneously to express the mood of their subject matter.

In *Salomé* Wilde takes this idea much further. It is significant that Moreau was a strong influence in Wilde's writing of the play. Indeed he wished his sets could have been designed by the artist – Beardsley's drawings were not at all what he had originally envisioned. Wilde wanted the luxurious vibrant colours of Moreau's paintings. For in *Salomé* he entered the Symbolist realm. Colours no longer simply expressed the "mood" of the subject; rather, the expressive capacity of the colours became in a way independent of the subject matter depicted. For, according to Wilde, "colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite form, can speak to the soul in a thousand different ways."⁵²⁶ In his autobiography, Graham Robertson, who was to design *Salomé*, tells us of Wilde's obsession with the colour scheme of the production:

‘I should like,’ said Oscar throwing off the notion at random, ‘I should like everyone on the stage to be in yellow.’ . . . ‘A violet sky,’ repeated Oscar slowly, ‘yes, I never thought of that. Certainly a violet sky, and then, in place of an orchestra, braziers of perfume. Think—the scented clouds rising and partly veiling the stage from time to time—a new perfume for each new emotion.’⁵²⁷

This suggests the twentieth-century notion that colours could be evocative by implication; that is to say, could evoke the idea and mood of the play (or painting) without even directly representing or referring to the play. Such theories obviously foreshadow abstract art, and certainly Wilde’s and Huysmans’ capacity to look at colour as autonomous implies a step in that direction. In the light of this it is fascinating to note that Moreau, ostensibly a traditional painter, should, near the end of his life, make works which were entirely non-representational. Colour no longer had a merely descriptive function imposed on it by the classical tradition. It should be remembered that Moreau is the link between Romanticism and Fauvism. Matisse, one of Moreau’s pupils, found in the Japanese prints what the decadents had discovered before him, specifically that: “One can work with expressive colours

beyond descriptive ones.”⁵²⁸ Colour was used by Matisse as a synaesthetic equivalence which could evoke the sensory: heat and cold, tactile sensations. Des Esseintes reacts to the painting of *Salomé* on this level primarily because the subject matter triggers something in his own imagination, and only partially because of the chromatic composition of the work. However, his response is at least in part due to the use of colour in the painting, and his own interest in colour has been prepared for in an earlier chapter. In his decoration of Fontenay he analyses the various shades of colour and their psychological import. He affirms:

...the truth of a theory to which he attributed almost mathematical validity: to wit, that there exists a close correspondence between the sensual make-up of a person with a truly artistic temperament and whatever colour that person reacts to most strongly and sympathetically.⁵²⁹

He posits the concept of the evocation of sensations by means of forms and colours, thereby adumbrating the trend towards abstraction in the twentieth century. According to Ricketts, who was at one point Wilde's choice as designer for his production, Wilde sought inspiration in Gustave Moreau and Japonisme. Ricketts suggested a black floor

upon which Salome's feet could move like white doves...The sky was to be a rich turquoise blue, but by the perpendicular fall of glided strips of Japanese matting forming an aerial tent above the terraces. Herod and Herodias to be in blood-red.⁵³⁰

In the decadent's view, if art is "a method of procuring extraordinary sensations,"⁵³¹ it does so by means of association. The work's expressivity lies in its ability to set off this chain of associations whether in painterly or linguistic terms. In part, it derives its "mysteriousness" from this quality, and mystery to the decadent was one of the most important attributes of a work of art.

Huysmans' prose poems seem designed to evoke a similar response. In "Camaieu Rouge," for example, the author begins with a context: a room with red accessories in which a woman with red hair sits on a couch. The sunshine "inundates" the room: "Cette fanfare de rouge m'étourdissait," the author tells us, 'cette gamme d'une intensité furieuse, d'une violence inouïe, m'aveuglait; je fermai les yeux ...' Later, he recalls the scene in terms of the colour that embodies it:

la nostalgie du rouge m'opprime plus
lourdement, je lève la tête vers le soleil, et là,
sous ses cuisantes piqûres, impassible, les

yeux obstinément fermés, j'entrevois, sous le voile de mes paupières, une vapeur rouge; je rappelle mes souvenirs et je revois, pour une minute, pour une seconde, l'inquiétante fascination, l'inoubliable enchantement.⁵³²

Huysmans, rather than reconstructing the moment through descriptive detail, tries to convey its essence. Similarly, future artists, instead of attempting to represent, try to directly convey their sentient response. Thus Matisse explains: "I merely try to find a color that will fit my sensation."⁵³³ Therefore, in order to paint an autumn landscape, rather than simply choosing the obvious autumnal colours, he chooses instead colours which correspond to the sensation the season gives him. Kandinsky clarifies this connection between the psychological and, by extension, physical response of the observer:

The soul being one with the body, it may well be possible that a psychological tremor generates a corresponding one through association. For example, red may cause a sensation analogous to that caused by flame, because red is the color of flame. A warm red will prove exciting, another shade of red will cause pain or disgust through association with running blood. In these cases color

awakens a corresponding physical sensation, which undoubtedly works poignantly upon the soul.⁵³⁴

The link between a work of art and what was in part a sensory response was, to some degree, prepared for by Baudelaire. His idea of “correspondances” suggested a symbolic interrelationship between the different senses, and Huysmans and Wilde interpreted this response as being primarily physical – a response of synaesthesia. This emphasis on the senses meant that the “artistic temperament” would need to have an almost instinctive nervous reaction to colour and form. Because the sensory perception is in Wilde’s and Huysmans’ view redolent of the mystical, it functions on a multiplicity of levels so that the ostensibly sensuous came also to embody the spiritual. When Lord Henry says that art is “simply a method of procuring extraordinary sensations,”⁵³⁵ he is merely stating this idea in its most reductionist form.

Wilde’s and Huysmans’ response to the Impressionists was conditioned by their interest in colour and their respective ideas as to what constitutes art. Wilde, therefore, approved of the Impressionists because “their white keynote, with its variations in lilac, was an era in colour,” because they captured an evanescent moment, and

because they were suggestive. Ultimately, however, he concluded that they “will not do.”⁵³⁶ He felt that the Impressionists were merely photographic, capturing atmospheric effects but with a slavish realism. Wilde exalted, instead, what he called the “nobler vision of the soul” over such a mere “physical vision.”⁵³⁷ After seeing an Impressionist exhibition Redon came to an analogous conclusion, finding this mode of painting to be:

très légitime quand il s'applique surtout a la représentation des choses extérieures sous le plein-air du ciel. Je ne crois pas que tout ce qui palpite sous le front d'un homme qui s'écoute et se recueille, je ne crois pas que la *pensée* prise pour ce qu'elle est en elle-même, ait à gagner beaucoup dans ce parti-pris de ne considérer que ce qui se passe au dehors de nos demeures. L'expression de la vie ne peut différemment paraître que dans le clair-obscur. Les penseurs aiment l'ombre...⁵³⁸

Similarly, Wilde admired the Impressionists but advocated a more subjective vision, and consequently felt that they were too limited in their approach. Huysmans, in his review of *L'exposition des Indépendants* in 1880, praises some aspects of the Impressionists' work, particularly their use of light; but is, nevertheless, much stronger than Wilde

in his overall denunciation of the artists. And although he seems to have appreciated what they were trying to achieve technically, he rejected the end result. In a rather bizarre passage in *L'Art moderne*,⁵³⁹ he concludes that in the process of sitting outside attempting to paint accurate outdoor paintings, the Impressionists must have strained their eyes, and consequently their painting of colour altered. He attributes this change in perception to problems with nerves, and refers to Charcot's work with patients suffering from hysterical conditions. The latter apparently noted that his patients' perception of colour often altered due to nervous illnesses. Huysmans, therefore, takes what seems to be an extremely odd pseudo-scientific tack in his assessment of the Impressionists. However, if one takes into account Huysmans' interest in psychology, in particular in relation to the temperament of the artist, his conclusion may seem less ridiculous today. For as we have seen, both Huysmans and Wilde accepted the prevalent notion that the artist has extremely delicate and finely tuned sensibility and nerves, and certainly neurosis and disease and abnormality were often associated with genius at the time. This evaluation of the Impressionists is not entirely negative; it might even be said to be almost complimentary. By 1882 his perception of Impressionism as

an "oeuf resté constamment mal éclos du réalisme"⁵⁴⁰ and his belief that Impressionism led to an impasse had undergone a transformation. At this point Monet and Pissarro found favour in Huysmans' eyes. It remained true, however, that Huysmans found it difficult to fully appreciate the Impressionists, primarily because they did not possess what he conceived as "modern temperaments."

So what constituted "modernity" to Huysmans? Like Wilde's, his work betrays the fact that he was attracted both to artificiality, which he identified with the urban (i.e. the city), and the contemporary as well as fantasy, dreams, and art of "escape." Certainly, it was not exclusively modern subject matter which appealed to him. In *Le Salon de 1879*, he makes it clear that it is among the Impressionists that the advances are being made, but he still feels that the time is awaiting "qu'un homme de génie, réunissant tous les curieux éléments de la peinture impressionniste, surgisse et enlève d'assaut la place ..." ⁵⁴¹ Both Wilde and Huysmans placed great importance on the man of vision. For it is he who comes to embody the modern in his work through the sheer force of his individuality. In Huysmans' opinion, Degas was just such a man, one who rendered "toute moderne, par l'originalité de son talent."⁵⁴² Further, Huysmans saw this "shocking" new subject matter as a sign

of defiance in the face of public opinion – something he could not but fail to appreciate:

Il semblait qu'excédé par la bassesse de ses voisinages, il eût voulu user de représailles et jeter à la face de son siècle le plus excessif outrage, en culbutant l'idole constamment ménagée, la femme, qu'il avilit lorsqu'il la représente, en plein tub, dans les humiliantes poses des soins intimes."⁵⁴³

Huysmans found in Degas' work a cynicism and sense of disillusionment coupled with a new examination of human movement which was so "scientific" that it distanced the onlooker, thereby enabling Huysmans as viewer to take an ironic stance. Degas depicted human beings in intimate detail reacting to the physicality of the world around them – figures crouching at their toilette. As always, Huysmans homes in on the union of the psychological with detailed observation. Thus, he says of Degas' paintings, "L'observation est tellement précise que, dans ces séries de filles, un physiologiste pourrait faire une curieuse étude de l'organisme de chacune d'elles"; yet couples this with his own rather salacious analysis of the human beings portrayed:

Et combien sont charmantes, parmi elles, charmantes d'une beauté spéciale, faite de

salauderie populacière et de grâce! Combien sont ravissantes, presque divines, parmi ces petits souillons qui repassent ou portent du linge...⁵⁴⁴

Huysmans' perception of Degas' laundresses as "little sluts who iron and carry linen" suggests, once again, how on occasion the literary approach to painting predominates in his criticism. Indeed, he did claim that Degas' paintings had their equivalent in the literature of the Goncourt brothers.⁵⁴⁵ This mode of approach, whether one finds it limiting or not, is consistent with Wilde's and Huysmans' desire to view art as seminal and provocative, the starting point of a new creation; in addition it reflects their belief that the arts are interdependent. Degas' work combined a realism with an overall organising formal structure, transforming realism into an aestheticization of his personal vision. For this reason, Degas' work appealed to Huysmans' two concerns: naturalistic observation and artifice.

Degas' work then exemplified what Huysmans viewed as modernity. He depicted human bodies in contorted positions, in highly organised patterns of artifice. His use of asymmetrical composition, and his adoption of unusual viewpoints, distances the viewer from the objects

or bodies depicted. These traits were adopted from Japanese art and utilized with originality and a sense of irony by Degas. But perhaps Degas' own words best convey the difference between the Impressionists (whom Huysmans viewed with reservations) and his own work. Moore describes a conversation that took place at the Cirque Fernando at which Degas, comparing his work with the Impressionists, said to an Impressionist painter, "A vous il faut la vie naturelle, à moi la vie factice."⁵⁴⁶ It was precisely "la vie naturelle," or what Wilde called the "tedious realism of those who merely paint what they see,"⁵⁴⁷ which Wilde also objected to in the Impressionists. Huysmans specifically articulates his approval of the level of artifice in Degas' paintings.

The subjects which Degas chose for his work were also congenial to Huysmans' idea of modernity. The depiction of the circus and the brothel in particular efficaciously allowed for the implicit juxtaposition of the artificial and the animal, the cynical mask and an unpalatable reality. The melancholy which Huysmans sought in landscape painting he found in Degas' paintings coupled with a sense of disillusionment as well as psychological insight. For example, he claimed that Degas noted the movements of the dancer "avec une perspicacité

d'analyste tout à la fois cruel et subtil."⁵⁴⁸ Holbrook Jackson claims that with such remarks Huysmans "does violence, with his literary emphasis, to these very delicately balanced pictures."⁵⁴⁹ Yet if one examines the painting *Repos*, or indeed *Au Salon*, it becomes apparent that the cynicism and detachment which Huysmans sees in the paintings is not solely a product of his own interpretative idiosyncracies. The description of the brothel in *Marthe*, for instance (as Theodore Reff points out⁵⁵⁰), could be the literary counterpart of these paintings. Thus the prostitutes are seen as having

des beautés falotes et vulgaires, des caillettes
agaçantes, des homasses et des maigriottes,
étendues sur le ventre, la tête dans les mains,
accroupies comme des chiennes, sur un
tabouret, accrochées comme des oripeaux, sur
des coins de divans...⁵⁵¹

So it seems that Huysmans' literary equivalence is not necessarily always misplaced; and in any case Huysmans' interest in psychology, in the internal life of the characters depicted, often prompted such comparisons. To Huysmans, Degas' work exemplifies the distinction between "unimaginative realism" and "imaginative reality."⁵⁵² It is fascinating, then, that Degas explicitly articulates the Wildean radical conflation of lying, art, and artifice:

L'art c'est le vice. On ne l'épouse pas, on le viole. Qui dit art, dit artifice. L'art est malhonnête et cruel.⁵⁵³

For death and disease are inextricably bound up with the world of the artificial. Decay takes place behind the powdered mask, and Des Esseintes' turtle dies encrusted with the very jewels that transform him into artifact; and therein lies the inescapable dichotomy of life and art which leads to an ironic "cruel" perception. In one sense, then, art was also cruel because its function was to shock, titillate, and provoke by means of this juxtaposition. Therefore, while the public may cry "C'est obscène!"⁵⁵⁴ before Degas' work, Huysmans believed such art was supremely chaste. Neither Wilde nor Huysmans saw any automatic link between the pornographic and the "immoral," and vulgarity and ugliness. Nor did they think that "crime and culture" were mutually exclusive.⁵⁵⁵ Indeed, extremes allow for intensity, and Wilde concluded, "One can fancy an intense personality being created out of sin."⁵⁵⁶ Moreover:

L'art comme l'homme est tour à tour vertueux ou vicieux, c'est à dire religieux ou pervers . . . ce qui n'est ni blanc, ni noir, ni pure, ni impur est gris ou bourgeois.⁵⁵⁷

Manifestly, then, Wilde and Huysmans deemed that whatever the middle classes considered ugly was beautiful:

A fresh mode of Beauty is absolutely distasteful to them, and whenever it appears they get so angry and bewildered that they always use two stupid expressions – one is that the work of art is grossly unintelligible; the other, that the work of art is grossly immoral. What they mean by these words seems to me to be this. When they say a work is grossly unintelligible, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is new; when they describe a work as grossly immoral, they mean that the artist has said or made a beautiful thing that is true.⁵⁵⁸

Huysmans came to a similar conclusion when he said that the exquisiteness of Degas' sculpture remained unintelligible for this public. He too stressed the importance of a new and fresh mode of approach in his criticism, praising such artists as Manet for their "mépris des conventions adoptées depuis des siècles"⁵⁵⁹ and rejecting a public "qui se pique de marcher de l'avant et que toute tentative effraye."⁵⁶⁰

As moral categories were perceived to be obsolete, and as art rather than nature was the repository of all

beauty, the idea of beauty became primarily a rhetorical one. For as Wilde claimed in Gautier's footsteps, art expresses only itself; it creates its own definition of beauty. And reality comes to depend on the nature of the art that represents it. For this reason, the artist and his art control our perception and, consequently, our moral constructs. The labels "immoral," "unintelligible," "exotic," "unhealthy," and "morbid" are therefore, Wilde maintains, ridiculous words to apply to a work of art. It is the "public who are all morbid, because the public can never find expression for anything. The artist is never morbid. He expresses everything."⁵⁶¹

Thus an artist such as Beardsley resolves "pornography" into patterns of elegance undercut by the whirling sinuous line. His drawings, insubstantial in black and white, are like elaborate patterns over the void. His excessive use of detail creates a sense of dissatisfaction, of restlessness, a self-conscious drawing attention to its own artifice. Deliberately provocative both in structure and allusive parody of the individuals and manners of his own day, the drawings exhibit excess within a formalized structure. The work is quintessentially decadent in its subject matter: yearning and desire. Desire is seen as good in and of itself for, if it is satisfied, it leads to its own

extinction, and by definition desire can only exist by remaining unfulfilled – a typically decadent paradox. Symons captures this quality in Beardsley's work:

His world is a world of phantoms in which the desire of the perfecting of mortal sensations, a desire of infinity, has overpassed mortal limits, and poised them, so faint, so quivering, so passionate for flight, in a hopeless and strenuous immobility . . . It is the soul in them that sins, sorrowfully without reluctance, inevitably. Their bodies are faint and eager with wantonness; they desire more pleasure than there is in the world, fiercer and more exquisite pains, a more intolerable suspense.⁵⁶²

Des Esseintes, viewing the painting of *Salomé*, responds in a manner which in some ways recalls Symons' description of Beardsley's work. He is "haunted by the symbols of superhuman passions and superhuman perversities, of divine debauches perpetrated without enthusiasm and without hope."⁵⁶³ Wilde had Beardsley make a set of illustrations for the play; in them, the French influence was evident. In the illustration of "The Toilette of *Salomé*" such volumes as those of De Sade and Baudelaire are surreptitiously inserted into the piece. Beardsley had read

Huysmans, but claimed in one of his letters not to be fond of his work.

In these illustrations the use of words juxtaposed with images was suggestive and generated an internal tension in each piece. In "Salomé with the Head of John the Baptist," the illustration contains the words "J'ai baisé ta bouche Iokanaan/J'ai baisé ta bouche." Salomé crouches, staring with narcissistic hunger at the severed head of John the Baptist held in her hands. The two are suspended in space, suspended on the brink of a kiss which never takes place, although the inscription ironically suggests that it already has done so. John the Baptist's blood streams downward like white ribbon onto a drooping flower which is juxtaposed with another phallic flower on the left, perhaps evoking Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal*. The sexual associations contrive simultaneously to be oblique and to focus our attention on them. The purely decorative grapelike forms in the background seem to belie any meaning, resolving the entirety into pure design. However, the words insist upon an interpretation. Thus the whole elaborate design creates a sense of ambivalence, teasing the onlooker's eye with patterns poised over nothingness. The interrelationship between word and image is deliberate, as each nuance-laden sentence conjures up a sort of reverie which in effect becomes the illustration itself:

"Why does she look at me with her yellow eyes?" "I shall kiss thy mouth, Jokanaan. I shall kiss thy mouth." "Is that the queen, she who wears a black head-dress sewn with pearls?" "Salomé, come sit near me. I will give thee the throne of thy mother." "As queen thou wilt be very lovely, Salomé." "Your little feet will be like . . . little white flowers that dance upon a tree." "I will dance for you, Tetrach." "I ask for the head of Jokanaan on a silver charger." "It is said that love has a bitter taste . . . but what matters it?"

The sexual metaphors in the illustration become both part of a subconscious dream landscape and a conscious intellectual reference. The illustrations are deliberately provocative and disturbing, studiously not imitating nature. Even in his unfinished pornographic novel *The Story of Venus and Tannhauser*, Beardsley attempts to transmute pornography into elegance and sophistication. In this way, the actual subject matter is contravened by the style, and moral categories no longer inhere:

I wish I could be allowed to tell you what occurred round table 15, just at this moment. It would amuse you very much, and would give you a capital idea of the habits of Venus' retinue. Indeed, for deplorable

reasons, by far the greater part of what was said and done at this supper must remain unrecorded and even unsuggested.

Venus allowed most of the dishes to pass untasted, she was so engaged with the beauty of Tannhauser. She laid her head many times on his robe, kissing him passionately; and his skin, at once firm and yielding, seemed to those exquisite little teeth of hers, the most incomparable pasture. Her upper lip curled and trembled with excitement, showing the gums. Tannhauser, on his side, was no less devoted. He adored her all over and all the things she had on, and buried his face in the folds and flounces of her linen, and ravished away a score of frills in his excess. He found her exasperating, and crushed her in his arms, and slaked his parched lips at her mouth. He caressed her eyelids softly with his finger tips, and pushed aside the curls from her forehead, and did a thousand gracious things, tuning her body as a violinist tunes his instrument before he plays upon it.

Priapusa snorted like an old war horse at the sniff of powder, and tickled Tannhauser and Venus by turns, and slipped her tongue down their throats, and refused to

be quiet at all until she had had a mouthful of the Chevalier. Claude, seizing his chance, dived under the table and came up the other side just under the queen's couch, and before she could say "One!" he was taking his coffee "aux deux colonnes," Clair was furious at his friend's success, and sulked for the rest of the evening.⁵⁶⁴

Perversity becomes a form of cerebral aestheticism, a means of deploying the intellect within a circumscribed world of fantasy. The crux of this interest in pornography was based on the fascination with the idea of sin. The interest was therefore cerebral, a product of the imagination, and in the decadent view constituted a superior vision. Beardsley's visions, by his own admission, occurred exclusively on paper, and Huysmans maintained that those artists who are truly obscene are always chaste:

...l'artiste qui traite violemment des sujets charnels, est, pour une raison ou pour une autre, un homme chaste.⁵⁶⁵

Huysmans begins his essay on Rops, the Belgian pornographer, with this idea. Rops' prints become associated with Decadence primarily because of their subject matter. His prints focussed on the diabolic or erotic,

but despite the studiously provocative themes the prints are usually to be interpreted on a moral plane. For unlike Beardsley's work, Rops' prints do not create their own autonomous artificial world with the occasional parodic reference or dig at contemporary society. Rather, Rops vitriolically castigates his contemporaries. For instance, in "Hypocrisy," a woman's naked buttocks are covered by a mask creating a concrete visual image of the title. His work would obviously hold appeal for Huysmans given Rops' use of the erotic and satanic within an essentially literary framework (he illustrated D'Aurevilly's *Les Sataniques*, for example, which Huysmans describes in great detail). Moreover, Rops' appeal is to the intellect despite the use of images associated with the erotic or the Satanic. In Huysmans' article on Rops he extends his analysis of the artist into an assessment of the erotic in the arts with, as might be expected, particular emphasis upon the psychological motivations of the artist. The artist "va mentalement, dans son rêve éveillé, jusqu'au bout du délire orgiaque,"⁵⁶⁶ and yet these ideas remain, "des idées érotiques isolées, sans correspondance matérielle, sans besoin d'une suite animale qui les apaise."⁵⁶⁷

This "erethism of the brain" permits the artist to transmute a reality which is "banal" into an ideal, an ideal,

albeit, "de fautes surhumaines, de péchés que l'on voudrait neufs."⁵⁶⁸ Huysmans appreciated Rops' capacity to "spiritualize filth"⁵⁶⁹ by means of the intellect. The scathing and mocking satire in Rops' prints implied disillusionment, frustration, and yearning. For, ironically, Rops' very mode of presentation of such scenes suggested a frame of reference which evoked a moral framework. Thus the characters or subjects Rops depicts seek intensity or extremes of emotion through the perversion of an ideal. It was this intensity which, characteristically, Huysmans most appreciated in Rops' art. Wilde also sought this quality in art and came to the conclusion that: "Not width but intensity is the true aim of modern Art."⁵⁷⁰ Such intensity of emotion directed toward a vision of purity, according to Huysmans, died in the middle ages. So what remained was only a vision of an excess of lewdness and impiety.⁵⁷¹

Huysmans repeatedly asserted the importance of such intensity when united with great individuality. By extension, because "the world hates Individualism"⁵⁷² the artist of necessity pits himself against an ignorant public. Huysmans, in his assessment of several landscape painters in the Salon of 1880, goes so far as to identify lack of individuality (translate, lack of talent—the two for Huysmans were synonymous) with public favour.

Nulle individualité chez la plupart de ces peintres; une même et unique vision d'un site arrangé suivant la predilection du public.⁵⁷³

Wilde similarly felt that art which was the product of an original mind was of necessity iconoclastic, and consequently must challenge, even shock, the public. For the public, according to Wilde,

are continually asking Art to be popular, to please their want of taste, to flatter their absurd vanity, to tell them what they have been told before, to show them what they ought to be tired of seeing...

"Now Art," Wilde concludes, "should never try to be popular. The public should try to make itself artistic."⁵⁷⁴ Wilde, like Huysmans, connects intensity of vision with individuality and praises the artist who rejects public standards of authority. However, because the artist's function is to "realise his own perfection,"⁵⁷⁵ the end result is that he becomes an educator (although this is not his aim), appealing initially only to the perceptive few, but eventually becoming more widely appreciated. Thus the true artist

has created in the public both taste and temperament. The public appreciates his

artistic success immensely. I often wonder, however, whether the public understand that his success is entirely due to the fact that he did not accept their standard, but realised his own.⁵⁷⁶

In contrast Huysmans insists upon an artistic cognoscenti, and his art criticism expresses the conviction that whatever is popular is invariably bad—or at least cheapened by that popularity. He continuously championed artists who were unknown, and indeed felt it was the role of the critic to use his own judgement and talent for the purposes of challenging established authority. In his essay “Du Dilettantisme,” he vilifies the pusillanimity of such critics who, in order to avoid jeopardizing their reputations, do not write of contemporary artists, who use catch phrases and obscure language to suggest profundity, who assess painting with preconceived notions and prejudices. In short, he rejects the authority of the establishment. Wilde also rejects authority (particularly of public opinion) because, like Huysmans, he sees art as the “full expression of a personality,”⁵⁷⁷ and views the individual as pitted against the masses and the state in an assertion of his own personal vision. Huysmans definitely had a predilection for such artists who had not yet been “polluted in the eyes of

the initiate" by "stereotyped ecstasies" and "inanities"⁵⁷⁸ of the public or the Academy.

His admiration for Rodolphe Bresdin and Jan Luyken stemmed from this appreciation of the unusual and the unique personal vision. Jan Luyken, "an old Dutch engraver who was almost unknown in France,"⁵⁷⁹ was a special favourite of Des Esseintes. He possessed a series of prints called *Religious Persecutions*:

a collection of appalling plates displaying all the tortures which religious fanaticism has invented, revealing all the agonizing varieties of human suffering—bodies roasted over braziers, heads scalped with swords, trepanned with nails, lacerated with saws, bowels taken out of the belly and wound on to bobbins, finger-nails slowly removed with pincers, eyes put out, eyelids pinned back, limbs dislocated and carefully broken, bones laid bare and scraped for hours with knives.

Des Esseintes, we are informed, could examine this series for "hours on end without a moment's boredom."⁵⁸⁰ In *Certains*, Huysmans also describes, with great relish, Jan Luyken's engravings illustrating torture and sadism. The desire for the new rarefied sensation, the use of art as a starting point for such reveries or indulgences, accounts in

part for such interest. It is also true, as we have seen in Huysmans' appreciation of Rops, that for the decadent religious sentiment or awareness often functioned (through a consciousness of sin) as a stimulus to eroticism. In any case, art was an escape, and art accordingly should bring us a "new element of pleasure" (or horror) and suggest to us a "fresh departure of thought, passion, or beauty."⁵⁸¹

As we have seen, because Wilde and Huysmans maintained that ideally art was an expression of an inner vision (a corollary of this belief was their emphasis on the individualism of the artist) they rejected mere imitation of external reality. It is for this reason that Huysmans named Bresdin as one of the artists that Des Esseintes admired. Redon, Bresdin's pupil, noted that he did not work from nature because he was unable to, and Bresdin himself believed that the artist's internal vision was all. Yet interestingly, Bresdin's work betrays an obsessive attention to detail, an assiduous examination of the natural world coupled with fantastical subject matter. He drew on his imagination to create bizarre landscapes and occasionally fairytale dwellings. His work is described in *A rebours* as being "rather like the work of a primitive or an Albert Dürer of sorts, composed under the influence of opium."⁵⁸² In accordance with Wilde and Huysmans' taste,

the subjects Bresdin chose often had a literary source, as in "Saint Antony and Death." But whatever his subject, this artist is perceived as being not only superior to nature but a re-creator of the natural world according to his subjective vision.

In Baudelaire's article "Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne," he writes that "tous les bons et vrais dessinateurs dessinent d'après l'image écrite dans leur cerveau et non d'après nature." And Huysmans and Wilde, like most decadent artists, took a similar stance. Wilde maintained that all creation in art is an expression of an internal vision, as man is trapped within his own subjectivity, "for out of ourselves we can never pass, nor can there be in creation what in the creator was not."⁵⁸³ To Wilde, however, this did not entirely preclude the use of "realism," as he believed that the more objective a creation seemed to be, the more subjective it was in actuality. The reconciliation of the subjective and objective viewpoints, in accordance with this new emphasis upon the inner world and mental processes of the artist, was summarized by Cézanne when he said, "I want to copy nature...I wasn't able to. I was satisfied with myself when I discovered that the sun, for example (sunny objects), could not be reproduced but had to be represented by something else than that which I was seeing –by colour..."⁵⁸⁴ Expressive

unity was attained through the fusion of design (colour, form) and subjective emotion. New formal methods created new meaning. Well in advance of any public recognition Huysmans lauded Cezanne as a “colorist of revelation,” and recognized how the use of colour and form in a non-realistic manner actually produces a more truthful or real vision:

In full illumination, in porcelain compotes or on white cloths, brutal rough pears and apples, shaped with a trowel, intensified with twists of the thumb. Seen close to, a rough assemblage of vermillion and yellow, of green and blue from a distance, the correct one, fruits meant for Chevet’s show windows, full savored and savory, enviable.⁵⁸⁵

The Symbolists placed an even greater emphasis upon the movement from the material to the spiritual, or rather putting the material to the use of the spiritual. The Belgian Symbolist Fernand Khnopff carried the obsession of subjectivity and introspection to its extreme, believing that art should make the subjective objective. In a total rejection of the outside world he shut himself away and focussed on reveries, dreams, and fantasy. The title of his painting of 1891 – “I Lock My Door Upon Myself,” taken from a Christina Rossetti poem – symbolizes this turning inward. Khnopff used photographic images repeatedly in his work, thereby

creating a union of idealism and realism. The frozen photographic image became not only a hieroglyph calling for interpretation, but also served to evoke a sense of stasis. Indeed, the very "realism" of the photographic image was used to call into question the reality of the material world. Khnopff was deeply influenced by Moreau, and the quiet portentous sense of stasis in the latter's work is reflected in Khnopff's paintings. His world was one of private recondite symbols that contained some psychological or spiritual import, as was consistent with the decadent approach. He was much admired by Maurice Maeterlinck as well as Wilde, who was familiar with his work from a London exhibition. It is hardly surprising that Wilde should been impressed by a painter who utilized obscure personal motifs to evoke intellectual and emotional associations in order to create a sense of mystery. Indeed, he was Wilde's second choice after Beardsley to illustrate "The Ballad of Reading Gaol," although no such drawings were ever made. Redon, Des Esseintes favourite painter, also uses naturalistic detail, evocative and dreamlike though his paintings are. He even used a microscope (although he denied this) as a means of obtaining ideas for fantastic creatures based on the natural world.

Thus the artist re-created the natural according to his own personal vision. This synthesis of idealism and realism

in the hands of a unique temperament, according to Wilde and Huysmans, enabled the artist to achieve a "modern vision." Style became the complete expression of personality, a means of ordering, organising, creating form, and imposing it upon one's material. The aim was not reconstitution of the external world but rather the creation of a pictorial one. In Maurice Denis' words:

The Symbolist viewpoint asks us to consider the work of art as an equivalent of a sensation received; thus nature can be, for the artist, only a state of his own subjectivity. And what we call subjective distortion is virtually style.⁵⁸⁶

These words echo Wilde's; a step beyond is the Symbolists' idea of evoking sensation by means of form and colour which leads towards abstraction. This was a step which Wilde and Huysmans did not take, although in some respects they pointed the way.

In *A rebours*, Huysmans' assessment of Mallarmé suggests that the route language took was comparable to that of painting at the time:

Sensitive to the remotest affinities, he would often use a term that by analogy suggested at once form, scent, colour, quality, and

brilliance, to indicate a creature or thing to which he would have had to attach a host of different epithets in order to bring out all its various aspects and qualities, if it had merely been referred to by its technical name. By this means he managed to do away with the formal statement of a comparison that the reader's mind made by itself as soon as it had understood the symbol, and he avoided dispersing the reader's attention over all the several qualities that a row of adjectives would have presented one by one, concentrating it instead on a single word, a single entity, producing, as in the case of a picture, a unique and comprehensive impression, an overall view.⁵⁸⁷

This "wonderfully condensed style" placed a new emphasis on language, words as units, and white spaces (by extension, silences) on a page. The function of art was not to define or represent but to evoke, present. Much of Mallarmé's poetry evinced this self-consciousness and awareness of the material used which was a characteristic of modernism. It dealt with the idea of "le néant," which he suggested obliquely in linguistic terms. The evocation of silence was, of course, closely identified with subjectivity at the time. Thus Mallarmé wanted to describe not things, but

their effects. For this reason, his language was deliberately vague and suggestive, seeking to focus not on words but on intentions. This attempt to evoke silence, as we have noted, had its parallel in Moreau's paintings, where the gesture generates a sense of limbo, of pregnant silences.

Ricketts was greatly influenced by Moreau as well as by Japanese art. His extremely stylized illustrations for Wilde's "The Sphinx" evinced the same quality of stasis, elaborate use of ornament and concern with detail. They also create a sense of tension between meaning and design. "Crouching by the Marge," from his illustrations of Wilde's "The Sphinx," used filigree designs to depict the decadent theme.

Sing to me of that odorous green eve when
crouching by the marge

You heard from Adrian's gilded barge the laughter
of Antinous

And lapped the stream and fed your drouth and
watched with hot and hungry stare

The ivory body of that rare young slave with his
pomegranate mouth!⁵⁸⁸

In the drawing that represents these stanzas, Ricketts makes these lines very much his own. He presents us with a sphinx who is in the classical tradition half woman, half

lion, although in Wilde's poem it is made clear that the sphinx's body is "spotted like the lynx."⁵⁸⁹ Wilde's source may have been Balzac's short story "A Passion in the Desert" (in which a French Napoleonic soldier is lost in the Egyptian desert and has an affair with a desert panther). Certainly, this story is one of the sources of Khnopff's famous painting "Les Caresses," with which Wilde was probably familiar. In this painting a spotted sphinx is figured embracing an androgynous Oedipus.

In Ricketts' illustration, the primary concern is not subject but form. The elongated form of the androgynous Antinous echoes the delicate verticals of the three trees in the middle ground, transforming the human figure into pattern. The importance of the autonomy of detail (which, in this picture, is still subsumed to the overall design) is made apparent by the two flower-like forms emerging at random from the tree and rocks. The semicircle of the sphinx's body in the foreground, like Antinous' body, echoes other configurations in the piece. In this way, Ricketts, through his use of line in the drawing, deliberately avoids imitating the forms of nature. The sinuous, repetitive lines of the river self-consciously draw attention to the river's own artifice. The river's circular

thrust, which draws the eye from the sphinx to the figure of Antinous, should suggest movement, but in fact, because the eye cannot move beyond this never-ending circle, it produces a sense of stasis. The two figures are forever frozen despite the curvilinear nature of the design. Ricketts also efficaciously juxtaposes filigree black line with completely white space, thereby serving to emphasise the laboured excess of the patterns as well as the way in which the design can be elusively symbolic. In addition, he manages to introduce the emotion of yearning and fear by means of the formal structure of the illustration while paradoxically reducing all to mere pattern and form.

Decadent art distorts, using colour, histrionic line, white spaces, asymmetrical design, and controversial subjects in an attempt to disturb or unsettle the onlooker. Yet these "excesses" are firmly contained within the picture space, suggesting an overall structure despite the obsessive concern with detail. The superfluous and the decorative enable the artist to superimpose an elaborate and self-conscious order on the totality, rather as the dandy composes his toilette from cumulative detail. Ornament becomes its own subject, self-referential, sterile, perfect in its autonomy. Wilde and Huysmans were attracted to these

attributes as well as to decadent themes – the femme fatale, the androgynous male, the mystical or occult. But above all, it was their interest in the artificial and artistic method, rather than subject matter, which guided their likes and dislikes. In addition, they looked to art to create a mood through its combination of what was often realistic detail and symbolic meaning: an art which, while it could appeal to the senses, did so primarily through the intellect.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

“Modern life is complex and relative. These are its two distinguishing notes,”⁵⁹⁰ wrote Wilde in 1897. And it was this complexity and relativity that Wilde and Huysmans attempted to grapple with in their works. Through the prism of the relationship of art and life they examined the complexity of the self which emerged in their work primarily as a concern with individuality and individual expression. In the face of an absence of fixed values this led to subjectivist tendencies, a focus on the world of the self – the alienation from the external and a preoccupation with an internal world. By extension, this is reflected in their work as a concern with the unconscious, dreams, and fantasy. Through such thematic preoccupations as the dream, satanism, and the dandy, they affirmed the interrelationship and

importance of the arts while connecting these ideas with the problem of identity.

The perception of art as autonomous and ideal resulted in the bifurcation between art and life which was expressed in their work as irresolvable paradoxes. Thus beauty, identified with consciously created artifice, was inextricably bound to death; and therefore the painted mask only partially concealed decay and ultimately perhaps even nothingness. The obsession with art's hermeticism resulted in their insistence on the primacy of form, their concern with style and structure above and beyond content – a concern which would later lead to abstraction. The dandy is the logical embodiment of such concepts. Impassive, controlled, every detail of his appearance conducing to a complex whole, he was the incarnation of the triumph of form over matter. The cult of the artificial became not only a means of improving upon nature, but also of implicitly juxtaposing an inadequate and banal reality with one transformed by the powers of the imagination. The ugly, bizarre, perverse could therefore become beautiful when the controlling structure, the form, with artifice as its agency transmuted it into art.

Wilde's and Huysmans' work gives expression to a yearning which could not be answered, and through the recognition of this impossibility, this yearning was transmuted into irony. Their recognition of man's complexity and the relativity of the modern world meant that they presented man as internally divided, not bound to any one truth or ideal except such as could be found or created in art. Their desire for transcendence manifests itself in the theme of satanism, which suggests a desire to annihilate boundaries, transcend limitations, or assert freedom – to experience all sensations. However, these desires and actions are once removed by the ironist's own dissective intellect so that subjective experience becomes a failed attempt to move beyond the restrictions of reality. It is for this reason that the mask was one of both comedy, or farce, and tragedy – for Wilde and Huysmans the two became inseparable. The decadent ironist is disengaged yet experiences intensely through the artifices of the imagination; he is simultaneously ecstatic and self-mocking. Wilde and Huysmans expressed this ironical pose in terms of reversal, paradox, and the subversion of social norms, and their relativistic approach efficaciously allowed

for both complexity and the expression of ambiguities and ambivalence.

Wilde and Huysmans examined this entire complex of ideas within the controlling framework of the themes and imagery of satanism, dandyism, and dreams and fantasy. These thematic concerns, as we have seen, gave them a structure within which it was possible to deal with such problems as the nature of identity, the unconscious, and man's means of dealing with refractory reality, the entirety of which was presented in terms of their perception of the relationship of life and art.

⁵⁸² Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 72.

⁵⁸³ Charles Maignon, *L'Univers Artistique de J. K. Huysmand* (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1977), p. 30.

⁵⁸⁴ Chipp, p. 100.

⁵⁸⁵ Elizabeth Holt, ed., *from the Classicists to the Impressionists* (New York: University Press, 1966), p. 488.

⁵⁸⁶ Chipp, p. 107.

⁵⁸⁷ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 196.

⁵⁸⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 834.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 833.

Conclusion

⁵⁹⁰ Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 460.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aslin, Elizabeth. *The Aesthetic Movement: Prelude to Art Nouveau*. New York: Frederick A. Praiger, 1969.
- Balakian, Anna. *The Symbolist Movement*. New York: Random House, 1967.
- Baldick, Robert. *The Life of J-K. Huysmans*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955.
- Balzac, Honoré de. *Oeuvres complètes*. Vol. 19. Paris: Les Bibliophiles de l'Originale, 1968.
- Barbey D'Aurevilly, Jules. *Oeuvres romanesques complètes*. 2 vols. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.
- Baudelaire, Charles. *Oeuvres complètes*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1961.
- Beardsley, Aubrey. *The Story of Venus and Tannhäuser*. London: Academy Editions, 1974.
- Berger, Klaus. *Odilon Redon*. London: McGraw-Hill Books Co.
- Borowitz, Helen. *The Impact of Art on French Literature*. London: Associated University Press, 1985.
- Bourget, Paul. "Theorie de la Décadence." *Essais de psychologie contemporaine*. Paris: Plon-Nourrit et. Co., 1912.
- Caillet, E. *The Themes of Magic in 19th-Century French Fiction*. Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1932.
- Calinescu, Matei. *Faces of Modernity: Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977.

- Camus, Albert. *Discours de Suède*. Paris, 1958.
- Carlyle, Thomas. *Sartor Resartus*. London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1896.
- Carter, A. E. *The Idea of Decadence in French Literature, 1830-1900*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958.
- Chamberlin, J. E. *Ripe was the Drowsy Hour*. New York: Seabury Press, 1977.
- Charlesworth, Barbara. *Dark Passages: The Decadent Consciousness in Victorian Literature*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965.
- Chipp, H. B., ed. *Theories of Modern Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968.
- Circlot, J. E. *A Dictionary of Symbols*. New York: Philosophical Library, 1962.
- Clay, Jean. *Modern Art 1890-1918*. Trans. Arnold Rosin. London: Octopus Book Ltd., 1978.
- Darracott, Joseph. *The World of Charles Ricketts*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1980.
- De Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Bantam Books, 1952.
- Degas et son oeuvre*. London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1984.
- Delevo, Robert L. *Symbolists and Symbolism*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1978.
- De Quincey, Thomas. *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*. Vol. 1. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1878.
- Dowling, Linda. *Aestheticism and Decadence: A Selective Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1977.

- *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- Ellis, Havelock. *Affirmations*. London, 1899.
- Epifanio, San Juan. *The Art of Oscar Wilde*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967.
- Fairlie, Alison. *Imagination and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Farmer, Albert J. *Le Mouvement Esthétique et "Decadent" en Angleterre (1873-1900)*. Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931.
- Félicien Rops 1833-1898* (Catalogue). Editions Flamrnarion, 1985.
- Finke, Ulrich, ed. *French 19th century painting and literature*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972.
- Flaubert, Gustave. *Salammô*. Paris: Charpentien, 1888.
- *The Temptation of St. Anthony*. Trans. Lafcadio Hearn. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1911.
- Fletcher, Ian, ed. *Decadence and the 1890's*. London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd., 1979.
- Flowers, Betty. *Browning and the Modern Tradition*. London: Macmillan Press Inc., 1976.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. A. A. Brill. New York, 1913.
- Gaunt, William. *The Aesthetic Adventure*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1945.
- Gautier, Théophile. *Complete Works*. Trans. F. C. Sumichrast. New York: Bigelow Smith, 1910.

- "Notice" in *Les Fleurs du Mal, Oeuvres complètes*. Vol. 1. Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1868.
- Gilman, Richard. *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979.
- Hart-Davis, Rupert, ed. *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*. London: Hart-Davis, 1962.
- Hennique, Léon and J. K. Huysmans. *Pierrot sceptique*. Paris: Edouard Rouveyre, 1881.
- Hoffman, Frederick J. *Freudianism and the Literary Mind*. Louisiana: Louisiana University Press, 1957.
- Holland, Vyvyan, ed. *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. London: Collins, 1983.
- Holt, Elizabeth Gilmore, ed. *From the Classicists to the Impressionists*. New York: University Press, 1966.
- Hough, Graham. *The Last Romantics*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961.
- Houghton, Walter. *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.
- Howe, Jeffrey. *The Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopf*. Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1979.
- Huysmans, J. K. *Against Nature*. Trans. R. Baldick. New York: Penguin Books, 1959.
- *A rebours/Le drageoir aux épices*. Paris: Union Générale, 1975.
- *L'Art moderne*. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1909.
- *Certains*. Paris: Tresse & Stock, 1894.
- *Croquis parisiens*. Paris: Librairie Plon, 1955.

- *Down There*. Trans. Keene Wallace. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972.
- *En Marge*. Paris: Chez Marcelle Lesage, 1927.
- *En rade*. Paris: Gallimard, 1984.
- *Là-bas*. Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1978.
- Juin, Hubert. *Barbey D'Aurevilly*. Paris: Seghers, 1975.
- Jullian, Philippe. *Dreamers of Decadence*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971.
- . *Oscar Wilde*. London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1971.
- . *Prince of Aesthetes: Count Robert de Montesquiou, 1855-1921*. New York: Viking Press, 1968.
- Kermode, Frank. *The Romantic Image*. London: Kegan Paul, 1957.
- Kuhn, Reinhard. *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976.
- Lane, Allen. *Symbolism*. London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1979.
- Lehmann, A. G. *The Symbolist Aesthetic*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968.
- Lester, John L. *Journey Through Despair 1880-1914*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- Lhôte, J. M. *Les Mots de Degas*. Paris, 1967.
- Lowry, Joyce O. *The Violent Mystique*. Librairie Proz.
- Lucie-Smith, Edward. *Symbolist Art*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Madsen, S. T. *The Sources of Art Nouveau*. Oslo: Ashenhough & Co., 1955.

- Maignon, Charles. *L'Univers Artistique de J. K. Huysmans*. Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1977.
- Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Oeuvres complètes* I. Eds. C. P. Barbier and C. G. Milan. Paris: Flammarion, 1983.
- . *Poésies Complètes*. Genève: Editions Pierre Cailler, 1948.
- Mathieu, Pierre-Louis. Trans. J. Emmons. *Gustave Moreau*, Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1977.
- Meyers, Jeffrey. *Homosexuality and Literature 1890-1930*. London: The Athlone Press, 1977.
- Miyoshi, Masao. *The Divided Self*. New York: New York University Press, 1969.
- Moers, Ellen. *The Dandy: Brummel to Beerbohm*. London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1960.
- Nietzsche, F. *The Will to Power*. Trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1968.
- Nordau, Max. *Degeneration*. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1985.
- Pater, Walter. *The Complete Works*. Vols. 4, 5. London: Macmillan & Co., 1910.
- . *The Renaissance*. New York: Boni & Liveright, 1919.
- Pearson, Hesketh. *The Man Whistler*. 1952.
- Péladan, J. *Le Vice Supreme*. Paris: 1884.
- Pierre, José. *Symbolism*. London: Eyre Methuen, 1979.
- Pierrot, Jean. *The Decadent Imagination 1880-1900*. Trans. Derek Coltman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

- Poe, Edgar Allan. *Tales by Poe*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1952.
- Praz, Mario. *The Romantic Agony*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- Raymond, Marcel. *From Baudelaire to Surrealism*. London: Methuen and Co., 1933.
- Redon, Odilon. *A Soi-même*. Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1961.
- Reed, John R. *Decadent Style*. Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985.
- Reff, Theodore, ed. *The Notebooks of E. Degas*. Vols. 1, 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.
- Rewald, John. *Post-Impressionism from Van Gogh to Gauguin*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1956.
- Ricks, C., ed. *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Ridge, George Ross. *The Hero in French Decadent Literature*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1961.
- . *Joris-Karl Huysmans*. New York: Twayne,
- Rosenblatt, Louise. *l'Idée de l'art pour l'art dans la littérature anglaise pendant la période victorienne*. Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1931.
- Sade, Marquis de. *The Complete Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*. Trans. R. Seaver and A. Wainhouse. New York: Grove Press, 1965.
- Saillet, Mauris. *Sur la Route de Narcisse*. Paris, 1958.
- Schlegel, Friedrich. *Literary Notebooks, 1797-1801*. Ed. Hans Eichner. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957.

- Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Idea*. 3 vols. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957.
- Stanton, Donna. *The Aristocrat as Art*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Starkie, Enid. *From Gautier to Eliot: The Influence of France on English Literature, 1851-1939*. St. Clair Shores, Michigan: Scholarly Press, 1960.
- Steegmuller, Francis, ed. and trans. *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert 1830-1857*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1980.
- Sutton, Denys. *Nocturne: The Art of James McNeill Whistler*. London: Country Life Ltd., 1963.
- Symons, Arthur. *The Art of Aubrey Beardsley*. New York: Boni & Liveright, 1918.
- . "The Decadent Movement in Literature." *Harper's Magazine*. 88 (November, 1893), 858-67.
- . *Selected Writings*. Ed. R. Holdsworth.
- . *Silhouettes*. London: Leonard Smithers, 1897.
- . *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. London: Wm. Heinemann, 1899.
- Sypher, Wylie. *Rococo to Cubism in Art and Literature*. New York: Random House, 1963.
- Temple, Ruth Z. *The Critic's Alchemy: A Study of the Introduction of Symbolism into England*. New Haven: College and University Press, 1953.
- Thornton, R. K. R. *The Decadent Dilemma*. London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1983.
- Verlaine, Paul. *Oeuvres Complètes*. 2 vols. Paris: Le Club de meilleur livre, 1959.

- . *Oeuvres en prose complètes*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.
- . *Oeuvres poétiques complètes*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Paris: Gallimard, 1962.
- Ward-Jackson, Philip. "Art Historians and Art Critics VIII: Huysmans." *Burlington Magazine* 109 (1967): 617-22.
- Welch, Cyril and Lilliane. *Emergence*. Bald Eagle Press, 1973.
- Whistler, J. *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. London: Ballantyne Press.
- Wichmann, Siegfried. *Japonisme: the Japanese Influence on Western Art since 1858*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 1981.
- Wilde, Oscar. *Art and Decoration*. London: Methuen and Co., 1920.
- . *Essays and Lectures*. London: Methuen and Co., 1978.
- Williams, Roger L. *The Horror of Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923.
- The Yellow Book*. Vol. I. 1894.
- Zagona, Helen Grace. *The Legend of Salomé and the Principle of Art for Art's Sake*. Paris: Librairie Minard, 1960.

*Tiparul s-a executat sub cda 2009/2008
la Tipografia Editurii Universității din București*

NOTES

Introduction

¹ Vyvyan Holland, ed., *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 926.

² Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), vol. 1, p. 1183.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1297.

⁴ J. K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. R. Baldick (New York: Penguin Books, 1959), p. 176.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁶ Philippe Jullian, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1971), p. 104.

⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 986.

⁸ Robert L. Delevoy, *Symbolists and Symbolism* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., 1978), p. 157.

⁹ Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*. (1961), vol. 1, p. 1076.

¹⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, pp. 983-6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 992.

¹² Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 36.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 970.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 987.

¹⁶ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 36.

¹⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 991.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 973.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 991.

²⁰ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 35.

²¹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 53.

-
- ²² Ibid., p. 75.
- ²³ Ibid., p. 70.
- ²⁴ Ibid., p. 90.
- ²⁵ Ibid., p. 1034.
- ²⁶ Ibid., p. 1052.
- ²⁷ Ibid., p. 101.
- ²⁸ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 115
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 989.
- ³¹ Ibid., p. 487.
- ³² Philippe Jullian, *Dreamers of Decadence* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 91.
- ³³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1023.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 1014.
- ³⁶ Ibid., p. 977
- ³⁷ Robert Baldick, *The Life of J. K. Huysmans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 37.
- ³⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 115.
- ³⁹ Ibid., p. 1040.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 1093.
- ⁴¹ Ibid., p. 1057.
- ⁴² J. K. Huysmans, *Down There*, trans. Keene Wallace (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972), p. 54.
- ⁴³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1086.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 1087.
- ⁴⁵ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 29.
- ⁴⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1025.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 1039.

-
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 1031.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 461.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 47.
- ⁵¹ Ibid., p. 70.
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 111.
- ⁵³ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 181.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Wm. Heinemann, 1899), pp. 172-3.
- ⁵⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1038.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 181.
- ⁵⁹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 991.
- ⁶⁰ Jullian, *Dreamers of Decadence*, p. 231.
- ⁶¹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 1041.
- ⁶² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p.842.
- ⁶³ Jullian, *Dreamers of Decadence*, p. 231.
- ⁶⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p.1041.
- ⁶⁵ R. K. R. Thornton, *The Decadent Dilemma* (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1983), p. 19.
- ⁶⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p.991.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 17.
- ⁶⁸ Cyril and Lilliane Welch, *Emergence* (Bald Eagle Press, 1973), p. 65.
- ⁶⁹ Théophile Gautier, *Complete Works*, trans. F. C. Sumichrast (New York: Bigelow Smith, 1910), p. 80 ff.
- ⁷⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p.976.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., p. 1025.

Chapter One: Dandyism

⁷² Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), vol. 1, p. 1178.

⁷³ Vyvyan Holland, ed., *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 976.

⁷⁴ Donna Stanton, *The Aristocrat As Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 182.

Original Source:

Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2 vols. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), vol.1, p. 705.

⁷⁵ Stanton, p. 182.

⁷⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 522.

⁷⁷ Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, (London: Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 313.

⁷⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1205.

⁷⁹ Denys Sutton, *Nocturne: The Art of James McNeill Whistler* (London: Country Life Ltd., 1963), p. 118.

⁸⁰ J. Whistler, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* (London: Ballantyne Press), p. 300.

⁸¹ *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 264.

⁸² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1052.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 101.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 1051.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 1020.

⁸⁶ Ellen Moers, *The Dandy: Brummel to Beerbohm* (London: Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd., 1960), p. 300.

⁸⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1032.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 423.

⁸⁹ J. Barbey D'Aurevilly, *Oeuvres romanesques complètes*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), vol. 2, p. 677.

⁹⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 17.

-
- ⁹¹ Ibid., p. 32.
- ⁹² Ibid.
- ⁹³ Philippe Jullian, *Dreamers of Decadence* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p. 25.
- ⁹⁴ Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*. (1961), vol. 1, p. 1179.
- ⁹⁵ Barbey D'Aurevilly, *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, p. 178.
- ⁹⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 995.
- ⁹⁷ Richard Gilman, *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (New York, Farrar Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 97.
- ⁹⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1205.
- ⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 1052.
- ¹⁰⁰ Robert L. Delevoy, *Symbolists and Symbolism* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc., 1978), p. 60.
- ¹⁰¹ J. K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. R. Baldick (New York: Penguin Books, 1959), p. 109.
- ¹⁰² J. K. Huysmans, *En Marge*, (Paris: Chez Marcelle Lesage, 1927), p. 53.
- ¹⁰³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1101.
- ¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 416.
- ¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 390.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 406.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 1206.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 103.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 417.
- ¹¹⁰ C. Ricks, ed. *The New Oxford Book of Victorian Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 586.
- ¹¹¹ Arthur Symons, *Selected Writings*, ed. R. Holdsworth, p. 32.
- ¹¹² John L. Lester, *Journey Through Despair 1880-1914* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968) p. 139.
- ¹¹³ Arthur Symons, *Silhouettes* (London: Leonard Smithers, 1897) p. 11.
- ¹¹⁴ "A Defence of Cosmetics" in *The Yellow Book* (1984), vol. 1.

-
- ¹¹⁵ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1052.
- ¹¹⁶ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 45.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- ¹¹⁹ Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, (1961), vol. 1, p. 1179.
- ¹²⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1042.
- ¹²¹ Honoré de Balzac, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Les Bibliophiles de l'Originale, 1968), vol. 19, p. 182.
- ¹²² *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 69.
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 113.
- ¹²⁴ J. K. Huysmans, *Down There*, trans. Keene Wallace (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972), p. 200.
- ¹²⁵ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 161.
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- ¹²⁷ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 200.
- ¹²⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 161.
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1020.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹³² Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes* (1961), vol. 1, p. 491.
- ¹³³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 55.
- ¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- ¹³⁵ Barbey D'Aurevilly, *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, p. 703.
- ¹³⁶ Moers, p. 275.
- ¹³⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 981.
- ¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- ¹³⁹ Moers, p. 279.
- ¹⁴⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1030.
- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1204.

-
- ¹⁴² Ibid., p. 975.
- ¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 1078.
- ¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 91.
- ¹⁴⁵ Moers, p. 275.
- ¹⁴⁶ *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 353.
- ¹⁴⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 17.
- ¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 1045.
- ¹⁴⁹ Hubert, Juin, *Barbey D'Aurevilly* (Paris: Seghers, 1975), p. 105.
- ¹⁵⁰ Moers, p. 122.
- ¹⁵¹ Walter Pater, "Imaginary Portraits" in *The Complete Works* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1910), vol. 4, p. 6.
- ¹⁵² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 995.
- ¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 459.
- ¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 32.
- ¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 390.
- ¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 462.
- ¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 43.
- ¹⁵⁸ Friedrich Schlegel, *Literary Notebooks, 1797-1801*, ed. Hans Eichner (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), p. 114.
- ¹⁵⁹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 445.
- ¹⁶⁰ Lester, p. 136.
- ¹⁶¹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 936.
- ¹⁶² J. K. Huysmans, *Certains* (Paris: Tresse & Stock, 1894), p. 53.
- ¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 54.
- ¹⁶⁴ Arthur Symons, *The Art of Aubrey Beardsley* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1918), p. 30.
- ¹⁶⁵ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 89.
- ¹⁶⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 488.
- ¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

-
- ¹⁶⁸ J. K. Huysmans, *Croquis parisiens* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1955), p. 196.
- ¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 189.
- ¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 190.
- ¹⁷¹ J. K. Huysmans, *L'Art moderne* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1908) p. 299.
- ¹⁷² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 163.
- ¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 938.
- ¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 94
- ¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 88.
- ¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 103.
- ¹⁷⁷ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 196.
- ¹⁷⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 134.
- ¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 154.
- ¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 112.
- ¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 926.
- ¹⁸² Ibid., p. 134.
- ¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 69.
- ¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 67.
- ¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 1041.
- ¹⁸⁶ J. E. Chamberlain, *Ripe was the Drowsy Hour* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 20.
- ¹⁸⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1012.
- ¹⁸⁸ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 179.

Chapter Two: Satanism

- ¹⁸⁹ Vivyan Holland, ed. *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 103.
- ¹⁹⁰ J. K. Huysmans, *Down There*, trans. Keene Wallace (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972), p. 2052.
- ¹⁹¹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 122.

-
- ¹⁹² Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), vol. 1, p. 1255.
- ¹⁹³ J. K. Huysmans, *Certains* (Paris: Tresse & Stock, 1894), p. 115.
- ¹⁹⁴ Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes* (1961), vol. 1, p. 1179.
- ¹⁹⁵ J. K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. R. Baldick (New York: Penguin Books, 1959), p. 81.
- ¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- ¹⁹⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 165.
- ¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.
- ²⁰⁰ Donna Stanton, *The Aristocrat as Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 183.
- ²⁰¹ Théophile Gautier, "Notice" in *Les Fleurs du Mal, Oeuvres complètes*. Vol. 1. (Paris: Calman-Lévy, 1868), pp. 37, 26.
- ²⁰² Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 106.
- ²⁰³ *Félicien Rops 1833-1898* (Catalogue), (Editions Flammarion, 1985), p. 58.
- ²⁰⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 32.
- ²⁰⁵ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 54.
- ²⁰⁶ Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination 1880-1900*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 140.
- ²⁰⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1055.
- ²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1093.
- ²⁰⁹ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 105.
- ²¹⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 105.
- ²¹¹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 69.
- ²¹² Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 206.
- ²¹³ Arthur Symons, *The Art of Aubrey Beardsley* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1918), p. 30.
- ²¹⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 29.

-
- ²¹⁵ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 78.
- ²¹⁶ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 52.
- ²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- ²¹⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1018.
- ²¹⁹ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 37.
- ²²⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1040.
- ²²¹ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 94.
- ²²² *Ibid.*, p. 237.
- ²²³ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 91.
- ²²⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 122.
- ²²⁵ J. K. Huysmans, *Croquis parisiens* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1955) p. 30.
- ²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.
- ²²⁷ Symons, *The Art of Aubrey Beardsley*, p. 28.
- ²²⁸ Pierrot, p. 90.
- ²²⁹ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 239.
- ²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 283.
- ²³¹ Pierrot, p. 48.
- ²³² Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 8.
- ²³³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 980.
- ²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 979.
- ²³⁵ E. Caillet, *The Themes of Magic in 19th-Century French Fiction* (Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1932), p. 174.
- ²³⁶ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 141.
- ²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 142.
- ²³⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1030.
- ²³⁹ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 17.
- ²⁴⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1012.

-
- ²⁴¹ J. Barbey D'Aurevilly, *Oeuvres romanesques complètes*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. (Paris: Gillimard, 1966) vol. 2, p. 155.
- ²⁴² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 166.
- ²⁴³ Ibid., p. 21.
- ²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 144.
- ²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 118.
- ²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 105.
- ²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 106.
- ²⁴⁸ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 91.
- ²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 61.
- ²⁵⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 144.
- ²⁵¹ Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Hart-Davis, 1962) p. 266.
- ²⁵² Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 162.
- ²⁵³ J. K. Huysmans, *En Marge* (Paris: Chez Marcelle Lesage, 1927), p. 266.
- ²⁵⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 161.
- ²⁵⁵ J. Barbey D'Aurevilly, Preface to 1874 edition of *Les Diaboliques* in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Bernouard, 1926), vol. 2, p. 291.
- ²⁵⁶ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 162.
- ²⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁵⁸ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 163.
- ²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 53.
- ²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 48.
- ²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 159.
- ²⁶² Ibid., p. 114.
- ²⁶³ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 115.
- ²⁶⁴ Alison Fairlie, *Imagination and Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 142.

²⁶⁵ Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Wm. Heinemann, 1899), p. 71.

²⁶⁶ Chipp, H. B., ed. *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 117.

²⁶⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1031.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1030.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁷⁰ translated by Robert L. Delevoy in *Symbolists and Symbolism* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 18.

Original Source:

Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, (1961), vol. 1, p. 1213.

²⁷¹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 59.

²⁷² *Félicien Rops 1833-1898*, p.

²⁷³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 552.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 561.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

²⁷⁶ Pierre-Louis Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau*, trans. J. Emmons (Oxford Phaidon Press, 1977), p. 106.

²⁷⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1952), p. 144.

²⁷⁸ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 118.

²⁷⁹ Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes* (1961), vol. 1, p. 1286.

²⁸⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 553.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 555.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 558.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

-
- ²⁸⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸⁸ J. E. Circlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 217.
- ²⁸⁹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 554.
- ²⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 564.
- ²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 102.
- ²⁹² Ibid., p. 569.
- ²⁹³ Ibid.
- ²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 574.
- ²⁹⁵ translated by Robert L. Delevoy in *Symbolists and Symbolism*, p. 41
- Original Source:
- Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes I Poésies* (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), p. 231.
- ²⁹⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 568.
- ²⁹⁷ Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, (1961), vol. 1, p. 28.
- ²⁹⁸ J. Péladan, *La Vice Suprême* (Paris: 1884), p. 65 ff.
- ²⁹⁹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 575.
- ³⁰⁰ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 118.
- ³⁰¹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 573.
- ³⁰² Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes*, (1961), vol. 1, p. 113.
- ³⁰³ Ibid., p. 1272.
- ³⁰⁴ Pierre-Louis Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau*, trans. J. Emmons (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1977), p. 129.
- ³⁰⁵ *Félicien Rops 1833-1898*, p. 54.
- ³⁰⁶ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 106.
- ³⁰⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 118.
- ³⁰⁸ Jeffrey Howe, *The Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1974), p. 133.
- ³⁰⁹ Huysmans, *Croquis parisiens*, p. 201.

Chapter Three: **Dreams and Fantasy**

³¹⁰ Robert Delevoy, *Symbolists and Symbolism*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 141.

³¹¹ J. K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. R. Baldick (New York: Penguin Books, 1959), p. 45.

³¹² Paul Verlaine, *Oeuvres en prose complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 695.

³¹³ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 64.

³¹⁴ Klaus Berger, *Odilon Redon* (London: McGraw Hill Books Co.), p. 134.

³¹⁵ Vyvyan Holland, ed., *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 108.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 572.

³¹⁷ J. K. Huysmans, *En rade* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984), p. 59.

³¹⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 101.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ Robert Baldick. *The Life of J. K. Huysmans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955): p. 67.

³²² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 978.

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1030.

³²⁶ J. K. Huysmans, *Certains* (Paris: Tresse & Stock, 1894), p. 67.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³²⁹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1051.

³³⁰ Helen Zagana, *The Legend of Salomé and the Principle of Art for Art's Sake*, (Paris: Librairie Minard, 1960), p. 123.

-
- ³³¹ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 72.
- ³³² Paul Verlaine, *Oeuvres poétiques complètes*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p. 261.
- ³³³ John Rewald, *Post-Impressionism from Van Gogh to Gauguin* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1956), p. 148.
- ³³⁴ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 72.
- ³³⁵ J. K. Huysmans, *Down There*, trans. Keene Wallace (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1972), p. 114.
- ³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- ³³⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 976.
- ³³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³³⁹ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 10.
- ³⁴⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1039.
- ³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 987.
- ³⁴² Stéphane Mallarmé, *Oeuvres complètes I*, eds. C. P. Barbier and C. G. Milan (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), p. 230.
- ³⁴³ Jean Pierrot, *The Decadent Imagination 1880-1900*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 183.
- ³⁴⁴ H. B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 117.
- ³⁴⁵ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1919), p. 196.
- ³⁴⁶ Huysmans, *Down There*, p. 172.
- ³⁴⁷ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 223.
- ³⁴⁸ J. Barbey D'Aurevilly, *Oeuvres romanesques complètes*. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), vol. 2, p. 718.
- ³⁴⁹ Joseph Darracott, *The World of Charles Ricketts* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p. 32.
- ³⁵⁰ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 21.
- ³⁵¹ Robert L. Delevoy, *Symbolists and Symbolism* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1978), p. 40.

-
- ³⁵² J. K. Huysmans, *L'Art moderne* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1908), p. 152.
- ³⁵³ J. K. Huysmans, *En Marge* (Paris: Chez Marcelle Lesage, 1927), p. 126.
- ³⁵⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 102.
- ³⁵⁵ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1896), p. 174.
- ³⁵⁶ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 180.
- ³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- ³⁵⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 285.
- ³⁵⁹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 180.
- ³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- ³⁶¹ Pierre-Louis Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau*, trans. J. Emmons (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1977) p. 106.
- ³⁶² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 51.
- ³⁶³ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 64.
- ³⁶⁴ Mathieu, p. 106.
- ³⁶⁵ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 82.
- ³⁶⁶ Mathieu, p. 58.
- ³⁶⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 956.
- ³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 986.
- ³⁶⁹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 35.
- ³⁷⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 912.
- ³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 920.
- ³⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 987.
- ³⁷³ Carlyle, p. 57.
- ³⁷⁴ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 66.
- ³⁷⁵ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1042.
- ³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1030.
- ³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

-
- ³⁷⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁸⁰ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 154.
- ³⁸¹ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 300.
- ³⁸² Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 190.
- ³⁸³ Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 186.
- ³⁸⁴ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 191.
- ³⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁸⁷ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 299.
- ³⁸⁸ Pierrot, p. 119.
- ³⁸⁹ Chipp, p. 117.
- ³⁹⁰ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 300.
- ³⁹¹ *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 636.
- ³⁹² Chipp, p. 117.
- ³⁹³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 929.
- ³⁹⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁹⁵ Odilon Redon, *A Soi-même* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1961), p. 163.
- ³⁹⁶ Berger, p. 130.
- ³⁹⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1020.
- ³⁹⁸ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 73.
- ³⁹⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 991.
- ⁴⁰¹ Chipp, p. 117.
- ⁴⁰² Huysmans, *En rade*, p. 93.
- ⁴⁰³ Ibid, pp. 48, 57.
- ⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 61.
- ⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 63.

- ⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 66.
- ⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 76.
- ⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 72.
- ⁴¹⁰ Ibid., p. 78.
- ⁴¹¹ Ibid.
- ⁴¹² Ibid., p. 79.
- ⁴¹³ Ibid., p. 176.
- ⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 70.
- ⁴¹⁵ Ibid., p. 49.
- ⁴¹⁶ Ibid., p. 86.
- ⁴¹⁷ Ibid., p. 107.
- ⁴¹⁸ Ibid., p. 108.
- ⁴¹⁹ Ibid., p. 80.
- ⁴²⁰ Ibid., p. 33.
- ⁴²¹ Mathieu, p. 244.
- ⁴²² Huysmans, *En rade*, p. 166.
- ⁴²³ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 84.
- ⁴²⁴ Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes* (1961), vol. 1, p. 385.
- ⁴²⁵ Mauris Saillet, *Sur la Route de Narcisse* (Paris: 2958), pp. 99-101.
- ⁴²⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 143.
- ⁴²⁷ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 173.
- ⁴²⁸ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 67 ff.

Chapter Four: Art and Artists

- ⁴²⁹ Vyvyan Holland, ed. *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London: Collins, 1983), p. 73.
- ⁴³⁰ J. K. Huysmans, *L'Art moderne* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1908), p. 197.

-
- ⁴³¹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1027.
- ⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- ⁴³³ Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 255.
- ⁴³⁴ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 133.
- ⁴³⁵ J. K. Huysmans, *Against Nature*, trans. R. Baldick (New York: Penguin Books, 1959), p. 43.
- ⁴³⁶ J. K. Huysmans, *En Marge* (Paris: Chez Marcelle Lesage, 1927), p. 126.
- ⁴³⁷ *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 233.
- ⁴³⁸ *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert (1830-1857)*, ed. and trans. Francis Steegmuller (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1980), p. 154.
- ⁴³⁹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 95.
- ⁴⁴⁰ Havelock Ellis, *Affirmations* (London, 1899), p. 178.
- ⁴⁴¹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 42.
- ⁴⁴² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1014.
- ⁴⁴³ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 153.
- ⁴⁴⁴ Huysmans, *En Marge*, p. 14.
- ⁴⁴⁵ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 919.
- ⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 920.
- ⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 987.
- ⁴⁴⁸ J. K. Huysmans, *Certains* (Paris: Tresse & Stock, 1894), p. 16.
- ⁴⁴⁹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 978.
- ⁴⁵⁰ J. E. Chamberlin, *Ripe was the Drowsy Hour* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), p. 96.
- ⁴⁵¹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1051.
- ⁴⁵² Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 73.
- ⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ⁴⁵⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1033.
- ⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 920.

-
- ⁴⁵⁶ Huysmans, *En Marge*, p. 133.
- ⁴⁵⁷ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 121.
- ⁴⁵⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 17.
- ⁴⁵⁹ Chamberlin, p. 121.
- ⁴⁶⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 17.
- ⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1030.
- ⁴⁶² H. B. Chipp, ed., *Theories of Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 92.
- ⁴⁶³ Pierre-Louis Mathieu, *Gustave Moreau*, trans. J. Emmons (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1977), p. 258.
- ⁴⁶⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p.
- ⁴⁶⁵ Hesketh Pearson, *The Man Whistler* (1952), p. 50.
- ⁴⁶⁶ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 71.
- ⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- ⁴⁶⁸ Oscar Wilde, *Essays and Lectures* (London: Methuen and Co., 1978), p. 166.
- ⁴⁶⁹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 920.
- ⁴⁷⁰ Jeffrey Howe, *The Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1974), p. 50.
- ⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.
- ⁴⁷² Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 196.
- ⁴⁷³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 979.
- ⁴⁷⁴ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 196.
- ⁴⁷⁵ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 9.
- ⁴⁷⁶ San Juan Epifanio, *The Art of Oscar Wilde* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 50.
- ⁴⁷⁷ Walter Pater, "Appreciations" in *Complete Works*, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1910), vol. 5, p. 62
- ⁴⁷⁸ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 245.
- ⁴⁷⁹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 987.

-
- ⁴⁸⁰ Chipp, p. 94.
- ⁴⁸¹ John Rewald, *Post-Impressionism from Van Gogh to Gauguin* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1956), p. 157.
- ⁴⁸² Joseph Darracott, *The World of Charles Ricketts* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p. 143.
- ⁴⁸³ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 223.
- ⁴⁸⁴ Oscar Wilde, "Sententiae" in *Art and Decoration* (London: Methuen and Co., 1920), p. 200.
- ⁴⁸⁵ José Pierre, *Symbolism*, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979).
- ⁴⁸⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 460.
- ⁴⁸⁷ Wilde, *Essays and Lectures*, p. 16.
- ⁴⁸⁸ Ibid
- ⁴⁸⁹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 25.
- ⁴⁹⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 151.
- ⁴⁹¹ Ibid., p. 1016.
- ⁴⁹² Ibid., p. 981.
- ⁴⁹³ Ibid., p. 989.
- ⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 160.
- ⁴⁹⁵ Robert Baldick, *The Life of J. K. Huysmans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 213.
- ⁴⁹⁶ Jean Pierro, *The Decadent Imagination 1880-1900*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 51.
- ⁴⁹⁷ Reinhard Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide: Ennui in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton Univeristy Press, 1976), p. 324.
- ⁴⁹⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 151.
- ⁴⁹⁹ Kuhn, p. 292.
- ⁵⁰⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 863.
- ⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p. 1047.
- ⁵⁰² Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 13.
- ⁵⁰³ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1047.

-
- ⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 1048.
- ⁵⁰⁶ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 265.
- ⁵⁰⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1096.
- ⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 1097.
- ⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵¹⁰ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 128.
- ⁵¹¹ Odilon Redon, *A soi-meme* (Paris: Libraire José Corti, 1961), p. 100.
- ⁵¹² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1022.
- ⁵¹³ Pater, "Appreciations," p. 66.
- ⁵¹⁴ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 16.
- ⁵¹⁵ Ibid.
- ⁵¹⁶ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 92.
- ⁵¹⁷ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 20.
- ⁵¹⁸ *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, p. 304.
- ⁵¹⁹ Mathier, p. 122.
- ⁵²⁰ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 182.
- ⁵²¹ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 19.
- ⁵²² Helen Borowitz, *The Impact of Art on French Literature* (London: Associated University Press, 1985), p. 161.
- ⁵²³ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 69.
- ⁵²⁴ Ibid., p. 68.
- ⁵²⁵ Ibid., p. 70.
- ⁵²⁶ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1051.
- ⁵²⁷ Phillippe Jullian, *Oscar Wilde* (London: Granada Publishing Ltd., 1971), p. 214.
- ⁵²⁸ Jean Clay, *Modern Art 1890-1918*, trans. Arnold Rosin (London: Octopus Books Ltd., 1978), p. 26.
- ⁵²⁹ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 29.

-
- ⁵³⁰ Jullian, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 215.
- ⁵³¹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 160.
- ⁵³² J. K. Huysmans, *A rebours/Le drageoir aux épices* (Paris: Union Générale, 1975), p. 347.
- ⁵³³ Chipp, p. 135.
- ⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- ⁵³⁵ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 160.
- ⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1051.
- ⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁵³⁸ Redon, p. 163.
- ⁵³⁹ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 104.
- ⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 292.
- ⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ⁵⁴³ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 23.
- ⁵⁴⁴ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 131.
- ⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- ⁵⁴⁶ Theodore Reff, "Degas and the Literature of his Time" in *French 19th century painting and literature*, ed. Ulrich Finke (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972), p. 200.
- ⁵⁴⁷ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1051.
- ⁵⁴⁸ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 129.
- ⁵⁴⁹ Phillip Ward-Jackson, "Art Historians and Art Critics VIII: Huysmans," *Berlington Magazine* 1090 (1967), p. 618.
- ⁵⁵⁰ Reff, p. 208.
- ⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.
- ⁵⁵² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 976.
- ⁵⁵³ J. M. Lhote, *Les Mots de Degas* (Paris, 1967), p. 41.
- ⁵⁵⁴ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 26.

-
- ⁵⁵⁵ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1008.
- ⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1007.
- ⁵⁵⁷ *Félicien Rops* (Editions Flammarion: 1985), p. 42.
- ⁵⁵⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1092.
- ⁵⁵⁹ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 131.
- ⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- ⁵⁶¹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1093.
- ⁵⁶² Arthur Symons, *The Art of Aubrey Beardsley* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1918), p. 30.
- ⁵⁶³ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 69.
- ⁵⁶⁴ Aubrey Beardsley, *The Story of Venus and Tannhauser* (London: Academy Editions, 1974), p. 42.
- ⁵⁶⁵ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 78.
- ⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- ⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.
- ⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷⁰ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 936.
- ⁵⁷¹ Huysmans, *Certains*, p. 91.
- ⁵⁷² *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1086.
- ⁵⁷³ Huysmans, *L'Art moderne*, p. 161.
- ⁵⁷⁴ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 146.
- ⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1096.
- ⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1084.
- ⁵⁷⁸ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 108 ff.
- ⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- ⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.
- ⁵⁸¹ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 1022.

⁵⁸² Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 72.

⁵⁸³ Charles Maignon, *L'Univers Artistique de J. K. Huysmand* (Paris: A. G. Nizet, 1977), p. 30.

⁵⁸⁴ Chipp, p. 100.

⁵⁸⁵ Elizabeth Holt, ed., *from the Classicists to the Impressionists* (New York: University Press, 1966), p. 488.

⁵⁸⁶ Chipp, p. 107.

⁵⁸⁷ Huysmans, *Against Nature*, p. 196.

⁵⁸⁸ *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, p. 834.

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 833.

Conclusion

⁵⁹⁰ Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London: Hart-Davis, 1962), p. 460.