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# The ekphrastic fantastic: gazing at magic portraits in Victorian fiction

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# THE EKPHRASTIC FANTASTIC: GAZING AT MAGIC PORTRAITS IN VICTORIAN FICTION

by

Deborah Maria Manion

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in English
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# ABSTRACT

While Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* depicts the quintessential literary portrait endowed with uncanny life and movement, dozens of such magic portraits are featured in Victorian fiction. From the ravishing picture of the title character in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* to the coveted portrait of a Romantic poet in Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, imagined portraits in these texts serve as conduits of desire and fear—windows into passions and repressions that reveal not only the images' external effects but their relation to the unconscious of their viewers. My dissertation turns a critical eye on this gallery of ekphrastic pictures—those not actually visible to the reader but rather visualizable through verbal description—to argue that the meditations on representation and desire that these novels and stories perform not only anticipate but augment theories of the image and the gaze developed primarily since the advent of cinema. Though the dissertation benefits from film theory's models of visual exchange, the distinctions between these portraits and images in film open up fertile analytical terrain. Ekphrastic magic portraits provide a unique opportunity to delve into the intersecting realms of word painting and image perception, the optics of desire and subjectivity, to advance critical discourses in visual studies that are framed both historically and theoretically. Using psychoanalytic and narratological methodologies, particularly those relevant to feminist and queer image theory, "The Ekphrastic Fantastic" demonstrates how the fictional visual exchanges on display in magic portrait stories elucidate various power struggles regarding sexuality and narrative structuring. These literary pictures thereby provide new access to the social and artistic commentaries that often subtend Victorian fiction.

Each chapter considers three primary texts and the branch of image theory most relevant to their deployment of magic portraits. Laura Mulvey's foundational essay,

"Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," provides the point of departure in the first chapter, which looks at Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, and Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*. The second chapter addresses Margaret Oliphant's "The Portrait," Thomas Hardy's "An Imaginative Woman," and James's *The Aspern Papers* with further feminist insights from Vivian Sobchack and Teresa de Lauretis. The final chapter determines the relationship of principles of visual representation and narrative production of the Aesthetic movement to magic portraits in Walter Pater's "Sebastian van Storck," Vernon Lee's "Oke of Okehurst," and Wilde's *Dorian Gray*, particularly as they relate to the nascent medium of cinema and the theories that soon as well as later arose to account for the impact of its kinetic mirage. The arc of my argument emphasizes how, as the Victorian period advances, the portraits become increasingly animate and subversive in their challenges to patriarchal gender norms and narrative formulas. In this way, they become the mechanisms by which new models of psycho-sexual relations can be expressed and new social and narrative systems can emerge.

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Graduate College
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Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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To my mother, Diana, and to Ron

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# ABSTRACT

While Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* depicts the quintessential literary portrait endowed with uncanny life and movement, dozens of such magic portraits are featured in Victorian fiction. From the ravishing picture of the title character in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* to the coveted portrait of a Romantic poet in Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, imagined portraits in these texts serve as conduits of desire and fear—windows into passions and repressions that reveal not only the images' external effects but their relation to the unconscious of their viewers. My dissertation turns a critical eye on this gallery of ekphrastic pictures—those not actually visible to the reader but rather visualizable through verbal description—to argue that the meditations on representation and desire that these novels and stories perform not only anticipate but augment theories of the image and the gaze developed primarily since the advent of cinema. Though the dissertation benefits from film theory's models of visual exchange, the distinctions between these portraits and images in film open up fertile analytical terrain. Ekphrastic magic portraits provide a unique opportunity to delve into the intersecting realms of word painting and image perception, the optics of desire and subjectivity, to advance critical discourses in visual studies that are framed both historically and theoretically. Using psychoanalytic and narratological methodologies, particularly those relevant to feminist and queer image theory, "The Ekphrastic Fantastic" demonstrates how the fictional visual exchanges on display in magic portrait stories elucidate various power struggles regarding sexuality and narrative structuring. These literary pictures thereby provide new access to the social and artistic commentaries that often subtend Victorian fiction.

Each chapter considers three primary texts and the branch of image theory most relevant to their deployment of magic portraits. Laura Mulvey's foundational essay,

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# INTRODUCTION: THE EKPHRASTIC FANTASTIC

"Long—long I read—and devoutly, devotedly I gazed."[1] Thus speaks the narrator of Edgar Allan Poe's 1842 fantastical tale, "The Oval Portrait," in regard to his contemplation of the paintings and accompanying book he finds in a strange room in which he is spending the night. While he looks at and reads about the paintings, he comfortably reclines in a kind of "dreamy stupor," but when he tries to cast light "more fully upon the book," a haunting image becomes newly visible and "startle[s] [him] at once into waking life." It is a portrait that depicts "a young girl just ripening into womanhood," "a maiden of rarest beauty" wearing "an absolute *life-likeliness* of expression" (italics original). His previously confident and authoritative gaze is immediately countered by the energy emanating from the woman's image. He instinctively shuts his eyes "to calm and subdue [his] fancy," but the picture's own life acts upon *him*, alerting him to its sentient presence. In venturing another look, he studies the picture prolongedly, suffering a paroxysm of emotions until he conquers its "spell" sufficiently to refer to the explicative volume to learn the painting's history (170-71).

This stunning, "lifelike" painting is no ordinary portrait. A typical, static rendering of a female figure would afford the ("typical" male) viewer a pleasurable mastery over the image and, by extension, its subject. In a fantastical tale like Poe's, however, the enlivened image startles the viewer "into waking life" (an intriguingly general phrasing that can refer to his own heightened senses or the painted figure's consciousness) and forces him to reckon with her subjectivity—threatening, haunting, alluring, or otherwise. My dissertation analyzes charged exchanges like this one between

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[1] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Oval Portrait," 1842, in *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe: Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, vol. I,* ed. Edmund Clarence Stedman and George Edward Woodberry (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), 170.

magic portraits in Victorian fiction and the characters who view and interact with them. As in Poe's "The Oval Portrait," these painted but animate figures resist being wholly vulnerable, visual objects. Instead, they exert power over those who gaze at them, defying norms of social ordering and of artistic representation and reception. This bidirectional exchange between a life-imbued portrait and its astonished viewer in Victorian fiction, I argue, is the site of contestations of power in matters psychological, sexual, social, and artistic that would not be formally theorized until well into the twentieth century. Using psychoanalytic and narratological methodologies, particularly those relevant to feminist and queer film and image theory, the coming chapter demonstrates how the fictional visual exchanges on display in magic portrait stories elucidate these various power struggles and can thereby be looked to for new access to the social and artistic commentaries that often subtend Victorian fiction.

Life-imbued pictures are invoked frequently enough in Victorian fiction that I have labeled the literary mode in which they appear "the ekphrastic fantastic," as my dissertation's title announces. Ekphrasis—the verbal description of an object of visual art—is the vehicle by which Poe's "rare maiden" is placed on view for the readers. It is therefore in our mind's eye that her beauty "ripens" within the frame and that we, like the narrator, can recognize that her essence has been fantastically infused into her image.[2]

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[2] Ekphrasis may constitute the first term of my dissertation's title, but within the project I do not directly engage with the debates about what constitutes ekphrasis or its types, though such critical work has been instructive. I am thinking particularly of studies by Françoise Meltzer, James Heffernan, Murray Krieger, W. J. T. Mitchell, and Laura M. Sager Eidt. In this project I am interested only in descriptions of objects of visual art that have a temporal dimension and therefore limit my comments regarding the general use of the device both historically and theoretically. Françoise Meltzer, *Salome and the Dance of Writing: Portraits of Mimesis in Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987. James A.W. Heffernan, "Ekphrasis and Representation." *New Literary History* 22.2 (1991): 297-316. James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Murray Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1992). W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Laura M. Sager Eidt, *Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).

This kind of commingling of the visual and verbal arts was common in the nineteenth century, stemming in part from a proliferation of optical technologies and theories of perception that abounded from the mid-eighteenth century on.[3] The tension and dialogue between the visual and verbal arts was also a product of the famous claim by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing in his 1766 text, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, that these two artistic forms have discrete properties that cannot overlap.[4] The visual art of painting (and by extension in the nineteenth century, photography), he argued, was a spatial art, while poetry (and by extension, prose) was a temporal one. These definitions of the non-convergent spheres of visual and verbal arts helped foster the competition between media that still exists today.

This ongoing (and expanding) competition inspires many critics who discuss paintings in Victorian literature and culture, such as Sophia Andres, Elisa Bizzotto, Susannah Rutherglen, and Julia Thomas, to seek evidence in the works of Victorian artists and writers of their views—hierarchical, hybridized, or otherwise—of the relationship between the plastic and temporal arts.[5] An often quoted line to this end comes from George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* where the narrator explicitly comments upon this medial competition, privileging temporal art because its fluctuations present a greater

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[3] While I do not address these related developments in this dissertation, scholarly work on them has been important in my research. Jonathan Crary has written extensive and influential accounts of the interrelation of optical technologies, painting, and subjective theories of perception in the nineteenth century. See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992) and *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001).

[4] Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, 1766, trans. Edward Allen McCormick (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

[5] Sophia Andres, *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel: Narrative Challenges to Visual Gendered Boundaries* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2005). Elisa Bizzotto, "The Imaginary Portrait: Pater's Contribution to a Literary Genre," in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2002), 213-223. Susannah Rutherglen, "'That Vandyke Duchess': Portraiture and Epic in *Daniel Deronda*," *The George Eliot Review: Journal of the George Eliot Fellowship* 35 (2004): 18-23. Julia Thomas, "Nation and Narration: The Englishness of Victorian Narrative Painting," *Pictorial Victorians: Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2004).

challenge to its creator. The remark appears during a description of the picturesque heroine, Gwendolen, after her triumph at an archery party: "Sir Joshua [Reynolds] would have been glad to take her portrait; and he would have had an easier task than the historian at least in this, that he would not have had to represent the truth of change—only to give stability to one beautiful moment."[6] This distinction between the ability "to represent the truth of change" rather than the "stability" of one moment reduces pictorial representation to an innately lacking medium, inferior to the dynamism assigned to narrative expression.

The magic portraits I turn to in this study, however, are more than just flat, spatial entities, as is the portrait in Poe's story. In that example, the enduring life of the depicted figure is first tied explicitly to the durational *process* of artistic portrayal itself. The embedded narrative of the painting's creation is transcribed in full for the reader, describing how the colors on the canvas have come from the very palette of the woman's face: She had married a painter, "passionate, studious, austere, and having already a bride in his Art" (171). In the same room in which the narrator reads, she had lovingly and sacrificially sat for the artist, languishing for days as her husband monomaniacally painted. "And he *would* not see that the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sate [*sic*] beside him" (172; italics original). When the last stroke of the brush was applied, "the painter stood entranced before the work which he had wrought; but in the next [moment], while yet he gazed, he grew tremulous and

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[6] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 1876 (New York: *The Modern Library*, 2002), 101. The readiness with which some critics have ascribed this simplistic stance on the relationship between the arts to Eliot is problematic. One issue is that it insists that Eliot is the narrator, but this is minor compared to the disservice done her by summarizing her view of the competition between media in one abstract phrase. One need only note the mitigating section of the quote—"at least in this"—to see that she leaves plenty of room for other means of comparison. For further support of her more judicious assessment, we can turn to other of her texts, such as *The Lifted Veil*, where the narrator calls writing an inadequate "summary medium" compared to all that can be conveyed through precise images. George Eliot, "The Lifted Veil," 1859, in The Lifted Veil *and* Brother Jacob, ed. Sally Shuttleworth (New York: Penguin, 2001), 34.

very pallid, and aghast, and crying with a loud voice, 'This is indeed Life itself!' turned suddenly to regard his beloved: —*She was dead*!" (173; italics original). "The truth of change" is on full view in this imaginary portrait, as it projects an active becoming—"Life itself!"—that has been transferred from a changing face to a changing representation of one. The painting's temporal quality extends beyond this tale of origin, too, as the narrator attests to the life that continues within it.

Of course, the supernatural quality of the portrait is not absolutely confirmed, as our narrator is given an alibi of unreliability. We are informed in the story's first sentence that he is "desperately wounded" and may be experiencing "incipient delirium" (169). The embedded narrative, on the other hand, provides corroborating evidence of the supernatural at work in the story via the painter's exclamation, leaving the matter of the "truth" of there being life in the painting unresolved. Such equivocation between the realism or supernaturalism of the tale places it within Tzvetan Todorov's mode of the "fantastic"—the other foundational term in this dissertation's title. The fantastic, as he defines it, is the uncertain realm in which an event occurs that seems at odds with the laws of the natural world and so must either be deemed "an illusion of the senses"—a product of delirium, for instance—or an actual event that is "an integral part" of a reality that allows for the supernatural.[7] He names these categories that fall on either side of the fantastic (and into which the fantastic usually resolves) "the uncanny" and "the marvelous." The uncanny mode, for Todorov, describes events that can actually happen in "the real world," however unlikely they may seem. The marvelous tale operates in an alternate reality with its own ontological rules.

I privilege Todorov's middle term because it signifies the uncertainty inherent in subjective perception and intersubjective exchanges. My aim in this project is not to

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[7] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, trans. Richard Howard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25.

distinguish among competing models of reality, but rather to analyze the dynamics between a viewer of such a portrait and the figure within it. In this way, the portraits I focus on are fantastical, as they appear so to their diegetic viewers, but the experience of seeing these pictures is "uncanny" not in Todorov's sense but in Sigmund Freud's. His famous account focuses solely on the perception of the subject and dismisses the question of the actuality of an occurrence.[8] The Freudian subject undergoing an uncanny experience—like seeing movement within a painting—is analogous to Todorov's subject in the fantastic, then, as s/he has no access to objective knowledge.[9] Freud's model of this bewildering experience is thus paramount to my project, since my approach is not only psychoanalytically based but interested in subjective visual exchange rather than identifying the "reality" of the movements in any individual portrait I discuss. As such, some of the paintings I analyze are more generally "uncanny"—i.e., fantastical in some ways but not necessarily at odds with the realism of the narratives in which they appear (e.g., Lady Dedlock's portrait in Dickens's *Bleak House*), while some are marvelous in that the supernatural is undoubtedly at work (e.g., the mother's painting in Margaret Oliphant's "The Portrait"). Ultimately, I use Todorov's term for what may seem more akin to Freud's concept because the temporal dimension of these imaginary portraits defies the laws of the natural world but not those of the psyche, as we can see similar moving images in dreams or, relatedly, at the movies.

It follows, then, that in my project, ekphrastic movement itself becomes a model for narrative, as the temporality of the images, imported via the fantastic, creates visually registered stories. One prominent theorist of ekphrasis, James Heffernan, acknowledges

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[8] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'." 1919. Trans. Alix Strachey. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch, et al. New York: Norton, 2001. 929-52.

[9] While I am referring to "the subject" as a character within the text, Todorov aligns the reader's subjectivity with that of a protagonist. In his model of the fantastic, then, the reader's uncertainty is as important as the character's, which it necessarily parallels.

the narrative movement that ekphrasis can impart to graphic representations, writing, "ekphrastic literature typically delivers *from* the pregnant moment of graphic art its embryonically narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that the graphic art tells only by implication" (italics original).[10] He is thinking, though, of the verbal expressions that accompany a work of art, such as a painting's title or sepulchral inscriptions, while I am addressing animation infused into the graphic image itself, so that it is not verbal description that sets it in motion but rather verbal description that lets us "see" the picture as it is already animated for a diegetic character. In this way, the images I investigate have filmic qualities and can be read according to narrative and visual theories developed in cinema studies, particularly those relating to the perception of a character's moving image.

In *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Christian Metz argues that the cinematic is psychoanalytic, as the movie screen presents images akin to those of a dream, or those seen in a Lacanian mirror that puts in flux the viewer's understanding of his relation to others that look back at him.[11] In *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*, Peter Brooks writes, "Psychoanalysis . . . is a primarily narrative art, concerned with the recovery of the past through the dynamics of memory and desire."[12] Psychoanalysis is also linked with narrative in its basic premise of "the talking cure," particularly in translating the visual images of dreams and memories into sensible stories. These intersections indicate the interrelatedness of moving pictures (seen on a real or an imaginary screen), psychic processes, and narrative development, and the immense analytical potential of combining them in a

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[10] Heffernan, "Ekphrasis," 301.

[11] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster, and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

[12] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), xiv.

methodological approach to ekphrastic fiction. At the same time, attention to the varying degrees of movement, life, and narrative energy in a literary portrait is vital to understanding the evolution of the deployment of this trope as the Victorian period progresses. These variations and their causes are most directly accessed via psychoanalytic readings of the scopic drive that is activated in each instance of exchange between a viewer and a responsive—or even initiatory—fantastical figure on a screen.

From mid-century realism to the supernatural Gothic of the *fin-de-siècle*, literary magic portraits gain in agency and narrative power. In the first of the dissertation's chronological chapters, texts by Charles Dickens, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Wilkie Collins are seen to include portraits that are in no way central to plot; they mirror and foreshadow the fates of the heroines they depict, and they provide alternate, sympathetic, and subtly subversive interpretations of the actions of these characters. In the second chapter, which looks at magic portraits in texts by Margaret Oliphant, Thomas Hardy, and Henry James, the portraits cause the action. They are given agency, and in becoming more forcefully animate, subvert norms of sexuality and narrative at the same time. By the third chapter, which considers Aesthetic works by Walter Pater, Vernon Lee, and Oscar Wilde, the portraits have become the plots; sexuality is only transgressive, and unique innovations of narrative development are realized as the products of homoerotically inspired art.

Poe's story is particularly useful in introducing this project because its linking "long reading" with "devout gazing" stresses the intermedial coherence of a narratological and (cine-) psychoanalytic approach to comprehending a fantastical painting that is only visible through ekphrasis. It had been to gain a better view of a written text, after all, that the narrator had moved his candelabrum, but the light instead functioned like a projector, presenting a visual medium's conveyance of story on the wall of a darkened room. To decipher the codes of this ghostly image, the narrator turns to the text that had itself been written to describe the fantastical creation of the image that

confronts him and the life that is apparent within it. This embedded narrative describes the temporal transfer of the woman's living spirit, fleck by colored fleck, into the captive figure coming into being within the frame. The painting and the narrative that explains it, then, are each infused by the other's qualities: the narrative evokes the picture and the painting conveys the narrative of its own ongoing "ripening." Its subject has been sacrificed into the painting in deference to her husband's demand to capture her in paint.

The determinants of her submission to the male artist and the patriarchal gaze point to a major foundation of my theoretical concerns: the traditional objectification of women in images, particularly in ones that are part of a narrative stream. In this way, my argument demonstrates how these Victorian texts are proto-Mulveyan. They expose and challenge the same sexist practices in creating and perceiving images of women that Laura Mulvey identifies in classic Hollywood films in her 1975 essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema."[13] For instance, in the embedded narrative of Poe's painter, not only do we have another instance (in addition to the narrator's experience) of a male viewer suffering the recognition of life emanating from the image and overriding his ostensibly masterful gaze; we also have an account of the process by which the woman's existence has been transferred from a corporal to a representational state. Her life has been drained out of her and poured into the canvas via the painter's brush as he imbues his first bride, Art, with the soul of his second. In this fantastical union of objects of visual pleasure, the captured status of the imaged woman is emphatically literalized and the sexual charge inherent in the scopic drive made apparent: the artist can only access and enjoy the beauty of his wife through a gaze he can cast on her image—particularly one he himself has painted. Thus, the relationship between artistic creation, life-imbued

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[13] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 1975, in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 833-44.

portraits, and the libidinal gaze to which captured figures are subjected is illuminated powerfully and concisely in this story.[14]

The nine Victorian texts I discuss present female characters and feminized male ones who resist this kind of capture and surveillance under patriarchal law. As the stories I address lead into one another, the power these marginalized characters wield from within and outside of portraits grows in intensity, leading to profound shifts in the way images are perceived and in the sexual relations and social structures of the environments they inhabit. Rather than resolving in favor of patriarchal norms, the narratives that contain these enlivened portraits become increasingly derailed by them, leading to positive appropriation of the trope for feminist and queer narrative aims, which my second and third chapters foreground. This analytical progression leads me well past Mulvey's arguments to include later feminist and queer articulations of spectatorial dynamics by such critics as Teresa de Lauretis, Vivian Sobchack, Richard Dellamora, and Dennis Denisoff.

Because the relations between the animated portraits and their diegetic viewers in these Victorian texts seem to anticipate image theories formally developed in the last 35 years, the project ruminates on the cinematic qualities of these magic portraits and their tales throughout. Victorian fictions that meditate on these same issues of patriarchal representational and narrative structures with a readerly eye on the filmic portrait manage in language to perform the kinds of visual subversions that would not be possible technologically or socially for decades. While the dissertation closes with a partial dovetailing of ekphrastic fantastic fiction with the birth of cinema in 1895, it does not intend to imply that this literary trope is simply absorbed by cinema. Rather, it utilizes

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[14] Paula Kot's feminist analysis of the story's enactment of the sacrifice of women for the sake of art is also exemplary. She is particularly interested in the evidence of Poe's acknowledgement and regret at his own frequent employment of this creative strategy. Paula Kot, "Painful Erasures: Excising the Wild Eye from 'The Oval Portrait,'" *Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism* 28, nos.1/2 (1995): 1-6.

some of the similarities in image production and reception that cinema produces to demonstrate that magic portraits are indeed sometimes proto-cinematic, but more so that they are prototypical of several strains of twentieth and twenty-first century film and image theories.

While my approach takes its cues from the parallels between twentieth-century image theory and ekphrases of fantastical portraits in Victorian fiction, then, it also extends beyond these observations to demonstrate that the magic portrait is a unique medium unto itself, not reducible to a purely literary or a cinematic definition. In this way, it draws upon and participates in the critical discussion around cross-medial influences in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Lynda Nead's recent study, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c. 1900*, has been instructive and inspiring in its sweeping analysis of the convergences and overlappings of painting, sculpture, literature, photography, and film at the *fin-de-siècle*.[15] Only small sections of her book address imaginary paintings in literature, but her constant attention to multiple media and their historical intermingling encourages the much more focused study of one particular intermedial trope that I undertake.

Elizabeth Helsinger has recently advanced the analysis of imaginary portraits in Victorian literature, but her focus is on ekphrastically evoked portraits in poetry, particularly by poets who were also painters—Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris.[16] The uniqueness of the pre-Raphaelites in being both painters and poets acting in service of a particular artistic milieu allows Helsinger to consider the differences in media quite forcefully across the same artists' works. She emphasizes how the augmentations of the fantastic mode allowed Rossetti and Morris to explore more fully

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[15] Lynda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c. 1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

[16] Elizabeth Helsinger, *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

the doublings and "life-likeness" achievable in two media at the same time. My focus is different. In certain cases, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novel, a particular school of painting (pre-Raphaelitism) bears upon the text and its imaginary portrait and therefore receives contextual and analytical treatment, but this is not the rule. Several of my primary texts also pass judgment on concurrent practices of portraiture and its social and aesthetic valuations, but I discuss these critical aspects of the fictions only in service of my main arguments about the portrayed figures' interactions with other characters.

Lynette Felber's 2007 article, "The Literary Portrait as a Centerfold: Fetishism in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*" is the critical work that comes closest to my emphasis on magic portraits and my approach via psychoanalytic film theory.[17] However, this is a single case study, and, interestingly, our readings of Lady Audley's portrait, while employing a similar methodology, draw different conclusions. Likewise, there is a critical tradition addressing the cross-sections of visual art, literature, and cinema in particular works of the Aesthetic movement (often Walter Pater's or Oscar Wilde's). Denisoff, for instance, has written several important articles in this vein during the last six years, and the interest in his work, evidenced by its anthologizing in additional publications, is testament to the currency of applying this interdisciplinary methodology to ekphrastically evoked art.[18]

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[17] Lynette Felber, "The Literary Portrait as a Centerfold: Fetishism in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35 (2007): 471-488.

[18] Dennis Denisoff, "The Forest Beyond the Frame: Women's Desires in Vernon Lee and Virginia Woolf," *Sexual Visuality from Literature to Film, 1850-1950* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 98-120, which also appears in *Women and British Aestheticism*, ed. Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 251-69; "'Men of My Own Sex': Genius, Sexuality, and George Du Maurier's Artists," in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 147-69; "Vernon Lee, Decadent Contamination and the Productivist Ethos," in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, ed. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 75-90. See also the whole of his recent book, *Sexual Visuality from Literature to Film, 1850-1950* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). His work on Wilkie Collins is in the same vein. See "Framed and Hung: Collins and the Economic Beauty of the Manly Artist," in *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins*, ed. Maria Bachman and Don Richard Cox (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 34-58.

My project, however, is the first to conduct an extensive and sustained study of the magic portrait trope across Victorian fiction. In uniting and augmenting critical treatments of imaginary portraits from different subgenres within the Victorian period, I aim to illuminate not only the creative uses and significations of magic pictures but also to explain their versatility in serving the social, artistic, and theoretical agendas of literary texts.

My first chapter, "Palimpsest Portraiture: The Double-Take in 'Capturing' Women," analyzes fictional portraits in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1852-53), Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860), and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) that provide uncannily multiple views of the major female characters through an apparent layering of images that shift as the novels progress.[19] I initially approach these portraits using Mulvey's famous account of the traditionally desiring and oppressing male gaze directed at a woman's image to demonstrate that these mid-Victorian novelists execute a critique similar to Mulvey's of narrative and visual pleasure. Dickens, Braddon, and Collins move beyond Mulvey's model, however, to grant their fictional heroines some power of their own, even as they are "captured" in both paintings and detection plots. Lady Audley's Pre-Raphaelite portrait, for instance, shows her crimson dress folding around her "like flames" which prefigure her recourse to arson when she is pursued by the privileged male portrait-gazer. She is not just victimized in her imaging; she wields threats of her own from within the image and brings them to fruition. Despite the transgressive nature of these heroines' actions, their portraits ultimately urge a sympathy for the women depicted that the narratives otherwise withhold from explicit expression. In this way, the critiques these portraits perform are aligned with arguments made by feminist film theorists who follow Mulvey.

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[19] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Nicola Bradbury (New York: Penguin, 2006). Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 1862, ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor (London: Penguin, 1998). Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, 1860, ed. Matthew Sweet (London: Penguin, 2003).

Later in the period, female characters were not so easily captured, literally or metaphorically, in portraits within fiction. In fact, they found powerful agency in this ekphrastic realm, as I argue in my second chapter, "Wrecking Oedipus: Embodiment, Spectatorship, and Narrative Perversion in Magic Portrait Fiction of the 1880s," which analyzes "The Portrait," by Margaret Oliphant (1885), "An Imaginative Woman," by Thomas Hardy (1888), and "The Aspern Papers," by Henry James (1888; 1908).[20] The women in these stories are able to manipulate the portraits they inhabit or confront in order to fulfill their desires. Their subversive power in these encounters between subjects and images is amplified by the portraits' grounding in the fantastic, as the fantastic nature of the portraits grants their depicted figures substantial autonomy, enabling them to achieve some level of embodiment in order to serve women's desires. These portrayed figures interact physically with characters, as when, in Hardy's story, a woman conceives a man's child while sleeping with his portrait, or when the pictured mother in Oliphant's story projects herself into her son's body and controls his movements. To address this introduction of materiality, the theoretical work of this chapter considers psychoanalytic film theory's conceptions of the image-viewer exchange when phenomenological pressure is placed on the encounter via the fantastic. Combining insights from Sobchack's phenomenological investigations with de Lauretis's feminist insights into the psychoanalytic gaze and its narrative impact, I argue that portraits within the literary fantastic enact the contradictions of the desiring unconscious where seeing can feel like touching, wanting like having—both of which would compromise the original desire if actually achieved.

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[20] Margaret Oliphant, "The Portrait: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen," 1885, *Selected Short Stories of the Supernatural*, ed. Margaret K. Gray (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 125-161. Thomas Hardy, "An Imaginative Woman," 1888, *The Distracted Preacher and Other Tales*, ed. Susan Hill (New York: Penguin, 1979), 305-330. Henry James, *The Aspern Papers*, 1888; 1908, The Turn of the Screw *and* The Aspern Papers (London: Penguin, 1986).

My third chapter, "Ekphrasis *en-Abyme*: Aestheticism's Androgyny and Portraiture's Proliferation," begins with an account of Walter Pater's aesthetics and his own short story, "Sebastian van Storck" (1886), from his collection, called *Imaginary Portraits*. After explicating the terms of Pater's coding of the homoerotic gaze, the queer subject, and artistic reproduction, I turn to works by two of Pater's protégés: Vernon Lee's "Oke of Okehurst" (1886) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890; 1891).[21] I examine the ways these texts appropriate the trope of the moving portrait to explore queer themes and defy the heteronormatively understood dynamics of the filmic exchange between image and viewer. These texts dramatize the productivity of the scopic drive in artistic terms in the sense that the artists who gaze upon the androgynous protagonists are compelled to produce multiple representations of these figures, creating a bountiful excess of similar images that can be read in succession like a film strip. In this way, I argue, Aesthetic texts provide a model for cinema's achievement of the illusion of movement through the proliferation of endlessly motivated but stilled images. At the same time, these texts utilize overarching instances of ekphrasis that maintain the dissertation's criterion of presenting moving portraits characterized in their own right by increasing degrees of narrative control.

My epilogue considers more fully the significations of the photograph in its actual and ekphrastic visuality to distinguish it more pointedly from the cinematic and assert its claim, along with the painted magic portrait's, to participating in a unique medium of the imaginary. This elaboration, undertaken via a reading of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida*, also emphasizes the crucial role the invested spectator's gaze plays in the magic

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[21]Walter Pater, "Diaphaneitè," in *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays*, 1895 (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1924), 247-54. Walter Pater, "Sebastian van Storck," 1886, *Marius the Epicurean and Other Short Works* (BiblioBazaar, n.p. 2007), 333-52. Vernon Lee, "Oke of Okehurst; Or, The Phantom Lover," 1886, *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, ed. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pelham (Toronto: Broadview, 2006), 105-153. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1890; 1891, ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

picture trope; as my subtitle is meant to indicate, the active gaze is as necessary as the portraits themselves to the trope's successful deployment. Barthes's text is particularly relevant as he analyzes his own gaze at variously evocative photographs and contrasts their effects with those of cinema.

Ultimately, this dissertation aims to show that the magic portrait trope is not just a historical phenomenon; it is a narrative vehicle in its own right with unique stakes and significations. There is nothing really magical, after all, about the movies; mechanical manipulation lends a series of photographs the illusion of movement. But a portrait, painted or photographed but fantastically imbued with life through the narratively captured exchange between viewer and image, is visible in the mind's eye, placed there by the power of verbal description. These images exist independent of technological developments and grant special access to the visual imaginary that transcends historical demarcations. In this way, their revelations about representation, perception, and narrative development lend new insight not only to intermedial relations but also to contemporary literary and image theory, making them as worthy of the "devout, devoted gaze" of the critic as they are of Poe's captivated narrator.

# CHAPTER ONE

# PALIMPSEST PORTRAITURE: THE DOUBLE-TAKE IN "CAPTURING" WOMEN

Until relatively recently, the traditional model for a painted portrait was the beautiful woman captured as an object for the default heterosexual male gaze. Because the portrayed figure was often thought to invite this gaze, the viewer was free to enjoy the image from this perspective without any complications of the consciousness of voyeurism. Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, and Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* are all mid-Victorian novels that, through the ekphrasis of uncanny portraits of attractive women, manipulate and challenge the dynamics of this standard model of female representation, more than a hundred years before feminist theorists of the image called for a similar exposure of the gaze's sexist objectifications and patriarchal foundations.[1] These Victorian texts go a step further, even, by granting their heroines, through stirrings of life within their portraits, more agency than second-wave feminist theory would allow for in its critiques of normative imaging.

Because these mid-nineteenth century novels are steeped in (and commenting upon) patriarchal conventions of power, where women are subject to men's possession through various mechanisms (from the legal contract of marriage to social contracts of gendered behavior), they foreground the traditional model of woman's place in society by positioning her inside the claustrophobic boundaries of a portrait. This metaphoric entrapment necessarily imbues the portrayed versions of these women with an uncannily

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[1] Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, 1852-53, ed. Nicola Bradbury (New York: Penguin, 2006); Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 1862, ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor (London: Penguin, 1998); Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, 1860, ed. Matthew Sweet (London: Penguin, 2003).

vitalized essence. The portrayed figures, in bearing a portion of their characters' living force, become metonymically linked with the narrative trajectory of the characters they represent. As such, they alter in appearance in tandem with developments in the heroines' own plights.

Dickens's portrait of Lady Dedlock functions in a way that most approximates the traditional model, though he expresses, through his narrative treatment of the portrait and Lady Dedlock herself, extraordinary sympathy for the plight of a woman captured in this kind of vulnerable public view. Braddon's portrait of Lady Audley exaggerates certain aspects of the "typical" male gaze and the pictured beauty, and grants her heroine, through an appropriation of Pre-Raphaelite ideas and a feminine perspective, a satiric and self-conscious deployment of her own image. Wilkie Collins offers a departure from this kind of particularized objectification with the ekphrasis of a portrait of Laura Fairlie that encourages readers to create their own version of her image with whatever physical and aesthetic features they fancy. In Collins's sophisticated view, there is no fixed, objective aspect a painted figure can be said to portray; the viewer's relationship to the image is not only mutable, but particularly susceptible to the whims of the conscious and unconscious mind, its memories and its desires.

Although cinema scholars have noted that "screen spectatorship" has been around for centuries, most notably in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries through phantasmagoria and magic lantern shows, ekphrastic versions of moving pictures from Victorian fiction have not yet received consideration in this light.[2] The effect of subtle movement in these literary virtual images is akin, according to Tom Gunning, to "the

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[2] Tom Gunning points out, for instance, through a reference to Charles Musser's The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907 (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1994), "that a tradition of screen spectatorship preceded Lumière by centuries" (819). Tom Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," 1989, in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 818-832.

uncanny and agitating power [of the earliest film images] exerted on audiences" (820). In his analysis of early cinema, Gunning reminds us that "in the earliest Lumière exhibitions the films were initially presented as frozen moving images, projections of still photographs. Then, flaunting a mastery of visual showmanship, the projector began cranking and the image moved" (822). The transition from a still image to one endowed with moving life is what was shocking to the audience, not the simple perceived threat of, for instance, an oncoming train, as is often assumed. Gunning concludes that the audience's "astonishment derives from a magical metamorphosis rather than a seamless reproduction of reality" (822). A simulation of life is not what is uncanny in early cinema; it is, instead, the subtle but insistent transition from a comfortably controlled stillness to the flutter of life on the screen. This kind of magical metamorphosis occurs in the ekphrastically evoked portraits of Dickens's Lady Dedlock, Braddon's Lady Audley, and Collins's Laura Fairlie, aligning them with principles of cinematic representation and spectatorship. Considered in this way, these literary magic portraits of the mid-nineteenth century assume an intriguing and understudied role in cinema's prehistory.

As the pictured woman caught in an ostensibly male gaze is the particular cinematic trope these Victorian writers employ and critique, Laura Mulvey's landmark essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) provides a productive analytical basis from which to proceed.[3] Mulvey famously articulates (via psychoanalytic examination) the mechanisms behind the sexist uses of women's images in mainstream Hollywood cinema, and while her evidence comes from mid-twentieth century films, the patriarchal basis for her analysis obviously predates cinema. "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance," she writes, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female

[3] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 1975, in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings,* ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999), 833-44.

figure which is styled accordingly" (837). Women's images function in this way for both the diegetic male protagonists and the external spectators, who assume, in Mulvey's argument, a heteronormative male gaze. While this simple equation has bred a multiplicity of vital revisions and expansions, its initial polemical presentation is important to specify here, as its assumptions and mechanisms are the point of departure for both film theorists that follow Mulvey and the Victorian novelists contemplating the image that are this chapter's concern.[4] Women's images serve as passive spectacles in the films Mulvey critiques, in contrast to the narrative propulsion associated with men, who are not framed in isolation "to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (837; italics hers). In aligning the woman's image with a spectacle that interrupts narrative progress for the sake of visual pleasure, Mulvey denies the captured female productive movement or change. Dickens, Braddon, and Collins are able to see through the patina of active male mastery and female objectification, though, to grant women's images narrative power in their own right, a subtle but disruptive imbuement that destabilizes the safety and pleasure male spectators should feel, in this preliminary configuration, when confronting a woman's image. In this way, the magic portraits these Victorian writers present prove not only proto-cinematic, but also proto-feminist.

In psychoanalytic terms, (particularly those current in 1975,) there is a danger inherent in the image of a woman because she represents the lack of the phallus, and therefore the threat of castration. The transgressions of the Victorian heroines discussed in this chapter are enactments of this threat, as they work against the symbolic order and

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[4] From Mulvey's essay's first appearance in *Screen*, it has spurred the development of multiple fields of visual studies. Clifford T. Manlove, in his 2007 article in *Cinema Journal*, provides a synopsis of all the most prominent responses to Mulvey, including pieces by Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, D.N. Rodowick, E. Ann Kaplan, Teresa de Lauretis, Gaylan Studlar, Christine Gledhill, David Bordwell, Noel Carroll, Joan Copjec, and Todd McGowan. Clifford T. Manlove, "Visual 'Drive' and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze Theory in Lacan, Hitchcock, and Mulvey, *Cinema Journal* 46 no. 3 (2007): 83-108.

its hierarchies. All of the women change their names, for instance, and all defy class boundaries and sexual restrictions. As passive subjects, women should not be "acting" at all, which makes these rebellious acts particularly threatening to society's order; the male figures of authority in these novels—lawyers and detectives, both amateur and professional—must respond and suppress the power the women claim, which is, at its root, the power to metaphorically castrate and disrupt patriarchal order.

Mulvey explains that men have "two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety," the first being "preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment, or saving of the guilty object" (840). *Bleak House* and *Lady Audley's Secret* employ this method of countering the threat inherent in the female image. Lady Dedlock and Lady Audley are each investigated by male characters—Lady Dedlock by the lawyers Guppy and Tulkinghorn and the detective Bucket; Lady Audley by an interestingly feminized man of leisure, her cousin-in-law, Robert Audley—and both suffer devastating punishment: death in the first case, lifelong confinement in a foreign asylum in the second.[5] The investigation of their transgressions motivate their novel's plots, making the male characters the active agents for each narrative, even though it is the women's stories that are uncovered. This is because the investigative response to the female image amounts to voyeurism, where "pleasure lies in asserting guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness" (840). Mulvey notes this interrogative male viewpoint is sadistic, and therefore has narrative force. "Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person" (840). While the women's portraits reveal clues about their histories, and those histories are pieced together by their

[5] Lady Audley dies shortly after her imprisonment, we are told, in the epilogic last chapter.

respective detectives, the active plots of these novels actually propel the portrayed figures from celebrated iconicity at the novels' outsets to peripheral obscurity at their ends, and this sadistic trajectory is what the portraits register in their subtle morphings.

In other words, the uncanny changes in the portraits do not occur as encore performances of the past, but rather in parallel with developments in the plots' investigative pursuits. Lady Dedlock and Lady Audley, despite their transgressions, are victimized by the interrogating male gaze that reinforces itself through the mechanisms of surveillance and punishment. The portraits not only symbolize the incessant visibility of Victorian upper-class women, but enact this visibility and its consequences through the uncanny forces present within and without the portraits. The particulars of these cases will later be discussed at length, but the general theory of female representation and spectatorship that they employ is analogous to this first treatment of women Mulvey cites as available to the male spectator. And while Dickens's and Braddon's novels seem to follow the rationale of Mulvey's analysis, they do so critically, ironizing and editorializing on the metaphorical capture of Victorian women. Their resistance takes the form of returning even the portrait, let alone the female image, to a kind of narrative agency.

The alternative response in Mulvey's figuration for the male viewer confronted by the threat of castration in a woman's image is "fetishistic scopophilia," where the image itself is fetishized and therefore precludes threat of any kind, becoming, in its "complete disavowal of castration . . . reassuring rather than dangerous" (840). Fetishistic scopophilia, Mulvey asserts, "can exist outside linear time as the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone" (840). In Collins's *The Woman in White*, Walter Hartright paints a picture of Laura Fairlie as she looks when they first meet. Midway through the narrative, the villains (Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco) switch Laura's body with that of her doppelganger, the mildly insane and fatally ill Anne Catherick. This causes Laura to have a nervous breakdown and become indistinguishable from Anne. Nevertheless, the

working class Hartright still intends to marry his once aristocratic love, but not before proving to legal authorities that she is in fact Laura and rightful heir to her fortune. The picture he paints upon meeting her stares at him as he composes the entirety of the novel—a pseudo-documentary that recounts Laura's plight, through multiple narrators, from innocence to victimhood to aristocratic reinstatement. Indeed, Hartright seems more devoted to the portrait than the woman it depicts. The picture is an effective substitute for the potentially castrating female because the woman it represents has been reduced to a parodic doll in the house, while her rank and wealth have transferred to its gazer's name; the image is also successful in this way because its figure is soothingly inaccessible. The woman in the portrait no longer exists, as Laura has been dramatically transformed, and the portrait itself is Hartright's private screen for the fantasized image. As a screen, it also proves narratively productive in that it serves as an external surface on which memory and fantasy can have their play.

Collins goes a theoretical step further than Mulvey in that her analyses are based on Jacques Lacan's famous mirror stage essay, and Collins's seem aligned with Lacan's later theory of image and desire. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan explains that an object of desire, the "*objet petit a*," may seem to have particular substance, but actually does not. It is a kind of place holder for what is desirable but absolutely unobtainable. Once the subject has access to an object, it is no longer an object of desire but of possession. The gaze itself, in this theorization, becomes the *objet petit a*, since, as Todd McGowan puts it in *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan*, "the gaze appears to offer access to the unseen," to the invisible lack or lacuna that triggers desire in the subject (6).[6] McGowan also reminds us that Lacan sees desire as masochistic, granting power to the object—through its confrontational lack—from within

[6] Todd McGowan, *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

an image.[7] "In Lacan's conception of desire, the gaze is not the vehicle through which the subject masters the object but a point in the Other that resists the mastery of vision…the gaze is 'what is lacking, is non-specular, is not graspable in the image.' Even when the subject sees a complete image, something remains obscure: the subject cannot see how its own desire distorts what it sees" (11).[8] The subject can know his view is distorted, as Hartright does, but he cannot assess or abstract this distortion, making it impossible to comprehend the image as an objective whole. Hartright's descriptions of his portrait of Laura Fairlie make clear both the pleasure and the problem of the kind of biased and fragmented viewing—the only kind possible—that results from gazing on a desirable image, even one the viewer has himself created. The unavailability of the object of which Lacan and McGowan write is made evident in Collins's text by the version of Hartright's picture that Laura, its object, herself paints. Hartright has painted Laura standing in the doorway of a small summerhouse on her family's estate; Laura paints the same summerhouse doorway, from the same outsider's perspective, but with a startling excision. In a brilliant exposure of the gaze's empty offerings, she reproduces the fetishized image altogether devoid of a woman's figure.

What substantially distinguishes the pictured women in Dickens's, Braddon's, and Collins's novels from Mulvey's screen sirens is the injection of uncanny life and movement into their images. Mulvey writes, "The presence of woman is an indispensible element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic

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[7] To illustrate his point, so to speak, Lacan directs us to Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* (1533), a Renaissance painting depicting two gentlemen adorned with objects signifying wealth, intellectual prowess and wordly confidence; in the central foreground, however, is an anamorphic skull that "looks back" at the viewer, revealing the emptiness at the heart of the painting's world and the viewer's life experience.

[8] McGowan is quoting Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire, livre X: L'Angoisse, 1962-1963*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2004), 294, McGowan's own translation.

contemplation" (837). Dickens, Braddon, and Collins do not permit their heroines to be frozen, and therefore, completely controlled or visually enjoyed. Through the changes within the frames that contain them, these women exert a powerful influence over characters and readers alike in such a way as to mitigate their reception and judgment by their viewers. Dickens, who usually keeps Lady Dedlock at a mystifying distance from the reader, allows her portrait to urge our sympathy and our re-evaluation of the mechanisms of justice in the novel. Braddon's portrait of Lady Audley more forcefully challenges stereotypes of objectified women and elicits dramatic but ambivalent reactions from its diegetic and extra-textual viewers. These reactions are multiple and shifting, in accordance with the portraits' changes, but, for the reader, they resolve as surprisingly alleviating sympathy. The uncanny malleability of Laura Fairlie's portrait in Collins's novel nullifies the question of an ethical relationship to the image and instead manipulates the reader's own store of affecting images. Collins personalizes the portrait in a way that unnerves, to a greater degree than Dickens or Braddon do, what should be the comfortable viewership of the Mulveyan gazer.

While I suggest that the uncanny portraits in Dickens's, Braddon's, and Collins's texts can be usefully approached through an analysis of how they generally adhere to Mulvey's dual mode of male spectatorship, where voyeurism and fetishism are the defensive recourses of the viewer faced with a woman's captured image, what is most compelling is how they comment upon and subvert the same mechanisms of visual exchange Mulvey exposes more than a century later. These Victorian authors grant women in portraits some power from within those frames. Where Mulvey calls for a radical re-imaging of the female figure, Dickens, Braddon and Collins demonstrate, by unfreezing these framed women, the possibility that they can begin to exert power from within these patriarchal traps; they have some recourse of their own, however subtle or fledgling it may be. This power of the portrait will be intensified in ekphrastically

evoked portraits in later Victorian texts, but the first indications of this uncanny force come from these mainstays of mid-Victorian fiction.

## Dickens's Painterly Prowess: Lady Dedlock's Uncanny Portrait in *Bleak House*

Victorian novelists were not watching movies, of course, but they were paying close attention to the visual artists of their day and the critical attention they received. One of the largest displays of mid-Victorian art was available for viewing at the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Instigated by Britain's Great Exhibition of 1851, the Paris Exposition was conceived as an even more expansive display of artistic, industrial, and scientific advances among the nations of Western Europe and the United States. The paintings exhibited were classified by British and French critics alike according to essentialist models: the French were said to depict war; the Germans, being high-minded, to aim for the sublimely abstract; and the British to devote themselves to domestic narrative paintings (or "genre" paintings).[9] One French reviewer described the British style thus:

> It is English—purely English. . . . [N]o artist, of whatever country he may be, has carried farther than they have, truthfulness in *genre* and the poetry of reality in landscapes. The actors whom they introduce into their familiar scenes of life, having a living power of visage and action; they think aloud—they move, and you become one of them, while dwelling on the scene, before which the artist stands with his palette and his pencils.[10]

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[9] For a typical account of the paintings, see "ART. IX.-1. Universal Exhibition of 1855." *London Quarterly Review* 5.9 (Oct 1855): 230-258.

[10] Julia Thomas, "Nation and Narration: The Englishness of Victorian Narrative Painting," *Pictorial Victorians: Inscription of Values in Word and Image* (Athens: Ohio UP, 2004), 110. Thomas is quoting from "French Criticism on British Art," *Art Journal*, November 1855, 299-300.

The reviewer is impressed by the paintings for their uncannily life-like effects. The figures are endowed with "a living power of visage and action," and "move" with the viewer among them, while the painter alone exists at a remove from the virtual scene. This characterization of the paintings is extraordinary for two reasons: it grants movement within a still image, rendering it somewhat cinematic; and it places the viewer within that image, dissolving the framed barrier between the real and the virtual, but without divesting the viewer of the knowledge of the image's fabrication by an artist. The Victorian painter has, at least in the eyes of the French reviewer, transcended his art. Considering the fevered nineteenth-century debates about which of the arts most "truthfully" depicts life—the plastic, visual arts, or the narrative arts of poetry and prose—this marked transcendence is profound.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's 1766 tract, *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, popularized the notion that the "sister arts" of painting and writing had distinct spheres: the spatial and the temporal, respectively. Both sets of artists chafed against these limitations, and often aimed to demonstrate the superiority of their medium, or its ability to convey both a temporal and a spatial effect. George Eliot, through her *Daniel Deronda* narrator, expresses jealousy and pride in noting that the writer, working in a temporal art, must represent "truth in change," while the painter need not—and cannot—attempt such a noble feat.[11] The French reviewer seems to reject this premise out of hand, and finds "truthful" representation of animated life in mid-Victorian

[11] The comment is made after an extensive description of Gwendolen Harleth in her archery dress: "Sir Joshua would have been glad to take her portrait; and he would have had an easier task than the historian at least in this, that he would not have had to represent the truth in change—only to give stability to one beautiful moment." George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, 1876 (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2002), 101. "Sir Joshua" refers to Joshua Reynolds, the famous portrait painter who helped found the Royal Academy of Arts in 1768, and was its first president. This remark is frequently cited in literary criticism about the competition in Victorian England between the visual and verbal arts.

narrative paintings, and "poetry" in British landscapes. Temporality and narrativity were evident, at least to some viewers, in these paintings.

Charles Dickens was among the spectators in Paris in 1855, and seems, predictably, to share Eliot's view of painting's limits. He goes further to identify its failings, though, as particularly British. He writes, in a private letter to John Forster during his Paris visit, "mere form and conventionalities usurp, in English art, as in English government and social relations, the place of living force and truth."[12] Dickens's criticism may stem, like Eliot's, from both jealousy of the potential of the painter's medium and pride in his own ability to out-paint the painter, so to speak, through ekphrastically rendered paintings within his novels. He had, for instance, finished writing *Bleak House* just two years before, a novel which contains a veritable gallery of ekphrastic pictures, most of which are included for satiric effect—some to mock the conventions of art, some those of society; often, both. He also makes use in this novel of an image's uncanny narrative potential by word-painting a portrait that exceeds even the most "temporal" of the actual narrative paintings he found sorely lacking.

The portrait of Lady Dedlock that hangs at Chesney Wold is uncannily imbued with her "living force and truth," and serves as a poignant figuration of her predicament as a fallen woman in the guise of an idealized aristocrat. When confronted with this image, characters are stricken with an awe that is not readily accountable, which intrigues the reader as well. This affective power of the portrait underscores Dickens's equivocation of Lady Dedlock's character through much of the novel, but ultimately helps resolve our sympathies in her favor, so that we, like Sir Leicester (Lady Dedlock's feeble but devoted husband), are left to contemplate the picture's pathos as well as its uncanny connection to her fate. In stirring our sympathy from within a magic portrait,

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[12] Thomas, 114. Qting *The Letters of Charles Dickens, vol. 7, 1853-55*, ed. Graham Storey, Katherine Tillotson, and Angus Easson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 743.

Dickens defies the conventions of female representation; while Lady Dedlock is mastered by her male viewers and pursuers, Dickens's subtext urges us to criticize this normative model of capturing a woman's beauty and suppressing her power.

While Lady Dedlock's picture is *Bleak House*'s example par excellence of visually depicted "living force and truth," the others in the novel are offered as targets for Dickens's virtuosic ridicule. British portraits of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which often employed contrived stagings and settings, particularly offended him, as falsity seems a worse failing to him than lifelessness. This theatrical convention might seem playfully benign, but Dickens felt, as Leonee Ormond writes in "Dickens and Painting: Contemporary Art," "that there was a deep hypocrisy in representing people on canvas as quite unlike their true selves" (13).[13] His critique of this trope is apparent in his description of Sir Leicester's collection of paintings from "the Fancy Ball School," filled with props and costumes enough to comprise a sales catalogue that might read: "'one Spanish female's costume . . . a suit of armor containing Don Quixote . . . one gondola in the distance, one Venetian senator's dress complete, . . . one scimitar superbly mounted in gold with jeweled handle, elaborate Moorish dress (very rare), and Othello'" (458-9).

Dickens also offers in *Bleak House* the ancestral Dedlock portraits, which he grants a modicum of "living force" in that they can alternately appear "to vanish into the damp walls in mere lowness of spirits" or be "beguiled into a wink" and a "dimple" when the sunlight is upon them (21, 641). However, as part of his persistent class critique, Dickens precludes the notion of these figures ever having had very much "living force," whether in life, death, *or* a portrait. Through Mr. Skimpole, we are told that these had been essentially "'stuffed people,'—a large collection, glassy eyed, set up in the most

[13] Leonee Ormond, "Dickens and Painting: Contemporary Art," *Dickensian* 80 no.1 (1984): 3-25.

approved manner on their various twigs and perches, very correct, perfectly free from animation, and always in glass cases" (605). In life, it seems, these people were no different from figures on display in a wax museum. In their portraits, the Dedlocks are further exposed by the absurd costumes and scenes in which they insert themselves. There were many Ladies Dedlock painted as "portentous shepherdesses" who "tended their flocks severely in buckram and powder, and put their sticking-plaster patches[14] on to terrify commoners, as the chiefs of some other tribes put on war paint" (604). Despite their pastoral settings, the aristocratic women's sense of entitlement and disgust at the "commoners" is presented perhaps more effectively than if they had been painted in their everyday attire and abode. Dickens mocks the theatrical conventions of Renaissance and eighteenth-century portraiture and the brutality of the aristocracy's self-preservation through these pictures, even while he lets the portrayed figures "thaw" on a daily basis to take on a warmth of life that "would have done [them] good, a hundred years ago" (641). The animation he grants them seems intended to demonstrate the hollow ineffectuality of "living force" without "truth" in paintings, particularly where the original models are devoid of virtue.

Lady Dedlock seems, in the beginning of the novel, to be the "stuffed person" extraordinaire, a wax-like figure that shuttles among the fashionable elite without any indication of an inner life. Her portrait, however, from its first appearance, conveys a unique depth that "acts upon" viewers "like a charm" (110). Sir Leicester refuses its copying, which allows it to retain its Benjaminian "aura," and be further enhanced (by

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[14] Rudimentary bandages. The *OED*'s first definition is: "A material for covering and closing superficial wounds, consisting of linen, silk, or other textile fabric, or of plastic, spread with an adhesive substance." The *OED* also cites Dickens's use of this in *Barnaby Rudge*: "*Barn. Rudge* xxiii, 'He was fixing a very small patch of sticking-plaster . . . near the corner of his mouth.'" The reference is interesting because the sticking-plaster here is also applied as a "patch" on the face.

Dickens) with uncanny significations.[15] While Lady Dedlock's lost virtue is what causes the precarious volatility in her portrait, the intensity of her struggle to right the past while protecting Sir Leicester from emotional and social ruin is also contained in this singular image. A wax-like figure she may intend to seem, in an effort to deaden her own and others' sense of her history: she had been the lover of Captain Hawdon and mother of a child, Esther, out of wedlock. When she tragically lost both (thinking Esther dead), she obscured this history and married the doting and enfeebled Sir Leicester. While this scandalous background emerges throughout the novel, inviting judgment and punishment from various sources, the reader recognizes how Lady Dedlock is relentlessly targeted by the pursuers of truth in the novel: namely, Guppy, the law clerk; Tulkinghorn, the Dedlocks' ruthless lawyer; and Bucket, the detective who investigates Tulkinghorn's murder and Lady Dedlock's disappearance with what has been noted as a panoptical vigilance.[16] Images of Lady Dedlock aid their efforts. These include not only her portrait but also her replicated likeness in the face of her angelic daughter, Esther, and the masquerading figure of her wicked lady's maid, Hortense. Her ambiguous portrait and

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[15] Elizabeth Helsinger also notes the Benjaminian "aura" in uncanny ekprastically evoked portraits, though her focus is on portraiture in Pre-Raphaelite writings. She makes the interesting argument also that in the competition between the verbal and visual arts, nineteenth-century writers use the magic picture trope so much as a way of *defending* painters as fellow artists, with photographers being the enemy of both. Elizabeth Helsinger, *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008).

[16] Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, "Investigating Books of Beauties in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853) and M.E. Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862)," in *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007). She notes the monitoring male gaze, featured by Inspector Bucket's "unlimited number of eyes" (335). Ronald Thomas, "Double Exposures: Arresting Images in *Bleak House* and *The House of the Seven Gables*," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 31 no.1 (1997): 87-113. Thomas writes, "The important part the portraits do play in the unauthorized and parallel investigation conducted by Bucket's amateur counterpart, the law clerk Mr. Guppy, exposes the legitimate detective plot of *Bleak House* for what it is—an allegory of democratic reform in which Bucket plays the role of the legitimate and benevolent panoptical machine empowered by his profession and expertise to expose and re-establish the identity of the impostor while he contains the anxiety surrounding the public exposure of the secrets of a powerful elite. As such, the detective establishes himself as the portraitist for the nation, armed with a new vision of cultural authority defined not by the privileges of birth or class but by the skillful management of signs and images" (94).

these two doubles provide evidence of Lady Dedlock's history and bear the consequences of her actions to some degree: Esther's beauty will be marred by smallpox scars, though her tale ends happily, and Hortense will be rightfully arrested. The portrait's symbolic fate, however, will be much worse. And while Lady Dedlock herself must suffer the most for her sins under the harsh judgment of Victorian delicacy, the depths of her love, sorrow, and contrition compel heartfelt sympathy from the reader, many of the characters, and, presumably, Dickens himself.

Our first introduction to Lady Dedlock is visually significant: we see her framed by her window, looking out into the rainy night, observing a happy working class family. The reader is given a quick account of what else would be visible in an exterior shot of Lady Dedlock's room. Beneath the window is the famed "Ghost's Walk," where one of the previous Ladies Dedlock—one who, like our Lady Dedlock, is not of aristocratic blood—died and cursed the family to humiliating disgrace. The third-person narrator describes this image briefly, then reverses the perspective to show us Lady Dedlock's view *from* the window:

> The vases on the stone terrace in the foreground catch the rain all day; and the heavy drops fall, drip, drip, drip, upon the broad flagged pavement, called, from time to time, the Ghost's Walk, all night. . . . My Lady Dedlock (who is childless), looking out into the early twilight from her boudoir at a keeper's lodge, and seeing the light of a fire upon the latticed panes, and smoke rising from the chimney, and a child, chased by a woman, running out into the rain to meet the shining figure of a wrapped-up man coming in through the gate, has been put quite out of temper. My Lady says she is "bored to death." (21)

This opening presentation already reveals the range of her life's events: from her aristocratic position of superior aloofness, she laments the loss of a potential household like the keeper's, which is fecund, humble, and loving; she feels deadened, but can outwardly complain of nothing, save "boredom."

This window-framed introduction is ekphrastically mimicked later in the novel in the commercial image of Lady Dedlock, which is the prized possession of Mr. Jobling

(a.k.a. Mr.Weevle), who has "a choice collection of copper-plate impressions from that truly national work, The Divinities of Albion, or Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty, representing ladies of title and fashion in every variety of smirk that art, combined with capital, is capable of producing" (330). In this portrait, which Jobling coincidentally hangs in Captain Hawdon's old room, Lady Dedlock is "represented on a terrace, with a pedestal upon the terrace, and a vase upon the pedestal, and her shawl upon the vase, and a prodigious piece of fur upon the shawl, and her arm on the prodigious piece of fur, and a bracelet on her arm" (510). This is the kind of portrait, statically laden with iconicity (in the manner of Sir Joshua Reynolds), that Dickens suggests would actually be circulating and, as such, is a target of obvious derision. The presentation of Lady Dedlock is ostentatious and superior, though we as readers, certainly by this mid-point in the novel, recognize its misleading superficiality. Lady Dedlock is not the ideal aristocratic emblem the public sees her as; and she is also not the icy society snob she finds safety in portraying.

Ironically, although Jobling's lifeless and false portrait is openly available to the public, its duplicity is never suspected. It successfully conceals Lady Dedlock's true character, which would be available in a reverse image; that is, a switch in perspective could show the very meaningful view of the keeper's lodge which that stone terrace affords, and signal the story of the Ghost's Walk, on which she ostensibly stands. But the portrait is unreadable in this way, and neither its subject nor its public consumers would desire to dispel its fiction. An insightful eye, however, immediately notes the picture's deficiencies. When Tulkinghorn sees it, he says it is "A very good likeness in its way, but it wants force of character" (637). This criticism sounds strikingly similar to Dickens's own about contemporary art. In this commodified image, Dickens represents the particularly British style of painting without "living force and truth," and, in casting it as emblematic of "truly national work," emphasizes the corrupting influence of political and economic Britishness he finds in contemporary painting.

In contrast to this and almost all of the other portraits in the novel, Dickens offers Lady Dedlock's startling portrait at Chesney Wold, which Sir Leicester significantly refuses to have copied.[17] The singularity of the painting and the narrative attention it receives—particularly when characters are not around to notice it—suggest its enhanced status above others in the novel. Mr. Guppy is the first we see observe the portrait. He is so awe-struck by his uncanny familiarity with the image that he can hardly believe it has never been engraved, or that he has never seen the "original" in person, this being "considered," Rosa tells us, "a perfect likeness" (110). "It's unaccountable," Guppy exclaims, "how well I know that picture!" (111). He is subsequently shown Lady Dedlock's room, and "looks out of the windows from which she looked out, not long ago, upon the weather that bored her to death" (111). Mrs. Rouncewell then teases him with a mention of the Ghost's Walk, which he astutely suspects is related to the uncanniness of the portrait. She is steadfast, though, in withholding the story of the Walk until after he is gone. Perhaps hearing of the great "humbling" to come to the Dedlocks would have cued Guppy's resourceful mind even more swiftly than it already will be.

The Ghost's Walk is indeed linked to Lady Dedlock and her portrait. The last thing Mrs. Rouncewell reveals about it is that "My Lady, who is afraid of nothing, admits that when it is there, it *must be heard*" (114; italics original). Lady Dedlock herself, it seems, feels uncannily tied to the Ghost's Walk. Later, Esther, who sees "innumerable pictures" of herself in Lady Dedlock's face, will assign herself the role of fulfilling the Ghost's Walk prophecy, linking her mother, her mother's "likeness" in herself and the painting, and her aunt's cruel words: "Your mother, Esther, is your

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[17] Some critics, like Ronald Thomas, take Jobling's picture to be a print of this Chesney Wold portrait, but that position seems untenable. Sir Leicester is so protective of Lady Dedlock and her image that we are told several times that he has adamantly refused to have it copied. Also working against Thomas's argument is that he claims the picture could have been reproduced by a photographic process developed in the 1850s, but the novel is likely set in the 1830s or earlier, according to the figuration of the Chancery in the novel.

disgrace, and you were hers" with the eerie curse of the seventeenth-century Lady Dedlock (296, 30). When talking to the present Lady Dedlock about his discoveries, Guppy says that he noted "such a resemblance between Miss Esther Summerson and your ladyship's own portrait, that it completely knocked me over; so much so, that I didn't at the moment even know what it *was* that knocked me over" (464). Lady Dedlock's image has been uncannily reproducing itself for him (and Esther and Lady Dedlock as well) in Esther's face and the portrait. All three of these characters instantly sense the mysterious connection between the two women, the portrait, and the Ghost's Walk. Their corroboration in this, each arriving at the conclusion separately, underscores the legitimacy and the value of knowing how to read the portrait to learn the past that it reveals and the fate that it prefigures.

Early in the novel, we (unlike the characters) observe Lady Dedlock's portrait under assault from light and shadow. While Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock travel from Paris to Chesney Wold in the "clear cold sunshine," that same sunshine slices Lady Dedlock's image in two, along a decidedly condemnatory axis: "Athwart the picture of my Lady, over the great chimney-piece, it throws a broad bend-sinister of light that strikes down crookedly into the hearth, and seems to rend it" (182). The "broad bend-sinister," Nicola Bradbury's notes tell us, is "a Heraldic device: diagonal line top left to bottom right of family shield; it signals illegitimacy, so acts here as a proleptic revelation of the plot, conspicuously highlighted" (1004). Lady Dedlock's actions thus far support the view of her afforded by Jobling's commercial image, but some essential part of her being seems bound up in *this* portrait; and, in laying the truth of her character—her "living truth"—bare, it uncannily suffers attacks from abstract "outsiders" (like sunlight and shadow) before the woman herself is fatally exposed and wrested from her persona of stoic virtue and aloof scorn.

In a much later scene, also available to the reader's eyes alone, the Lady Dedlock within the portrait again undergoes an attack from the shadows that mimic Tulkinghorn's

pursuit. The sun is setting, and, as usual, stirring strange effects in the portraits in the drawing-room. "Even now the floor is dusky, and shadow slowly mounts the walls, bringing the Dedlocks down like age and death. And now, upon my lady's picture over the great chimney-piece, a weird shade falls from some old tree, that turns it pale, and flutters it, and looks as if a great arm held a veil or hood, watching an opportunity to draw it over her" (641). We recall the importance of Lady Dedlock's veil the night she stole to town to see Hawdon's residence, place of work, and pitiful grave. The veil, as well as her borrowed servant's garb, was meant to disguise her identity, but Tulkinghorn is tenacious in investigating her interest in the dead law-writer. He wishes to make evident his control over her concealment; it is at his discretion that her secret shame will be revealed. She may have initially donned and doffed her veil, but once Tulkinghorn knows the truth of her character, she is captured in plain view like a portrayed figure, over which he can "draw a hood" at any time. When this power of his is fully articulated, equivocation about villainy in the novel is dispelled: Lady Dedlock is assuredly the sympathetic victim of Tulkinghorn's brutal pursuit.

Any ambiguity that might linger about her particular fate is resolved by the next attack upon the portrait: "[T]he shadow in the long drawing-room upon my lady's picture is the first to come, the last to be disturbed. At this hour and by this light it changes into threatening hands raised up, and menacing the handsome face with every breath that stirs" (642). The next line is spoken by a servant to Mrs. Rouncewell: "She is not well, ma'am" (642). How could she be, we wonder, when the threat to her life is so clearly illustrated? Her death seems undoubtedly close, as the shadows threaten "every breath" of her portrayed face, which all along has seemed imbued with her "true" life.

While most of the forces propelling Lady Dedlock to her death are externally exerted, there is also some sense that Lady Dedlock is brought down from within. In a

curious illustration, "Shadow" (815),[18] of her returning home on the night of Tulkinghorn's murder, her head is turned suspiciously toward her own shadow, which looks monstrous in shape and intention. In truth, her fatal journey through the winter night to Hawdon's and her own desecrated grave is self-willed. Her virtuous character forces her to exact the harshest punishment on herself. The metaphorical shadows that threaten her image, then, are borne from without and, mysteriously, within the portrait. Its uncanny "living force" combines with the "truth" of her history and character to push her toward her unfortunate end.

After her death, Lady Dedlock's portrait remains but briefly, for the characters as well as the reader. Sir Leicester sits vigil in front of it, allowing light "only in that part" of the drawing room. That light, though, "seems gradually contracting and dwindling until it shall be no more" (983). The portrait is, finally, blackened out like an embarrassing mistake that ought never to have appeared in writing. This erasure renders Lady Dedlock, almost impossibly, more inaccessible than she is at the start of the novel. The difference here is that we have come to know her tragedy and appreciate her profound grief, so we experience this final obscurement painfully. It is like the fade-out at the end of a film, as the portrait has been a screen on which the arc of her downfall has played out. Left with the ekphrastic image of a portrait darkened in shame and defeat, Dickens invites us to lament not only Lady Dedlock's suffering, but Victorian society's need to blot out its trace and its truth.

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[18] One of the dark plate etchings by Halbot K. Browne (Phiz), which has accompanied the text from its first printing in a monthly installment in 1853.

## Mary Elizabeth Braddon as Feminist Pre-Raphaelite Painter: Lady Audley's Uncanny Portrait

While Dickens, albeit sympathetically, renders Lady Dedlock as an object metaphorically captured in paint in a manner typical of the traditional hierarchy of an image, with the male viewer—represented by Guppy, Tulkinghorn, Bucket, and Sir Leicester—free to enjoy or interrogate the imaged figure, Braddon offers a refreshingly satiric rebuttal to this type of representation. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Lady Audley's portrait reveals an impressive number of possible "secrets" about her character, including her propensity for sinister action. The arc of her narrative is much more tempestuous than Lady Dedlock's, this being, after all (along with Collins's *The Woman in White*), the archetypal sensation novel. As such, the uncanniness of her portrait is more forcefully pronounced and more explicitly linked with the stages of Robert Audley's investigation and Lady Audley's retaliation. Unlike Lady Dedlock's portrait, Lady Audley's is not simply a playing out of her victimization, though it partially serves this function; the portrait also threatens its viewers through its uncanny changes in aspect. The portrait still alleviates the male characters' fear of metaphoric castration by the image via a "preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment, or saving of the guilty object" (Mulvey, 840), as Lady Audley will be successfully investigated and punished by her nephew-in-law, Robert. But Braddon grants Lady Audley, partially through her portrait, some power of her own. Where Lady Dedlock seems helpless against Tulkinghorn and Bucket, Lady Audley can take bold action to at least delay her exposure and problematize her defeat. In the end, her nephew, with the corroboration of a discreet physician, finds her guilty of unprovable crimes by way of *potential* insanity, and quietly removes her to a foreign asylum. Her uncanny portrait ambivalently plays a role in each stage of her trajectory toward defeat.

Lady Audley begins life as the extraordinarily beautiful but impoverished Helen Maldon. She marries George Talboys, who comes from a wealthy family but is disowned as a result of marrying so beneath his family's rank. George leaves Helen and their newborn son to seek a fortune in Australia, vowing not to return until he has the means to provide her with the riches she deserves. For a few years, she struggles to survive with her father and her child, but their pitiful circumstances and her own sense of undeserved abandonment and doom cause her to seek a new life, training as a teacher. She assumes the alias Lucy Graham, and quickly finds herself a governess and the object of the wealthy and aged Sir Michael Audley, whose offer of marriage she accepts after some anguish and a confession that she is not in love with him. She sends money to her father to care for the son she has left behind, and seems, from the ring, lock of hair and baby shoe she saves, to lament the loss of her first husband and child.

At the opening of the novel, George is en route back to England, having built up a small fortune and expecting his wife and child to be devotedly awaiting his return. Lady Audley learns of George's homecoming and posts a fake obituary in the paper, arranging for a poor, sickly young woman to be buried in the grave of "Helen Talboys." George, conveniently, is friendly with Robert Audley, the nephew of Sir Michael, and he and Robert are invited by Sir Michael's daughter, Alicia, to Audley Court. George's arrival necessitates protective action on the part of Lady Audley to preserve her current identity. She avoids Audley Court during the visit, but the men gain access to her private chamber, where her emblazoned Pre-Raphaelite portrait is displayed. George is struck silent by the portrait, recognizing in it, unbeknownst to Robert, his wife, Helen. Shortly after, George disappears, and Robert launches his investigation of Lady Audley's past, which has actually begun, unconsciously, with his voyeuristic intrusion into her boudoir.

Braddon starts things off in this initial "pursuit of the portrait" section with the standard gendered power dynamics in place: as a woman, and a particularly desirable one, Lady Audley is necessarily subject to the male authority that places her body and

belongings under his control. She tries to protect her privacy by locking the door to her rooms when George and Robert are visiting (and whisks herself off to London), but the men are not foiled by the formality of a locked door. Lady Audley's stepdaughter, Alicia, finds her locking her door "very provoking, for the best pictures in the house are in that ante-chamber," including "her own portrait, too, unfinished, but wonderfully like" (69). Alicia's doubly restrictive status as a woman subordinate to men and to the lady of the house seems to prevent her contemplating surreptitious access to the locked chamber. Robert is enticed beyond subdual, though. "Her portrait!" he cries, "I would give anything to see it, for I have only an imperfect notion of her face. Is there no other way of getting into the room, Alicia?" (69). Alicia answers with a shake of her head and an invitation to view the paintings in Sir Michael's room. These portraits have, as Lady Audley's will, uncannily horrid life, as Robert notes the room's generally haunted feel, and one painted figure's murderous intent "to split George's head open" (69). It isn't until Robert implores her one last time to think of "a secret passage, or an oak chest, or something of that kind" to give him access to the interior of Lady Audley's room that she recalls a means to fulfill his desire. Alicia, who flirts to no avail with her oblivious cousin, reveals that there is a passage, "To be sure!" (69). She continues, suggestively: "if you don't mind crawling upon your hands and knees, you can see my lady's apartments" (69-70). She wishes to degrade her stepmother in the eyes of her cousin, but is perfunctorily excluded from the entitled male act of violating the woman's private space. At other points in the novel, Alicia rejects norms of feminine behavior, and is more accomplished in masculine endeavors, such as hunting on horseback, than her bachelor cousin is. But descending into the passageway would mean defiling herself with nothing to be gained but the pain of watching two men stare at a ravishing woman with whom she cannot compare.

Several critics, including Elizabeth Langland, Brian Donnelly, and Lynette Felber have explicated Braddon's description of Robert and George's foray into Lady Audley's

chambers as a metaphorical sexual assault.[19] Via a trap door beneath a carpet, the men lower themselves into "the invaginated" narrow passage, snaking through it to emerge from a similar hatch in Lady Audley's dressing room (Felber 478). Once inside, they encounter various signs of private attentions to her body. As Braddon tells us, "the whole of her glittering toilette apparatus lay about on the marble dressing table," while "[t]wo or three handsome dresses lay in a heap upon the ground, and the open doors of a wardrobe revealed the treasures within" (70). The intimate disclosures of the room beg a somewhat embarrassed response from the men for their improper intrusion, but they seem to shamelessly take in all that is available to their probing gaze.[20]

These signs of Lady Audley's defrocked but highly "treasured" body are accompanied by "the rich odours of perfumes in bottles whose gold stoppers had not been replaced" (70). The uncontained and "almost oppressive" scents in the room signify the unchecked power of Lady Audley's feminine allure and the means by which she amplifies it.[21] The abandoned gowns and open wardrobe, however, indicate that despite the power she wields through manipulation of her beauty, her arsenal of feminine accoutrements cannot protect her privacy. The fact that the men so unabashedly surround

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[19] Elizabeth Langland, "Enclosure Acts: Framing Women's Bodies in Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret,"in *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context* (Albany: State U of NY P, 2000), 3-16. Brian Donnelly, "Sensational Bodies: Lady Audley and the Pre-Raphaelite Portrait," *The Victorian Newsletter* 112 (2007): 69-90. Lynette Felber, "The Literary Portrait as Centerfold: Fetishism in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 35 (2007): 471-488.

[20] Compare this with the more appropriate reaction of Luke Marks, Lady Audley's maid Phoebe's beau, when Phoebe shows him the same quarters. He "looked round in gawky embarrassment, bewildered by the splendour of the room; and after some deliberation selected the most substantial of the chairs, on the extreme edge of which he carefully seated himself" (33). His discomfort, however, probably owes more to class difference than gender.

[21] She has, after all, managed to marry two upper-class men, motivating one to reinvent himself on the other side of the world, and the other to shower her with infinite material gifts. She has also used her beauty to disarm the otherwise homosocially driven Robert such that when he first encounters her, he believes he could fall in love with her. Instead, he seems to fall in love with her first husband, and it is this devotion to George that drives his investigation.

themselves with her most intimate items and essences indicates how entrenched gendered power is in the novel. Langland notes this well: "Ironically, the locks and keys, secret passages and drawers that should secure her secrets from penetration, prove no defense against the social expectation of continual and invited visibility" (9). Wealthy young women like Lady Audley were supposed to always convey Mulvey's *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Lady Audley is very successful at embodying this quality, but the men's intrusion into her chamber demonstrates the alarming degree to which women had to submit to the male gaze. Robert and George's original motivation in violating her private space was to see her portrait, but their transgression yields more than just a pleasurable look at the painting; it gives them voyeuristic access to the various components of her allure, and a sensorial encounter with her absent body.

Once the men pass through Lady Audley's dressing room, they reach her curiously octagonal and crimson-toned drawing room, in which the unfinished portrait sits on an easel. This chamber is uniquely significant to the picture because it has a chiasmic relationship to it: the picture is in the room, and the room is in the picture: "It had been a fancy of the artist to paint her standing in this very room, and to make his background a faithful reproduction of the pictured walls" (71). Apart from the more conventional paintings on the walls, like those by Philips Wouwerman and Nicholas Poussin,[22] mirrors have been "cunningly placed at angles and opposite corners by an artistic upholsterer" (291). These geometric and reflective features combine to make the room a surreally oversaturated space of disoriented reproduction, where Lady Audley's portrayed image is reflected infinitely, and yet panoptically trapped by the oddly positioned mirrors. This paradoxical situation represents the tensions of agency that

[22] Wouwerman (1619-68) was a Dutch landscape painter; Poussin (1594-1665), master of French Classicism. Other paintings in the room include those by Claude Lorrain (1600-1682), who was a French landscape painter, and Albert Cuyp (1620-91), another Dutch landscape artist.

Braddon creates in regard to the portrait: Lady Audley is another poseur (like Lady Dedlock) of an aristocratic feminine ideal who is vulnerably exposed by her painted representation, but her embrace of villainy seems alive within the painting as well.

The disquieting duality of the portrait is attributed, significantly, to the peculiarities of the painter, who "must have been a pre-Raphaelite" (72), a label both celebrated and criticized in the novel. The narrator is "afraid the young man belonged to the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, for he had spent a most unconscionable time upon the accessories of this picture—upon my lady's crisp ringlets and the heavy folds of her crimson velvet dress" (71). This fearful observation is certainly no compliment to Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics and ideals, and yet it is precisely because a Pre-Raphaelite painted the picture that it achieves such unsettlingly lifelike effects.

The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, founded by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, John Everett Millais, and several others, was an assemblage of artists who rejected the hackneyed lifelessness of Royal Academy paintings (much as Dickens had in his 1855 letter, though he had famously rebuked Pre-Raphaelitism from its earliest appearance[23]) and sought to represent life with sober dedication to keeping "truth to nature."[24] Their aim of depicting "truth to nature," though, is not synonymous with replicating a natural image. In fact, they use almost preternaturally rich colors and painstakingly depict every detail within a painting, however unlikely it is that a viewer

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[23] In 1850, Dickens published a scathing critique of John Everett Millais's *Christ in the House of his Parents* in his article, "Old Lamps for New Ones." Once the Pre-Raphaelites gained esteem and popularity, though, Dickens probably regretted such a public, premature and unmitigated damnation of the new style. As Leonee Ormond writes, "Dickens' failure to mention the Pre-Raphaelite works in the 1855 exhibition has been noted. By that date the whole question of Pre-Raphaelitism had become a source of acute embarrassment to him" (20). The history of Dickens's interactions with the Pre-Raphaelites is fascinating, particularly in his relationship with Millais, who quickly became a good friend of Dickens's, and with William Holman Hunt, with whom he had more fraught but ultimately cordial interactions. Kate Perugini eventually published an apologetic explanation of Dickens's "Old Lamps" meant to soften the blow and present all parties in a better, more "brotherly" light.

[24] A widely quoted phrase of John Ruskin's, who was a staunch defender of Pre-Raphaelitism.

looking on the actual scene could visually distinguish them. Their subjects were often unconventionally beautiful women who evoked criticism from some as "grotesque," but who were undeniably striking in their features and expressions (another instance of productive duality). Several owners of Pre-Raphaelite paintings were overwhelmed by the insistently life-like aspects of the portraits. George Price Boyle, for instance, who owned Rossetti's *Bocca Bocciata* (1859) was said to be "wearing away the surface of the painting by himself kissing the image of the painted model" (Newell, qtd in Henderson 12).[25] The first owner of William Holman Hunts's *The Awakening Conscience* (1851-53) was so disturbed by the expression of the mistress mid-epiphany that he made Hunt repaint the face in a less provoking manner. (Unfortunately, no copy of that initial version exists so that we may experience its alarming effects.)

Braddon's ekphrastic Pre-Raphaelite depiction of Lady Audley is no less evocative than these actual portraits by Rossetti and Hunt:

> No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid lightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait.
>
> It was so like and yet so unlike; it was as if you had burned strange-coloured fires before my lady's face, and by their influence brought out new expressions never seen in it before. The perfection of feature, the brilliancy of colouring, were there; but I suppose the painter had copied quaint medieval monstrosities until his brain had grown bewildered, for my lady, in his portrait of her, had something of the aspect of the beautiful fiend.
>
> Her crimson dress, exaggerated like all the rest in this strange picture, hung about her in folds that looked like flames, her fair head peeping out of the lurid mass of colour, as if out of a raging furnace. Indeed, the crimson dress, the sunshine on the

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[25] Christopher Newell, "Themes of Love and Death in Aesthetic Painting of the 1860s," in *The Age of Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and Watts: Symbolism in Britain, 1860-1910*, eds. Andrew Wilton and Robert Upstone (London: Flammarion, 1997), 35. Qtd in Ian Henderson, "Looking at Lady Audley: Symbolism, the Stage, and the Antipodes," *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film* 33, no.1 (2006): 3-25.

> face, the red gold gleaming in the yellow of her hair, the ripe scarlet of the pouting lips, the glowing colours of each accessory of the minutely-painted background, all combined to render the first effect of the painting by no means an agreeable one. (72)

A painter with a brain "bewildered" from copying "quaint medieval monstrosities" is not exactly the intuitive choice for glorifying the heretofore angelic lady of the house, and yet it is only such a painter who can transcend the material limits of his art to reveal the "truth" of Lady Audley's "nature." The painting's Pre-Raphaelite markers—the "raging" colors, "sinister" gleams, and exaggerations towards both beauty and monstrosity—are what grant the portrait its exceptionally uncanny and "fiendish" life. The power the portrait conveys indicates that the extraordinary efficacy of this style of painting outweighs the criticisms the narrator dispenses in assessing the value of Pre-Raphaelitism.

Braddon has interestingly allied herself with the Pre-Raphaelites, as she is obviously the portrait's "painter." By the 1860's, the Pre-Raphaelites were highly regarded, if controversial, as can be said of Braddon herself, who required her works to be popular but desired they be literary, too. *Lady Audley's Secret* seems to have achieved this balance. As Braddon revises Dickens's plot in *Bleak House*, her novel subscribes to the laudable realism of the period but sensationalizes it for popularity's sake and, more importantly, I would argue, for the sake of rebutting the victimization of Lady Dedlock through the intensification of representation that Pre-Raphaelite portraiture allows. Interestingly, several critics have equated Pre-Raphaelitism with "sensational realism" or "hyper-realism."[26] These seem terms Braddon would prefer for her novel's genre, as they grant the prestige of realism with the innovative augmentation of its effects through uncanny magnification and representation. The uncanny is, as Freud writes, (quoting

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[26] Talairach-Vielmas writes, "Pre-Raphaelitism was famous for its reliance on physiognomical and phrenological theories and was very often close to photography in its blunt portrayal of human features. With its photographic realism Pre-Raphaelitism was hyper-realism, able, as Sir Michael Audley's daughter thinks, to uncover details invisible to the eye" (121-22).

Schiller,) "the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light" (933; ellipses Freud's).[27] Lady Audley's portrait reveals the unseemly, even dangerous retaliations stirring within the repressively objectified woman. And while Lady Audley's sensational case may seem singular, as Elaine Showalter, in her 1977 *A Literature of Her Own* famously proclaims, "Lady Audley's real secret is that she is *sane* and, moreover, representative" (167). The rebellion that will visibly brew in Lady Audley's portrait is not the result of a particular genetic inheritance, but rather of the repressions and performative demands imposed on Victorian women. The Pre-Raphaelite aesthetic is the perfect vehicle for this tension because, as Sophia Andres writes, "the paradoxical perspective governing . . . [the] portrait captures some of the inherent contradictions in Victorian gender ideology which at once worships women and imprisons them within the domestic sphere, depriving them of the power it grants them" ("Braddon's Ambivalent," 3). Braddon goes further than this, though, to endow Lady Audley with some power through the portrait by making it not only Pre-Raphaelite, the virtues of which several critics have discussed, but by imbuing it with uncanny life.

The portrait projects Lady Audley's threatening power in showing her to be devilish yet alluring—the classic *femme fatale*. While the narrator easily relates the duplicity of the image, its two male diegetic viewers, used to the safety and pleasure of the voyeur's position, do not seem to glean much from its overall effects or provocative details. They save this picture for last in their inspection of the chamber's artistic offerings. When they are ready for their reward, Robert's excitement, at least, is obvious. He says to George, in what to us seems a transparent suggestion about his voyeuristic aims, "we have between us only one wax candle, a very inadequate light with which to look at the painting. Let me, therefore, request that you will suffer us to look at it one at

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[27] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 1919, trans. Alix Strachey in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent B. Leitch, et al. (New York: Norton, 2001), 929-52.

a time: if there is one thing more disagreeable than another, it is to have a person dodging behind your back and peering over your shoulder, when you're trying to see what a picture's made of" (71). Never mind that they have presumably been looking at every other painting in the room together. This picture, unlike the others, is not a landscape. More than that, it promises a look at the fully adorned beauty of the woman whose fragmented but intimately exposed femininity they have been surveying; but voyeurism is only pleasingly effective if the voyeur feels immune to exposure himself. Robert admits that this being-watched-while-watching is most disagreeable, and so he must avert George's gaze to feel fully empowered to masterfully probe the portrayed figure. While George faces a window, Robert makes spatial adjustments to maximize his viewing pleasure: he "arrange[s] the easel very conveniently, and . . . seat[s] himself on a chair before it for the purpose of contemplating the painting at his leisure" (72). Some time passes, and when George finally turns around, Robert stands, saying only, "Now, then, for your turn, Talboys . . . . It is an extraordinary picture" (72). From this ambiguously pleased statement, how much he has deduced about Lady Audley from the image seems negligible. He seems more confident about the protocol of male gazing—do it alone, but affirm its pleasurability afterwards (as opposed to its threat)—than about what the gaze actually offers him.[28]

The extended description of the painting quoted above occurs, importantly, while George sits in private contemplation of the image. Because of this, the ambivalence

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[28] Robert may be so unspecific about what he finds "extraordinary" in her looks because, as the rest of the novel bears out, and as many critics have noted, Robert seems to really be in love with George and his own particular beauty—that of his eyes, for instance, which appear, quite conveniently, in the countenance of George's sister, Clara, whom Robert marries at the end of the novel. The sister is superfluous though, as the story ends with the three of them—the original pair of Robert and George, and the heteronormative marital façade between Robert and Clara that sanctions the set up—all living in an idyllic cottage. The tom-boy Alicia, always in love with her effete cousin Robert, pays endless visits with her own decoy-partner, Harry Towers, completing the group who need sanctuary from the restrictive normative demands of Victorian England, but who can abide the measures necessary to grant a semblance of propriety to the scene.

expressed in the narrator's observations seems at least partially attributable to George, who cannot forget his grief about his wife's death through a simple voyeuristic encounter owing precisely to the details of the figure he is gazing upon. The narrator necessarily withholds the fact that George realizes his wife is not literally dead, but has instead become this "beautiful fiend." What is noted, however, is George's suggestive, visceral reaction in holding "the candlestick grasped in his strong right hand," which belies the apparently "blank" expression he wears as he sits before the picture "for about a quarter of an hour without uttering a word" (72-73).[29] His voyeuristic gazing is brought to an end by Robert, who accuses George of falling asleep, then takes the candle from him and leads their retreat from the chamber.

While the men have triumphed in penetrating Lady Audley's chamber and perusing her painted image, what they have learned about the woman—what material gains they have made, if any, in mastering her—are unclear at best. Braddon contrasts their relatively dim reactions with those of a woman as soon as the men return from their escapade. Alicia's perception, as the other woman of the house—and the rightfully upper class one—is superior to that of the men. She astutely assesses Lady Audley's portrait, even though she is denied, in the reader's view, direct access to the image. She can also interpret the male gaze that constructs and consumes the image as someone who, by virtue of her sex, is foreclosed from direct exchange with it. When the men return from Lady Audley's room, Robert tells Alicia, "I don't like the portrait; there's something odd about it" (73). Alicia agrees, but she also knows why the painting is disconcerting: she believes painters have an uncanny ability to represent those things in a person's character

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[29] In her recent analysis of fetishism in Braddon's novel, particularly how it relates to the portrait, Lynnette Felber addresses the ambiguity of George's phallic impotence and his onanistic mastery of the image in one of his hand's "hanging loosely" while the other firmly grips the erect candle. Her essay analyzes "the verbal portrait" as "a transitional medium" and a "precursor" to photographic pornography and "the modern magazine centerfold" (476).

which non-artists cannot perceive unaided. She says, "I think that sometimes a painter is in a manner inspired, and is able to see, through the normal expression of the face, another expression that is equally a part of it, though not to be perceived by common eyes. *We* have never seen my lady look as she does in that picture; but I think that she *could* look so" (73; emphasis original).

Robert's response to Alicia's foreboding interpretation of the portrait is fearful, defensive, and almost hysterical. He refuses to allow that the portrait or the paint could have any supernatural qualities. He scolds Alicia, with an initial insult reminiscent of the 1855 Exposition review: "Don't be German, Alicia, if you love me. The picture is—the picture; and my lady is—my lady. That's my way of taking things, and I'm not metaphysical; don't unsettle me" (73). Robert "repeated this several times with an air of terror perfectly sincere" (73), and must have sounded not unlike the stereotypically overwhelmed Victorian woman. The degree of this effect would depend, no doubt, on how much of his speech the narrator refers to with the deictic "this." While Robert is in the presence of only another man, he does his best to perform normative, masterful, masculine gazing; with the introduction of the masculinized Alicia[30] and her insightful penetration of the portrait's veneer of beauty, Robert cannot help but give way to his intense anxiety about woman's potential—and Lady Audley's in particular—to break up the patriarchal, homosocial world he so enjoys.

While George may have learned more about Lady Audley than Robert from the painting in that he recognizes his wife in it, he does not interpret the image as cynically as Alicia does; he can discern the true identity of the woman, but not her true nature. In fact, he wants to alert "Lady Audley" to his discovery and reassert his power over her, leaving behind his "great man's glove" on her carpet to flaunt the pleasure he has derived

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[30] She is a fierce horse-back rider, runs with the hounds, is uncensored in her speech, and indelicate in her dress and demeanor, sometimes "slashing the skirt of her habit with her riding-whip" (118).

from the perverse painting (79). He then seeks her out in a secluded walkway near the house, never suspecting that she is capable of murder. He is quickly punished for his presumption, however, when she pushes him down a well. Lady Audley herself recognizes this naïveté on George's part, and that it is precisely what empowers him to accost her without any preparation. She tells us later that George had said that "no power on the earth should turn him from his purpose, which was to take me to the man I had deceived, and make me tell my wicked story. He did not know the hidden taint that I had sucked in with my mother's milk" (386). This "hidden taint" is what Alicia sees in the portrait, and what Robert Audley cannot see but becomes aware of through his investigation. He'll eventually beg a physician to diagnose this uncanny sign as "the taints of hereditary insanity" (370).

And while the portrait can reveal this taint and potential for violence, Lady Audley is confident that she can master the normative male viewer with her extraordinary looks. After dispatching with George, she returns to her room and cries—"with *mock* indignation" (my emphasis)—"they had the audacity to look at my picture, Alicia . . . I found the baize thrown on the ground and this great man's glove on the carpet. Look!" (79). She is fully aware of the sexual dynamics of their intrusion as evidenced by the painting's garment tossed to the floor along with the glove of "spent sexuality" (as Lynette Felber calls it),[31] but she knows that the astonishing effects of her wiles—particularly as rendered in an ostensibly powerless and vulnerable image—grant her real power in the exchange, enabling her to dispose of George quite handily, and befuddle Robert for months, making a mockery of their surreptitious claim to the voyeur's visual pleasure.

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[31] Felber notes the glove and the "withered flowers" and other "litter" (Braddon 81) in the room as signs of George's "spent sexuality" (475).

Alicia's interpretation of the portrait and the woman is proven correct by George's attempted murder (le lives, unbeknownst to Lady Audley), as well as Lady Audley's later act of arson (prefigured by the flames in her portrait).[32] She explicitly looks like a bewitching fiend when she is devising further cover-ups of her transgressions. As it becomes clear late in the novel that Robert has finally discovered her guilt and true identity, she decides to tell her husband that Robert has gone mad as a way of preempting his disclosure of her secrets. When she begins the false and highly subjective accusation of Robert's insanity, "the lines about her pretty rosy mouth, those hard and cruel lines which Robert Audley had observed in the pre-Raphaelite portrait, became plainly visible in the firelight" (282). This paraphrased recounting of the description of the portrait emphasizes how much Robert has learned about reading images and looking beneath the surface. Just before this, he had discovered the clue of Lucy's suitcase, with her name written on a label. Realizing he has been duped in the past by taking surface appearances as facts, he tries to remove the label, and sure enough finds the real name of the suitcase's owner, Helen Talboys. While the insights of the portrait's description above were in no way attributable to Robert at the time of their initial narration, he has been able to retroactively gain access to a revelatory gaze, and see in the painted figure the truth of its model's character that had been obvious to Alicia's displeased woman's eye.

The causal relationship between Lady Audley's portrait and her soul is the reverse of Dorian Gray's; his portrait changes after he has committed atrocities. Her unfinished portrait shows the potential of her fiendishness, and after she has committed murder, she looks more like her sinister, painted image. Robert's second look at the portrait comes

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[32] In the stage adaptation that Henderson writes of, this foreshadowing is made explicit. Alicia's character cries that Lady Audley has become "the portrait!" when the fire is glowing in the background (17).

when he visits his sick uncle and must walk through Lady Audley's drawing-room, "in which George Talboys had sat so long five months before, staring absently at my lady's portrait. The picture was finished now, and hung in the post of honour opposite the window, amidst Claudes, Poussins, and Wouvermans, whose less brilliant hues were killed by the vivid colouring of the modern artist" (215). The recall of George in the room, the painting's completion and repositioning, and its lethal effect on the ones that surround it conspire to reveal Lady Audley's secrets, since she has, by this point, accrued many in addition to the perhaps understandable secret of the initial identity change, and the expressed secret of the title, her hereditary madness.

In the end, Lady Audley's life, as Lady Dedlock's had, brings about the destruction of the aristocracy from within, even if no public legal proceedings take place. Robert Audley openly admits several times that his chief concern in dealing with Lady Audley is to "save" the family's "stainless name from degradation and shame" (371). All along he has been motivated by the mysterious loss of his dear friend, George; he has sought truth and justice in his investigation, but cannot ignore the consequences to himself, should his own name be dragged down, as it must, with his uncle's. These conflicting aims mean he must try to maintain the roles of detective, judge, and jury as long as he can. He summons a physician, Dr. Mosgrave, to determine if Lady Audley suffers from the madness that she claims, so that legal charges may be avoided. He tells Mosgrave that Lady Audley is guilty of bigamy and fraud, describing the circumstances in detail. Mosgrave finds nothing "mad" about running away from an impoverished home and lying to secure "fortune and position" (370). This is an important vindication of Lady Audley's "representative" struggles, as Showalter defines them. Mosgrave understands the Victorian woman's predicament, even if he is not her moral defender. When Robert finally confesses he suspects Lady Audley guilty of murder, the doctor agrees to see the woman alone. Importantly, he seeks her in her "octagon ante-chamber" (372). He returns to Robert in ten minutes, reporting nothing of the interview. In fact,

the conversation seems to have been active on only one side, with Lady Audley rendered almost silent under the probing gaze of the doctor, saying only, Mosgrave later reveals, "You think I am mad like my mother, and you have come to question me . . . . You are watching for some sign of the dreadful taint in my blood" (374). As surely as he has seen her, he has observed her portrait in the same interview. It seems, even, that he does not find the "sign of the taint" in the real woman, but rather in the portrait, as Alicia has before:

> "I have talked to the lady," he said quietly, "and we understand each other very well. There is latent insanity! Insanity which might never appear; or which might appear only once or twice in a life-time. It would be *dementia* in its worst phase perhaps: acute mania; but its duration would be very brief, and it would only arise under extreme mental pressure. The lady is not mad; but she has the hereditary taint in her blood. She has the cunning of madness, with the prudence of intelligence. I will tell you what she is, Mr. Audley. She is dangerous!" (372)

Despite Lady Audley's many transgressions by this point, the doctor's revelations are merely an elaboration of Alicia's earlier inference from the portrait that Lady Audley *looks capable of fiendishness*. She has a latent potential that "might never appear," or "might appear only once or twice." Mosgrave may as well have added that Robert may never have "seen my lady look as she does in that picture; but I think that she *could* look so," and his conclusions would be entirely preserved, if redundant. A professional man of authority has been called to the scene and finally deemed the look of the woman "dangerous" enough to warrant "shut[ting] her from the world and all wordly associations" just as well as "if you were to dig a grave for her in the nearest churchyard and bury her in it alive" (373).

Still, Robert's "greatest fear is the necessity of any exposure—any disgrace" (372). Dr. Mosgrave declares he won't "assist [Robert] to condone one of the worst offenses against society," but that he "will do [his] best to help" (372). He signs Lady Audley over to a Belgian asylum whither Robert conducts her, and she is invalidated further with the new moniker, "Madame Taylor." Robert tells the attending French doctor

that Madame Taylor has "shown some fearful tokens of the lurking taint that was latent in her mind" (382). According to this indictment, she is only guilty of looking like the "beautiful fiend" of her portrait. In fact, Monsieur Val calls her a "beautiful devil" as she "hiss[es] through her teeth" for him to leave (383). Producing this image is enough of an offense, and in fact the only one she is explicitly punished for, to place her in perpetual imprisonment in what she calls (independent of Mosgrave's comment) "a living grave" (384). She tells Robert he has used his power "basely and cruelly," and that she "*cannot*" accept such an anonymous, uncreditable fate, where her words are as good as unsaid, since she will hereafter be dismissed wholesale as insane (384; emphasis original). She is aware that her punishment has everything to do with her looks, though she does not herself acknowledge the role of the portrait in her doom. She cries,

> Has my beauty brought me to *this*? Have I plotted and schemed to shield myself, and laid awake in the long deadly nights trembling to think of my dangers, for *this*? I had better have given up at once, since *this* was to be the end. I had better have yielded to the curse that was upon me, and given up when George Talboys first came back to England. (384; italics original)

It seems she would prefer to be tried for her actual crimes than have all of her efforts, her triumphs and defeats, nullified. Everything she had achieved she had done through successful manipulation of her beauty—its allure and its threats. Robert erases her actions—redefines in fact, the Audley family, by raising George from the metaphorical dead and restoring him to aristocratic legitimacy. With the token female surrogate in George's sister, Clara, Robert and George become the Audleys for a new age. "Audley Court is shut up . . . . A curtain hangs before the Pre-Raphaelite portrait; and the blue mould which artists dread gathers upon the Wouvermans and Poussins, the Cuyps and Tintorettos" (436). The portrait, unlike its painted neighbors, remains unfaded and untarnished, which seems only appropriate for so unnatural an image. It is instead covered over, like Lady Dedlock's, but this time, literally. The picture could still wield power, just as a Rossetti painting can elicit kisses after the model's passing, but it is kept

necessarily out of sight. "Inquisitive visitors" may "admire my lady's rooms, and ask many questions about the pretty, fair-haired woman, who died abroad" (436), but the rumors of this woman do not include an account of what was visible in her portrait, the latent fiendishness perceptible to the critical eye that could resist the pleasure of mere voyeurism. George and Sir Michael could not see it, and Robert could only after overwhelming evidence about her crimes taught him to look for it. Alicia and the doctor, though, were able to defy "the magic power of fascination with which a woman can charm" depicted in the uncanny picture, hanging in its own surreally "enchanted" chamber (11, 291).

Though Lady Audley receives sympathy from the society from which she has been banished, it is not informed, authentic sympathy, as Lady Dedlock's portrait evokes. Lady Audley's portrait has revealed her "living force and truth" only insofar as it has revealed the extremities of her nature's capabilities. Since she is ultimately punished for nothing more than her looks, which reveal a fierce rebelliousness beneath the submission to constant and pleasurable visibility, she is, as Showalter says, representative in general of mid-Victorian women, who must have sympathized with her motives, her defensive actions, and, ultimately, her suffocating entrapment—her sensationalized but nonetheless routine trajectory from captivating beauty to obscured captive.

## Collins's Ekphrastic Exposé: Uncanny Lack in the Subjective Image in *The Woman in White*

Laura Fairlie, the ostensible heroine of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, is, like Lady Dedlock and Lady Audley, uncannily linked to her portrayed image, but also to her doppelganger, Anne Catherick, the woman of the title.[33] Laura seems, in many ways,

[33] While the figure of the double is used in both Dickens's and Braddon's novels, Collins's text suggests most explicitly the interchangeability of the two women.

a mere sketch of a character—a "phone[d] in . . . ready-made victim entirely subject to her tumultuous emotions and the whims of others," as Camille Cauti puts it in her introduction to the novel (xxvii).[34] Yet, the socially progressive Collins cannot have condoned this type of womanhood, and seems to use the "fair lie" of Laura to mock the idealization of such a vacuous "angel in the house."[35] Furthermore, he has Laura paint *her own version* of the portrait Walter Hartright paints of her. In her picture, her own figure is excised, underscoring the imaginary basis of a female form as captured by the male painter who presents Laura as the object of his love. In producing this vacated version of the picture and bequeathing it to Hartright, her drawing master and eventual second husband, Laura more forcefully critiques representations of women than even the violently resistant Lady Audley, despite her seemingly flimsy construction by Collins as a flat character. In doing so, she evinces a theory of women's representations that aligns with recent scholars of the image who build upon Mulvey's model.

As with our visual introduction to Lady Dedlock, we first see Laura Fairlie inscribed within a frame that will mimic both her portrait and her metaphorical entrapment. With Walter Hartright as our first and primary narrator, we encounter Laura when he does, as he walks through the grounds of the Fairlies' Limmeridge estate. She appears framed by the doorway of a one-room summer-house, "standing near a rustic table, looking out at the inland view of moor and hill presented by a gap in the trees, and absently turning over the leaves of a little sketch-book that lay at her side" (50-51). After presenting her in this initial stance, Hartright feels urged to describe for us precisely

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[34] Camille Cauti, Introduction to *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins (New York: Barnes and Noble Classics, 2005).

[35] Sophia Andres makes use of this play on the Fairlie name in her book, *The Pre-Raphaelite Art of the Victorian Novel: Narrative Challenges to Visual Gendered Boundaries* (Columbus: The Ohio State UP, 2005).

how Laura looked before any biases of perception had influenced his image of her, but he recognizes the impossibility of such an endeavor. He laments, "How can I describe her? How can I separate her from my own sensations, and from all that has happened in the later time? How can I see her again as she looked when my eyes first rested on her—as she should look, now, to the eyes that are about to see her in these pages?" (51). His remarkable consciousness of the power of perspective—chronologically, emotionally, and mnemonically—undermines the very project of "picturing" her for us, or for himself, despite the endorsement of the doorway's frame around her figure.

Hartright had tried to memorialize this pose of hers in a painting that is his constant companion. It sits on his desk as he reconstructs the narrative of her victimization, rescue, and reinstatement to upper-class feminine idealization that is the hermeneutic aim of *The Woman in White* as a kind of documentary.[36] The portrait before him refuses to remain frozen, however, as the figure within it seems ever-born out of the background in a constant state of becoming that is ripe for fantasy. He describes the picture and its inaugural effects thus: "The water-colour drawing that I made of Laura Fairlie, at an after period, in the place and attitude in which I first saw her, lies on my desk while I write. I look at it, and there dawns upon me brightly, from the dark greenish-brown background of the summer-house, a light, youthful figure, clothed in a simple muslin dress" (51). Her "dawning figure" seems newly summoned with every glance at the picture, reactivating his adoration and desire, as it does much later in the narrative, when he writes:

> I surprised myself, one day, neglecting my work, to dream over the little water-colour portrait of her which I had taken in the summer-house where we first met . . . . Changed as all the circumstances now were, our position towards each other in the golden days of

[36] The use of multiple narrators is a product of this documentary aim, where Walter wishes to present first-hand accounts of events wherever possible, and have multiple characters corroborate important details.

> our first companionship, seemed to be revived with the revival of our love. It was as if Time had drifted us back on the wreck of our early hopes, to the old familiar shore! (557)

By this point in the story, Laura has had an infantilizing breakdown, rendering her only perversely desirable, if at all. Hartright, needing to rationalize his continued desire to marry her (and mask his socio-economic motives),[37] reverts to this painted image of Laura because it offers her not only with the untainted aesthetics of a healthy woman, but as a perfect *objet petit a* because she is completely inaccessible; the physical and mental trauma of her breakdown are largely irreversible, though Hartright tries to disguise this fact. The woman in that picture, if she ever did exist as he had painted her, is no more; she's been reduced to an almost imbecilic level of cognition. She must relearn everything—from her identity and personal history to how to draw, dress, and use money. Her effectively lobotomized state makes her a perfect and parodic angel in the house, as D.A. Miller points out,[38] but it also makes the notion of a fully restored and reciprocal emotional relationship between her and Hartright impossible to imagine. He describes their revived love as indistinguishable from its first incarnation, as if it could be unaffected by the passage of time, but Laura is no longer a woman in full possession of her faculties, and now looks like the sickly Anne Catherick instead of herself. Hartright needs to disguise Laura's new deficiencies, though, and their effect upon the relationship since he marries her and begets a son by her, who, bearing his father's name, fulfills Hartright's (unstated) goal of installing himself among "the landed gentry" (626).[39]

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[37] For an extensive reading of Hartright's class aspirations, see Dennis Denisoff, "Framed and Hung: Collins and the Economic Beauty of the Manly Artist," in *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins*, ed. Maria Bachman and Don Richard Cox (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 2003). 34-58.

[38] He writes, "The same internment that renders Laura's body docile, and her mind imbecile, also fits her to incarnate the norm of the submissive Victorian wife." D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* ( Berkeley: U of California Press, 1988), 172.

[39] Marian makes this new status explicit in her last lines in the book. She holds up the baby and asks Walter if he knows "who this is." Walter responds that it is his child. "'Child!' she exclaimed, with all her easy gaiety of old times. 'Do you talk in that familiar manner of one of the landed gentry of England? Are you aware, when I present this illustrious baby to your notice, in whose presence you stand? Evidently

Following his initial description of the painting and the memory of Laura in the summer-house, Hartright then details the features of her figure, first the pleasing ones, then, the blemishes, which are important as they indicate, through direct comparison and the fear they inspire, her connection to Anne Catherick. Both women have, for instance, a nervous quiver about their lips. Laura's other imperfections—like the disproportion of the upper half of her face to the lower, or the concavity of her nose—are significantly mused upon, perhaps to dispel the possibility of the physically ideal heroine. As a painter, Hartright can ascertain the contours and aesthetic merits of his subject's face; as a smitten lover (or as someone trying to pass as a smitten lover, depending on one's reading of the novel), however, he cannot acknowledge a negative reaction to such faults. He writes that though these defects may be conspicuous in other women's faces, they are "not easy to dwell on . . . in hers, so subtly are they connected with all that is individual and characteristic in her expression, and so closely does the expression depend for its full play and life, in every other feature, on the moving impulse of the eyes" (52). To enliven the image of Laura, the picture must force the viewer's eye to constantly search the image, never seeing all of its details at once. The succession of partial images available to the eye acts like a narrative chain, granting "full play and life" to the woman within the portrait, even as the character herself seems lifelessly flat to the reader. His water-color portrait is importantly only visible to him as its ideal audience, as it functions as the screen which affirms the elusive desirability of Collins's cardboard heroine. This point is underscored when Hartright confesses that the reader cannot see her as he does, as a perfect object of desire (particularly after, we might add, his tallying of her physical faults).

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not! Let me make two eminent personages known to one another: Mr. Walter Hartright—THE HEIR OF LIMMERIDGE'" (626-27).

Hartright's accounting for the aspects and effects of his love's image grows more intriguing yet: after his long digression about Laura's looks and expression, he asks the reader, "Does my poor portrait of her, my fond, patient labour of long and happy days, show me these things? Ah, how few of them are in the dim mechanical drawing, and how many in the mind with which I regard it!" (52). He is explicitly aware of the intractable influence of memory and desire in image creation and perception. He is an unreliable source for a "portrait" of Laura, whether through an ekphrastically evoked painting or a description of the woman that he offers "in these pages." After this extensive attempt to picture his love for us, he abandons all visual specifics as he realizes the necessary outcome of prejudiced viewership.

He instructs the implied (straight male) reader to use his own store of desirable images to conjure the heroine of the present narrative: "Think of her as you thought of the first woman who quickened the pulses within you that the rest of her sex had no art to stir. . . . Take her as the visionary nursling of your own fancy; and she will grow upon you, all the more clearly, as the living woman who dwells in mine" (52). Laura is acknowledged here as little more than a fantasized figure, and Hartright, like the master fetishist, protects her image from others' eyes, directing his readers to make use of their own internal imaginary screens, upon which memory and desire can have "full play." With this command, Hartright seems to keep this "fair lie" of an image for himself while effectively activating a more compelling—because personalized and already rooted in the readers' psyche—vision for what he hopes is a sensationally intrigued audience.

For Laura, interestingly, this image of herself standing in the summer-house flipping through a sketch book also serves as the emblem of their relationship. When Hartright must leave Limmeridge before her marriage to Percival Glyde, Laura performs perhaps her only autonomous act: she presents Hartright with a picture of the summer-house to remind him of her. Her picture, though, depicts the summer-house empty,

forcing him to confront her absence rather than her image. Hartright describes the exchange:

> with that courage which women lose so often in the small emergency, and so seldom in the great, she came on nearer to me, strangely pale and strangely quiet, drawing one hand after her along the table by which she walked, and holding something at her side, in the other, which was hidden by the folds of her dress.
>
> "I only went into the drawing-room," she said, "to look for this. It may remind you of your visit here, and of the friends you leave behind you. You told me I had improved very much when I did it—and I thought you might like—"
>
> She turned her head away, and offered me a little sketch drawn throughout by her own pencil, of the summer-house in which we had first met. The paper trembled in her hand as she held it out to me—trembled in mine as I took it from her.
>
> I was afraid to say what I felt—I only answered: "It shall never leave me; all my life long it shall be the treasure I prize most." (125)

In relinquishing the picture, Laura stands in her characteristic pose with a hand upon a table. The words that accompany the gift are significantly cut short of identifying *what specifically* would be desired by Hartright. "I thought you might like—" could conceivably be completed with a simple "it," referring to the picture, but it seems more likely that Laura was thinking of a more complex object. She thinks he might like a visual reminder of their first meeting, and she is right, as he has painted one himself (with her in it). Removing herself as an object from the image seems an important commentary on the visual representation of women and the denial of women's own subjectivity. The absence of a word or phrase is, then, the linguistic registration of picture's own intentional lack.

The absence of figure from Laura's version of the picture could be a reflection of Mulvey's notion that men resist objectification,[40] as this could have been the reverse of

[40] Mulvey, 838.

his image—i.e., the view she had of him *outside* the summer-house, but also framed by its doorway. This would be an appropriate representation as it would emblematize his outsider status and his desire, above all, to transcend class and become master of Limmeridge House and all its adornments, including Laura. Perhaps some intuition of this meaning prevents her from painting the memory from her own perspective, but it seems more likely that she wishes to expose—or rather, Collins wishes to, through her—the real significance of a woman's image as a projected ideal that ultimately reveals nothing but lack and absence. The trembling and fear Hartright feels upon receiving the picture could stem from his nervous excitement at being alone with his love for what should be a final parting, but it could also be the uncanny feeling inspired by the empty image that mocks his own memorial to their meeting. Laura's picture insists that Hartright does not really see her, just as his own version contains a desirable figure that purports to be Laura but is inseparable from the desires and memories of the artist/viewer Hartright.

Walter ends the scene of their parting with a door closing between them, noting that "the image of Laura Fairlie was a memory of the past already" (126). This proves true in a few senses, not the least of which that the next time Walter sees her will be after her nervous breakdown, when she looks like Anne Catherick instead of herself. He predicts this transformation when first contemplating her face: "If ever sorrow and suffering set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of Miss Fairlie's face, then, and then only, Anne Catherick and she would be the twin-sisters of chance resemblance, the living reflections of one another" (97). Of course, illness and tragedy befall Laura, and her looks are affected in the way Hartright predicts, allowing Anne's death to become Laura's in a rather convenient switch.

The interchangeability between the two women, as has been noted above, is markedly exaggerated in Collins's novel.[41] The mental and physical differences between the two are erased by Laura's breakdown and subsequent stint in the asylum. If any difference exists, it is that Laura is rendered more infantile than Anne ever was. The novel opens, after all, with Anne's successful escape from captivity, highlighting her independence of movement and motivation. Shirley Stave takes the interchangeability so far as to propose that Laura and Anne are never actually switched in the novel, making Hartright akin to Glyde, Laura's first, villainous husband, as they both seek aristocratic legitimacy and wealth through marriage to Laura, or to someone who can pass for Laura.[42]

Ultimately, whether the women are switched or not is irrelevant, as Stave points out, since "Laura/Anne in essence does not exist narratively except as a cipher or a lack, an empty symbol that points to male authority, the agency of the Phallus" (296). I would add that Laura's curious drawing is germane to this analysis as she gives Walter a picture to remember her by that is a representation *of* this lack. Likewise, Laura's suggestion that Walter "might like—" to possess her image, to gaze at her infinitely, to remember her with this visual aid devoid of object, insists upon her status, essentially, as a kind of

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[41] Collins is, in some measure, revising *Bleak House*, where doubles are only effective for singular acts—like making it look as though Lady Dedlock enters Tulkinghorn's office the night of his murder. Braddon, revising Dickens and Collins, takes up the trope of the double by having Phoebe Marks look like Lady Audley, but she rejects the notion that Phoebe could ever pass for Lady Audley, and by extension, that any two women are interchangeable. Her plot does not rely upon a doppelganger; it only needs a non-descript body to lie in Helen Talboys' grave.

[42] While I see Anne as more autonomous than Laura, Stave adheres to the usual reading of Anne as the mindless double. Her evidence that the women are never switched is compelling, and includes the fact that Walter and Marian never appeal to the person who would recognize Laura the best—Mrs. Vesey, her nurse, governess, and companion—to testify that "Laura" is indeed Laura. Shirley A. Stave, "The Perfect Murder: Patterns of Repetition and Doubling in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*," *Dickens Studies Annual* 25 (1996): 287-303.

"blank to be filled in by male desire" (Perkins and Donaghy 393, qtd in Stave 296).[43] That Collins makes Laura the conveyor of her own abstraction, indicated by her illustration with the ever-elusive object actually missing, allows us to see *The Woman in White* as far more progressive in its commentary on the Victorian woman than is usually permitted.

Laura's diminution in the second half of the novel is almost laughable; her existence as pure reconstruction is apparent from her need to relearn the simplest skills and be goaded into claiming her identity. The one time Laura's sketch of the summer-house reappears is when Walter and Marian are trying to jog her memory to see if she can ever argue on her own behalf that she is Laura Glyde. (She can't, and she doesn't.) The only events they try to make her recall are the pleasantest, of course, when the three of them were together at Limmeridge. Hartright writes:

> The day when I roused those remembrances by showing her the sketch of the summer-house which she had given me on the morning of our farewell, and which had never been separated from me since, was the birthday of our first hope. Tenderly and gradually, the memory of the old walks and drives dawned upon her; and the poor weary pining eyes, looked at Marian and at me with a new interest, with a faltering thoughtfulness in them, which, from that moment, we cherished and kept alive. (434)

Anne Catherick was also in love with Limmeridge, and could easily be made to pine at tales of its beauty and grandeur. The picture serves to "birth" a new Laura for Walter to master completely—not just as an art instructor—with the help of Marian, who would also be destitute without a reinstatement of Laura's identity and fortune. Laura's drawing of herself as lack allows her place-holder status to be emphasized by the ease with which

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[43] While Stave's article and Perkins and Donaghy's offer these insights about Laura's blankness, neither dwells on the significance of this lack in visual terms, which is my main emphasis. Pamela Perkins and Mary Donaghy, "A Man's Resolution: Narrative Strategies in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*," *Studies in the Novel* 22 (1990): 392-402.

Anne can become Laura, like the figure that "dawns upon" the viewer of Walter's water-color.

Interestingly, Walter and Marian don't show Laura the other picture that places her at Limmeridge. This could be because Walter's water-color is intended for (his) visual pleasure only, and cannot be identified with, even by the woman depicted. They also may shield her from this earlier image of herself for fear of shocking her by her own displeasing transformation. After all, when Laura actually meets Anne early on in the narrative, she responds, as Freud would predict, with uncanny fear to this image of her sickened self. She says, "it came over my mind that we were like each other! Her face was pale and thin and weary—but the sight of it startled me, as if it had been the sight of my own face in the glass after a long illness. The discovery—I don't know why—gave me such a shock, that I was perfectly incapable of speaking to her, for the moment" (277-78). The double is, Freud writes, "the uncanny harbinger of death" (940), and Laura reacts to hers just as Freud does to the old man he misrecognizes in his own mirror as an enfeebled stranger.

The final image of Laura in the novel emphasizes her figure as a kind of cut-out that can easily be excised, transposed, or replaced. Walter narrates his surprise at finding his family—Marian, Laura, and baby Walter—removed to Limmeridge House after Frederick Fairlie's death:

> My wife and Marian were both up-stairs. They had established themselves (by way of completing my amazement) in the little room which had once been assigned to me for a studio, when I was employed on Mr. Fairlie's drawings. On the very chair which I used to occupy when I was at work, Marian was sitting now, with the child industriously sucking his coral upon her lap—while Laura was standing by the well-remembered drawing table which I had so often used, with the little album that I had filled for her, in past times, open under her hand. (626)

This pose of Laura's is the figured repetition that Walter tries to repress, but which he allows to surface in spite of himself. She seems to have been extracted from his water-color painting and superimposed here, onto the scene of what has now become *his* estate.

He is no longer an outsider and can therefore be the one to restore her not just to the small shelter of the summer-house on their grounds, but to Limmeridge House itself. Significantly, she is placed in what had been a guest's room, occupied by Walter when he was a mere employee. This works to downplay her upper-class legitimacy and augment his own, however disturbingly arranged (i.e., through marriage to an abject imbecile).

Laura is present in the second half of the novel only in her all-important upper-class name, leaving room for her reconstruction by the narrative and by the ekphrastically evoked pictures that reveal her victimhood through the system of women's representation. While objectification is successful in this novel to such a degree that the heroine does the male viewer the favor of erasing the specifics of her own image and providing a blank canvas on which he can configure his own fantasy, the hyperbolic terms in which *The Woman in White* negates the subjectivity of the alluring heroine captured in art and in life seem to beg ironic interpretation. Perhaps because Collins himself had been a painter, as were his father and brother, he is particularly adept at deconstructing the mechanisms by which a woman's image offers the illusion of pure pleasure while attempting to suppress the uncannily threatening lack at its heart.[44] Laura's portrait of her own absence and her subsequent still-life transposition onto different scenes in the narrative mocks the fantasy of the totality and comfort of patriarchal power, and enables her to exit, in an essential way, the repressive confines of the patriarchal visual field and leave in her stead a veritable paper doll.

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[44] Collins's father, William Collins, was a successful Royal Academy painter of the Reynoldsian tradition. Collins's first book was a biography of his father, and a defense of his somewhat bland style. For more on the relationship between Collins's work and his father's paintings, see Scott McEathron, "Romantic Portraiture: The *Memoirs of William Collins* and *The Woman in White*," *Victorians Institute Journal: Victorian literature, art, and culture* 25 (1997): 7-28. Wilkie's brother, Charles Allston Collins, was (unofficially) a Pre-Raphaelite painter and writer, and, in 1860, became the first husband of Dickens's beloved daughter, Kate.

## The Mid-Victorian Magic Portrait, Looking Forward

In this early stage of the ekphrasis of uncanny portraits, the stirring of life within them is evident in the ways mid-Victorian novelists signify the spirited presence of their heroines within their portraits. The "living force and truth" with which Dickens imbues Lady Dedlock's targeted image is made almost parodically manifest in the vividly sensational image of Braddon's "beautiful fiend," Lady Audley, while Collins mocks the idea of visually "capturing" a woman, particularly a Victorian-style heroine, with the vacuity he calls attention to where a living image ought to be. These various treatments of the framed female image all seem to criticize, as Mulvey does in 1975, the patriarchal mechanisms of capturing women and claiming mastery over their narratives. Mulvey's sirens are frozen victims of the male pleasure-seeking gaze; in contrast, the mid-Victorian heroines discussed in this chapter can struggle within their frames, as Lady Dedlock seems to; "fire" back—literally—in Lady Audley's case, as the flames in her portrait become her weapon; and subvert the systems that underpin patriarchal constructs, as Laura Fairlie does in freeing herself from the frame altogether and leaving in her place the gaping vacancy that exposes the delusions of fantasy and unimpeachable male power. These heroines are able to react from within their frames, mobilizing a narrative force that Mulvey's model cannot comprehend in what she sees as the static pose inherent in women's *to-be-looked-at-ness.* Ekphrastically evoked pictures prove their ability to convey "living force" and narrative force, in defiance of mid-nineteenth-century conceptions of the division of labor between the visual and verbal arts as well as of certain twentieth-century second-wave feminist figurations of women's repression. This medial, social, and theoretical sophistication of fiction writers continues to develop in the period so that the figures within the magic portraits discussed in the next chapter will be more violently alive than these, and will take yet more forceful command of the narratives in which they appear.

# CHAPTER TWO

# WRECKING OEDIPUS: EMBODIMENT, SPECTATORSHIP, AND NARRATIVE PERVERSION IN MAGIC PORTRAIT FICTION OF THE 1880S

Unlike the mid-century heroines of Dickens, Braddon, and Collins, the women in Margaret Oliphant's "The Portrait" (1885), Thomas Hardy's "An Imaginative Woman" (1888), and Henry James's *The Aspern Papers* (1888, 1908) use the dynamics of representation and spectatorship to challenge Victorian insistence on women's submission in domestic, economic, and sexual affairs.[1] In defying such social repressions, these characters also resist allocation to the objectifying realm of the portrait. Oliphant's is the only one of these stories, in fact, to place a heroine within a portrait, but at such a perch that she is able to escape its boundaries. Her self-liberation signals, in the trajectory of this project, an opportunity to turn to literary magic portraits that present male characters on compromising display. Hardy's and James's stories embed just such images in narratives that interrogate the exchanges between pictured figures and their diegetic viewers. In redefining previously gendered positions of viewer and object, each of these texts refutes the notion that within traditional narratives, female characters serve mainly as icons, obstacles, or prizes with males as active agents. The women in these stories gain narrative control through their facility with images, subverting in the process the oedipal formula of narrative and introducing plots that adhere to women's desires.

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[1] Margaret Oliphant, "The Portrait: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen," 1885, in *Selected Short Stories of the Supernatural*, ed. Margaret K. Gray (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1985), 125-161; Thomas Hardy, "An Imaginative Woman," 1888, in *The Distracted Preacher and Other Tales*, ed. Susan Hill (New York: Penguin, 1979), 305-330; Henry James, *The Aspern Papers*, 1888, 1908, in The Turn of the Screw *and* The Aspern Papers (London: Penguin, 1986), 43-142.

As my first chapter draws from early feminist film theory to better understand mid-Victorian instances of ekphrastically evoked portraits whose figures are subtly but restlessly stirring within them, this chapter finds critiques subsequent to Laura Mulvey's landmark essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) particularly helpful in understanding the alternative dynamics between image (as literary portrait) and spectator (as character) these fin-de-siècle stories proffer. [2] Rather than masochistically accept objectification or identify with a normative masculine gaze as Mulvey purports, these female characters assert their right to various viewpoints, including ones of ironic identification and, conversely, scopophilic indulgence. These new figurations align in various ways with models of representation and spectatorship developed by scholars like Mary Ann Doane, Miriam Hansen, Teresa de Lauretis, and Linda Williams who write in response to Mulvey. The pictured character, Agnes, in Oliphant's story, for instance, uses her role as "mere" visual object to manipulate the male characters and advance her own agenda. From within her enlivened image, she invokes the "masquerade" of femininity theorized in 1929 by Joan Riviere and later elaborated by Doane. The masquerade "constitutes an acknowledgement that . . . femininity itself . . . is constructed as mask," allowing a woman to "[use] her sex or . . . her body for particular gains" (Doane, 138; 139).[3] Having died prematurely, Oliphant's heroine longs to be freed from her metaphysical entombment in the portrait and reinstated among the living. She uses her painted figure and the desire it incites in several living bodies to achieve her goal of lasting corporeality.

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[2] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 1975, in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 833-44.

[3] Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," 1929, in *Psyhcoanalysis and Female Sexuality*, ed. Hendrik M. Ruitenbeck (New Haven: College and University Press, 1966); Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator," 1982, in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 131-45.

Hardy's story reverses the frequent gendered hierarchy of portrait gazing by placing a male (though feminized) poet within a photograph[4] whose viewer is an unhappy but soulful woman intent upon communing with the imaged figure. She succeeds, becoming pregnant with the portrait's child. In reversing the roles of subject and object, Hardy is able to explore the diverse libidinal reactions the traditional (i.e. still normatively repressed) female spectator can have to a desirable male figure. Ella Marchmill, being a poet herself, but also a dissatisfied wife, identifies with the pictured poet but is also deeply attracted to him. She slides between the kind of "trans-sex identification" Mulvey describes in her 1981 essay, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,'" where, through temporary regression to an active, pre-oedipal stance, women identify with a male hero, and what Hansen describes as a particularly female perspective in her 1986 article, "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship."[5] Hansen writes that images of men such as those of Valentino in early cinema (men who are feminized or marked as "other" in some way) that are offered for a desiring female gaze "articulated the possibility of female desire outside of motherhood and family, absolving it from Victorian double standards; instead, they offered a morality of passion, an ideal of erotic reciprocity" (598). Both Ella Marchmill and her fantastically evoked lover evidence such reciprocity (although they themselves are not aware of it) in a manner that supports Hansen's model. Hardy is careful not to have Ella simply move from a relation of identification to one of desire. In

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[4] As this is the first photograph to be discussed in the dissertation, its medial difference will be discussed at length later in the chapter. The Epilogue will further refine its distinctions from painting and cinema.

[5] Laura Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)," 1981, in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. Sue Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 122-130; Miriam Hansen, "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship," 1986, in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 584-601.

nuancing her vacillation between these relational modes, Hardy, of the three Victorian authors here discussed, presents the most extensive account of the psychical stakes of female spectatorship as they are later theorized by feminist film scholars.

The last story addressed in this chapter, James's *The Aspern Papers*, offers a version of the female spectator at her most sadistically triumphant. Juliana Bordereau not only takes pleasure at will from the fantastical portrait of her old lover, the poet Jeffrey Aspern; she also protects her history and Aspern's "papers" from the narrator, who is one of the many parasitic editors who badger her for these "treasures." In her utter control over Aspern's rare portrait, she in some sense returns us to the simpler binarism of Mulvey's sadomasochistic model of spectator-image relations, but with woman assuming the power that had seemed unavailable to her, and man, then, as victim, captured in paint. James goes a step further, though, and has the portrait secreted into the male narrator's possession at the end of the story, suggesting he will take Juliana's place as master of the imaged figure. In this way, James shatters the notion that spectatorial pleasures are neatly determined by anatomical sex, correcting to some small degree the essentialism inherent in theoretical models based on this difference. In short, the stories in this chapter, all written within three years of each other, take us from women breaking out of their metaphorical capture in paint (Oliphant), to enclosing a male object in a frame for an ambivalent female viewer (Hardy), to having representatives of each sex variously engage with a man fantastically trapped in his own image (James).

In addition to offering successful positions for women to claim in the dynamism of image and viewer, the texts in this chapter have another and more distinctive similarity: they all inject the body into this heretofore visual and psychical realm. One criticism of Mulvey's original essay is that rather than account for any actual, material spectator, she theorizes the unconscious of all film viewers as oppressively similar. Linda Williams writes of how psychoanalytic theory, in severing the psyche from the body, has "giv[en] rise to the concept of an abstract 'visual pleasure' grounded in a

voyeuristic gaze whose pleasure presumes a distanced, decorporealized, monocular eye mastering all it surveils but not physically implicated in the objects of its vision."[6] Models of female spectatorship like Hansen's (of Valentino's actual fans) demonstrate how a perspective theorized in terms of specific viewers corrects the fallacy of the disembodied gaze. Hansen first reminds us of the theory that while men are considered more visual by nature, women are more tactile. She continues: "If such generalization is at all permissible, women might be more likely to indulge—without immediately repressing—in a sensuality of vision which contrasts with the goal-oriented discipline of the one-eyed masculine look" (590).[7] Hansen's work (and others') demonstrates how a focus on woman-as-viewer reveals a broader range of senses engaged in visual perception than that for which cine-psychoanalysis had originally allowed.

Bringing the body into spectatorial dynamics also gets beyond the reductive binary of powerful viewer vs. victimized figure within the image, as Williams's critique indicates it should. In his recent study, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses*, William Cohen writes of how "An emphasis on interiority and sensation can circumvent a fixation on discipline and surveillance."[8] He encourages consideration of modes of embodied visuality, beginning with the figurations to which the unique nature of the eye

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[6] Qtd. in Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 59, n. 33. Sobchack is quoting from an unpublished manuscript by Linda Williams, "The Visual and Carnal Pleasures of Moving-Image Pornography: A Brief History," which was incorporated into the Epilogue for the 1999 edition of Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). The phrasing Sobchack quotes is not included in that reworking.

[7] It's important to note that she does not mean to condone an essentialist ideology. "If I seem to belabour this notion of an undomesticated gaze as a historical aspect of female subjectivity, I certainly don't intend to propose yet another variant of essentialism. To the extent that sexual difference is culturally constructed to begin with, the subversive qualities of a female gaze may just as well be shared by a male character" (590).

[8] William Cohen, *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 25.

lends itself: "rather than considering the eye as the source for a circuit of disciplinary power between the Panoptic tower and the prisoner in his cell, we can, in the context of Victorian materialism, understand it as both an orifice—an opening into the body—and a tactile surface for drawing together the subject and object of sight" (25).[9] Though Cohen's approach does not engage with film-based theories of such spectatorship, his model highlights the intrinsic breaking down of the rigid binaries of power and access to the look with far-reaching consequences. As the sharp distinctions between panoptic gazer and captured object fall away, so, too, do the divisions between distance and proximity, masculinity and femininity, activity and passivity, seeing and being seen. These binaries dissolve, enabling not just vacillations between positions of subject- and objectivity, but a fluctuating coexistence of heretofore contradictory positions. The relation between viewer and image becomes a kinetic circuit rather than a disproportionate opposition. This development is vital because it moves beyond the biases of earlier feminist arguments that privileged women's tactility in an effort to empower female film-goers who experience visual and narrative pleasure at the cinema distinct from that of Mulvey's disenfranchising model. More recent scholarship alert to the exclusions and inadequacies inherent in theories that rely on narrow definitions of gender and sexuality rightly assert that any viewer can have multiple senses mobilized in spectation. Laura U. Marks's work on haptic visuality emphasizes the importance of a

[9] Cohen's move away from a Foucauldian model distinguishes his work from celebrated studies of the history of vision like Jonathan Crary's. Crary explains how optical gadgets like the stereoscope and phenakistoscope attested to the new subjectivity of vision and its inextricable link to the observer's body. He writes, "The body that had been a neutral or invisible term in vision was now the thickness from which knowledge of the observer was obtained. This palpable opacity and carnal density of vision loomed so suddenly into view that its full consequences and effects could not be immediately realized" (150). This realization would involve new mechanisms for controlling subjects in the modern world. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992). See also Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

non-essentializing vocabulary for fully comprehending the subversive potential of the synthesis between touch and sight:

> There is a temptation to see the haptic as a feminine form of viewing; to follow the lines, for example, of Luce Irigaray that "woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking" and that female genitalia are more tactile than visual. While many have embraced the notion of tactility as a feminine form of perception, I prefer to see the haptic as a feminist visual strategy, an underground visual tradition in general rather than a feminine quality in particular.[10]

While the female characters in these late-Victorian tales engage in perception that unites the visual with the tactile, the male characters also respond with several senses to both female and male figures. It is therefore in Marks's sense—as "a feminist visual strategy"—that these stories deploy image perception that is inseparable from physical stimulation.

Vivian Sobchack provides an apt theorization of and terminology for embodied viewing in her essay, "What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh."[11] Criticizing post-1970s film theory's aversion to bodily responses to the cinema, she describes physical sensations during rapt film viewing—her own, as well as those of film reviewers who describe their bodies being moved and touched "as if" they themselves were within the diegesis. She explicitly elevates to a rigorous theoretical level film viewing that is alert to reciprocity and physicality. Sobchack names the tactilely stimulated spectator "the *cinesthetic subject*," a term that combines *cinema* with the sensorial stew of *synaethesia* ("an 'involuntary experience in which the stimulation of

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[10] Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 7. She is quoting Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 26.

[11] Sobchack, 53-84.

one sense cause[s] a perception in another'"[12]) and *coenaesthesia* ("the potential and perception of one's whole sensorial being," often "used to describe the general and open sensual condition of the child at birth") (67-69). The cinesthetic subject thus experiences a film with more senses than sight, more interpretative means than abstract cognizance. She writes,

> the cinesthetic subject both touches and is touched by the screen—able to commute seeing to touching and back again *without a thought* and, through sensual and cross-modal activity, able to experience the movie as both here and there rather than clearly locating the site of cinematic experience as onscreen or offscreen. As a lived body and a film viewer, the cinesthetic subject subverts the prevalent objectification of vision that would reduce sensorial experience at the movies to an impoverished "cinematic sight" or posit anorexic theories of identification that have no flesh on them, that cannot stomach "a feast for the eyes." (71)

Certainly this phenomenological account, which owes much to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception, speaks to a range of levels of physical reaction to image viewing. The radically cinesthetic subject seems most likely to emerge, however, in a fantastic rendering of the exchange between viewer and image such as is presented in the stories I discuss below. These Victorian tales offer the reader a privileged view of a character as a cinesthetic subject actively engaged with a figure within a fantastic portrait, an image that impossibly features animation and turns what was once a mere fetish object into a recognizably active subject. In Oliphant's "The Portrait," our narrator describes his seduction and physical manipulation at the hands, so to speak, of the alluring portrait. In Hardy's "An Imaginative Woman," the cinesthetic subject is the melancholy wife who communes with a portrait to the point of conceiving a child that is the "spitting image" of the pictured face. And in James's *The Aspern Papers*, we have two cinesthetic subjects: the male narrator who is shown a portrait of the poet he idolizes by the poet's old

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[12] Sobchack quotes this definition from Richard E. Cytowick, M.D., *The Man Who Tasted Shapes: A Bizarre Medical Mystery Offers Revolutionary Insights into Emotions, Reasoning, and Consciousness* (New York: Warner, 1993), 52. Sobchack, 67.

mistress, and that mistress herself. She sexually gratifies herself with the picture, gasping as she presses it "face down" into her lap, while the narrator forges a relationship with the portrait that is not only visual and tactile, but also auditory (James, 110).

There is one other feminist critique of Mulvey's argument that these stories presciently heed, and that is the call to corrupt narrative development itself, which structuralists had observed to be not only patriarchal but specifically oedipal. Roland Barthes most influentially identified the links between traditional narrative and the story of Oedipus, but numerous literary and film scholars like Peter Brooks, Stephen Heath, and de Lauretis have persuasively corroborated the evidence.[13] De Lauretis is particularly helpful in outlining what is at stake in feminist challenges to this norm.[14] She writes, "Barthes's discourse on the pleasure of the text, at once erotic and epistemological, . . . develops from his prior hunch that a connection exists between language, narrative, and the Oedipus. Pleasure and meaning move along the triple track

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[13] Barthes writes, in his 1966 introduction to a special issue of *Communications* on the structural analysis of narrative, "It may be significant that it is at the same moment (around the age of three) that the little human 'invents' at once sentence, narrative, and the Oedipus" (124). In his later analysis of *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes asks, "Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origins, speaking one's relationship to the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred?" (47). His early essay is reprinted in Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives" in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 79-124; Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).

[14] Oedipality seems capable of referring to different things, depending on circumstances and writer. It can be interpreted as broadly as a search for origins, as narrowly as a working through of the incest taboo. Teresa de Lauretis gives ample support for the claim via her own analysis and a survey of other commentators' points: "any imagistic identification and any reading of the image, including its rhetoric, are inflected or overlaid by the Oedipal logic of narrativity; they are implicated with it through the inscription of desire in the very *movement* of narrative, the unfolding of the Oedipal scenario as *drama* (action). Can it be accidental, I ask, that the semantic structure of all narrative is the movement of an actant-subject toward an actant-object (Greimas), that in fairy tales the object of the hero's quest (action) is 'a *princess* (a sought-for person) and *her* father' (Propp), that the central Bororo myth in Lévi-Strauss's study of over eight hundred North and South American myths is a variant of the Greek myth of Oedipus? And that even the circus act of the lion and lion tamer is semiotically constructed along a narrative, Oedipal trajectory?" (79). Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

he first outlined, and the tracking is from the point of view of Oedipus, so to speak, its movement that of a masculine desire" (*Alice*, 107). Apart from being about "searching for one's origins, speaking one's relationship to the Law" (Barthes, *Pleasure*, 47) and taking the place of the father, oedipal narrative is also "situated within the system of exchange instituted by the incest prohibition, where woman functions as both a sign (representation) and a value (object) for that exchange" (*Alice*, 140). Because such ordering had seemed intransigent, Mulvey had urged feminists to reject narrative outright and develop alternative modes of cinematic expression. While her call resulted in a robust (if marginal) avant-garde cinema, feminist theorists quickly realized that in ceding narrative to men, they were relinquishing too much. De Lauretis proposed that feminist cinema (and literature and scholarship) not seek "the destruction of narrative and visual pleasure," as Mulvey initially called for, but rather be "narrative and oedipal with a vengeance, working, as it were, with and against narrative in order to represent not just female desire . . . but the duplicity of the oedipal scenario itself and the specific contradiction of the female subject in it."[15] Her more inclusive system implicitly encourages not just an articulation of narratives "cut to the measure" of woman's desire,[16] but ultimately, a profusion of narrative and visual systems that can honor more kinds of difference than just that of sex.

In creating a reciprocal, cinesthetic gaze that often originates with a female character, Olphant's, Hardy's, and James's stories subvert oedipal narrative and lay new

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[15] Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 108.

[16] This phrase originally appears in Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure," as part of what de Lauretis calls a "marvelous sentence . . . which sets out practically all the specifications—the terms, components, and operations—of the cinematic apparatus: '*cinematic codes* create *a gaze*, *a world*, and *an object*, thereby *producing* an *illusion* cut to the measure of *desire*'" (*Alice*, 59; italics de Lauretis's). That desire has been, according to oedipal logic, masculine. De Lauretis calls for a feminine desire to guide narrative, rather than an acceptance that narrative must follow patriarchal law.

tracks for subjectivity and desire to follow, guided by the fluidity inherent in fantastically figured, embodied spectatorship. As they pursue new avenues of narrative and visual pleasure, each of these stories also follows a traditional narrative logic in at least one sense: they all end in contemplation of their ekphrastic portraits, which reinforces the narrative power of these images as they retroactively structure and motivate plot developments from the start. Brooks explains in his definitive work on *Reading for the Plot* that "beginnings are chosen by and for endings. The very possibility of meaning plotted through sequence and through time depends on the anticipated structuring force of the ending" (93). While Oedipus's relation to desire, language, and plot is undermined in these stories, narrative cohesion is effected through the animating force of the portraits. Frozen feminine spectacle has given way to innate narrativity; these portraits are all mobilizing plot, interacting with characters, and fulfilling women's desires by uniting visual with other sensorial pleasures while taking Oedipus to task along the way.

## Oliphant's Domestic Fantastic: Jocasta and the Rebirth of Matriarchy

Margaret Oliphant's 1885 supernatural story, "The Portrait: A Story of the Seen and the Unseen," enacts de Lauretis's dictum to embrace narrative and oedipality "with a vengeance" when re-deploying women's images for feminist effects. The story offers at its center an alluring portrait of a young woman whose spirit is fantastically infused within the image. Oliphant demonstrates how a screened heroine can wield profound narrative power, how an ostensibly still, iconic image of her can function as what de Lauretis calls "the *narrative image* of woman—a felicitous phrase suggestive of the join of image and story, the interlocking of visual and narrative registers effected by the cinematic apparatus of the look" (*Alice*, 140). At the same time, de Lauretis points out, a woman's image may represent narrative closure, "the fulfillment of the narrative promise

(made, as we know, to the little boy)" (140). In motivating the narrative with her heroine's desires, Oliphant redefines closure; the animated image itself on a journey, the very motor of narrative progress rather than mere destination. In reassigning the active role of "the figure of narrative movement, the mythical subject" to Jocasta instead of Oedipus while ironically maintaining her as "the figure of narrative closure," with the mother's portrait supplying itself as the final image of the story, Oliphant's tale rewrites *the* founding narrative myth as an alternative tale of origins *and* as a send-up of oedipal overdetermination (*Alice*, 144).

Oliphant may seem a strange candidate to accomplish this proto-feminist reversal of the oedipal logic of narrative where a female character's desires govern the plot. She has often been considered antifeminist, in fact, owing in large part to the conservative critiques she published in *Blackwood's*, particularly her infamous essay, "The Anti-Marriage League" (1896), which rails against Hardy's contemptuous presentation of marriage and sexuality in *Jude the Obscure*.[17] However, several critics have recently worked to dislodge this pigeon-holing of Oliphant, specifically citing the subversive work of her supernatural tales. The genres of the fantastic and the marvelous are excellent choices for radically revising structural mainstays of a culture because they allow a writer greater play in exploring scenarios that are foreclosed and desires that must stay repressed in realist scenarios. As Leila Walker notes in her recent essay, "Ghosts in the House: Margaret Oliphant's Uncanny Response to Feminist Success," Oliphant "used her ghost stories to create a safe rhetorical space in which to explore a shifting relationship between gender, power, property, and space" (178).[18] In "The Portrait," not only does

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[17] Margaret Oliphant, "The Anti-Marriage League," *Blackwood's Magazine* 159 (1896): 135-149.

[18] Leila Walker, "Ghosts in the House: Margaret Oliphant's Uncanny Response to Feminist Success," in *Antifeminism and the Victorian Novel: Rereading Nineteenth-Century Women Writers*, ed. Tamara Wagner (Amherst, NY: Cambria, 2009), 177-195.

the heroine propel the narrative from within her life-imbued image; she also interferes in the social and economic structures of patriarchy: she aids her husband's oppressed tenants and helps bring an end to his outmoded feudalism. Her personal goal of achieving reincarnation involves contestations of each of the entities Walker mentions—"gender, power, property, and space"—as she gains control of her son, her husband, the household, and their estate.

As a lost mother, the portrayed woman could easily have served as her counterparts did in the earlier works of Dickens, Braddon, and Collins, trapped, surveiled, and overcome by the male characters that gaze at her. But this instance of ekphrastic portraiture is a repetition with a major difference: she's already dead, and therefore *un*contained—liberated—in the fantastic realm, and she seeks rebirth. To achieve this aim, she "masquerades" in Doane's sense of actively pursuing her private agenda while hiding behind the "decorative layer" of hyperbolized femininity found in her image (Doane, 138). Having died in childbirth, she is depicted in the painting as a rather young woman. Her now-adult son, Philip, who has enjoyed what he assumes to be a privileged surveillance of her painted features, falls easy victim to her manipulation as she exploits his scopophilic pleasure and forcefully reactivated oedipal desire. Her spirit steps out of the painting to capitalize on her son's physicality. During three distinct possessions,[19] all of which include, to some degree, her metaphorically sexualized penetration of his body, she makes Philip confront his father about taking in a young woman—the mother's cousin's daughter, who is identical to her in name and appearance. This summoned doppelgänger serves as the new, permanent vessel of the elder Agnes's spirit, having escaped the confines of the ostensibly dead canvas. From portrayed figure

[19] Brooks demonstrates how "repetition by three constitutes the minimal repetition to the perception of series, which would make it the minimal intentional structure of action, the minimum plot" (99). Oliphant, it would seem, is following traditional narrative formula as closely as possible to best expose its inadequacies. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

to "flesh and blood" character, Agnes proves her superior understanding of oedipal desire and the vulnerabilities of the voyeur. Philip feels heroic as well, but is comically deluded, as his mother has determined his actions and his fate, including his marriage to his cousin/mother. Oliphant has empowered the "unseen" but palpably present woman to play upon and subvert the patriarchal dynamics of the oedipal triangle, which Freud would not formally theorize for at least a decade.[20]

While many Oliphant critics agree with this feminist reading of the story, Penny Fielding arrives at the opposite conclusion, writing that the tale "explicitly problematises the figure of the female ghost, whose power is entirely dependent on the surrogacy of the male. Philip's response to his mother's portrait emphasizes her immaturity and thus her powerlessness. She is 'the white-robed innocent creature, to me no more than a child'" (208; qtg Oliphant, 136). Philip may see his mother *as imaged* as an immature, powerless victim, but we do not; his observation is the result of his naïve gaze and poor interpretive skills. He admits, after all, to being "possibly somewhat dull . . . by nature" (126). Meanwhile, Agnes displays cleverness and great facility in setting her agenda in motion, while Philip can get nothing done on his own. We might as well say that *he* "is entirely dependent" on being made "the agent" of his mother, on the authority and leadership of the female. When he first arrives at home and wishes to argue the case of their poor tenants to his father, he admits that he does not know what to say. "I could but hope that, at the moment of broaching [the subject], words would be put into my mouth" (132). What he manages to say is essentially a targeted version of this plea, asking his father to play ventriloquist to his dummy: "I am doing nothing; my time hangs heavy on

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[20] I must point out that Penny Fielding first places "Oliphant at the beginning of the movement [psychoanalysis] that was to revolutionise twentieth-century thinking" (208). She notes, "One of the most interesting recent developments in this field has been to turn the tables on Freud and to explore not what his theories can tell us about texts, but how nineteenth-century texts, in particular mainstream narrative forms like the novel, influenced Freud's views on the formation of the ego and its circuitous journey toward death" (209). Penny Fielding, "Other Worlds: Oliphant's Spectralisation of the Modern," *Women's Writing* 6, no. 2 (1999): 201-13.

my hands. Make me your agent" (133). His father naturally scoffs at this suggestion. As this is also the moment when the fantastic portrait arrives, Philip's mother is able to seize upon this request and exhaust Philip with work.

The full-length portrait, reported by the servant to be "a speaking likeness," is from Agnes's recently deceased cousin (the father of the young Agnes, we later learn) (134). Philip describes the painted beauty for us: "a very young woman—I might say a girl, scarcely twenty—in a white dress," (of course,) with a complexion of "dazzling fairness, the hair light, but the eyes dark" and "a little wistful, with something which was almost anxiety—which at least was not content—in them" (135-36). Philip is obviously smitten with the figure, as he describes himself gazing at this "dazzling" beauty who invites "love, confidence, and instinctive affection" from a man like him—a man "full grown and conscious of many experiences" (136). While Philip has already confessed his lack of experience with women and his having "recognized" them merely as part of the "economy of nature," he assures himself (and attempts to assure the reader) that he nonetheless has adequate sexual knowledge to respond appropriately in this visual exchange; he tries to assume with confidence the pleasures of the voyeur that patriarchy would traditionally grant him, particularly as a man of thirty, possessed of mature virility but also rightfully matched (society would say) with one young enough to "scarcely" be a woman (126, 137). In competitive contrast, as if conscious that the portrayed figure may be "sizing up" her options—both in soliciting arousal and evaluating the results—he points out that his father is only an "old man" (136). But what he identifies for us without registering its significance (as he is bragging of his mastery of coded knowledge) is the fact that this is not a young woman at all, but rather, an "impersonation of tender youth" (136). Within the unfolding story, he of course means she is mere representation rather than embodied subject; as the retrospective narrating voice, though, he means something quite different. As an enduring presence within an enchanted portrait, she is not a frozen entity, petrified in paint. She is not actually young, just as she does not have

"actual beauty" (136). She is virtual but not virtuous in the sense of innocent maidenhood. She is, after all, a mother of a thirty-year old man, and "conscious" of more "experiences" than our narrator is. But as this fact chafes against the purity he would like to assign to her, he obscures acknowledgement of it.

His father somewhat cruelly withholds the information that this is a painting of his mother, which enables us to assess Philip's instinctual reaction to the portrait, one devoid of the complex psychical taint of his knowing this to be his own mother. Once he learns her identity—the internal cry of "My mother!" erupting as its own paragraph—he reacts somewhat hysterically, which is a fitting response when what should be a repressed desire is so abruptly and involuntarily unveiled: "a sudden laugh broke from me, without any will of mine: something ludicrous, as well as something awful, was in it. When the laugh was over, I found myself with tears in my eyes, gazing, holding my breath. The soft features seemed to melt, the lips to move, the anxiety in the eyes to become a personal inquiry" (137). Confronting the young, desirable figure now as his mother, Philip experiences fear and embarrassment, which mingle with the attraction he has been openly describing to his father. His laughing and crying give way to a plea projected onto his mother's expression for care and protection. What he previously noted in her as generalized anxiety becomes focused on his well-being in "a personal inquiry." He has confessed, without meaning to, his oedipal desire for his mother to his father, and understandably seeks consolation from her, acknowledging her to be at once the object of his desire and the subject he wants to please so she will not leave him again.

In this iteration of the family, as becomes clear, the mother is the one with true authority, so she is a good choice of ally for Philip. It is his unlikely sensitivity to the experience of the mother that helps make this story both proto-Freudian and proto-feminist. Gazing at the seemingly enlivened portrait (or is it "the water in [his eyes]" that makes her expression change?), he wonders, "What did she ask, looking at me with those eyes? what would she have said if 'those lips had language'?"—quoting Cowper but also

channeling Irigaray as well as the famous question of Freud's that necessitates a critical response: what does a woman want? (136, 137).[21] Philip recognizes her individuality as a *particular* woman and the rightful reciprocity in her looking back at him. He also intuits that the mystery of her desire could be cleared up—at least partly—if she could speak freely, seizing authority in words as well as images.

Philip ostensibly never had the chance to work through his oedipal phase with his mother dying shortly after his birth, making his newly kindled desire for her quite strong. He tells us he wishes there were "some thread, some faint but comprehensible link between us" (137), a material connection that would physically bond mother and child as in, perhaps, the retraction device of the *fort*/*da* game,[22] or, earlier still, an umbilical cord. Such a physical link will be made, but Philip will have no control over its tension or slack. He expresses this regressive wish "with a curious vertigo and giddiness of my whole being in the sense of a mysterious relationship, which it was beyond my power to understand" (137). That the relationship will develop beyond his comprehension is an

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[21] The Cowper is from his poem,"On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture" (1798), which opens: "Oh that those lips had language! Life has pass'd/ With me but roughly since I heard thee last." William Cowper, "On the Receipt of my Mother's Picture," in *The Complete Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. H.S. Milford (London: Henry Frowde, 1905), 394-396. The Freud question is reported by Princess Marie Bonaparte as something he said during an analytical session. See Alan C. Elms for an interesting account of the particulars that motivate the question, most notably, his daughter's decisions to be a full-time psychoanalyst and to reject marriage in preference of a life partnership with Dorothy Tiffany Burlingham. Alan C. Elms, "Apocryphal Freud: Sigmund Freud's Most Famous 'Quotations' and Their Actual Sources," in *Sigmund Freud and His Impact on the World*, ed. Jerome A. Winer and James William Anderson (Hillsdale, NJ: The Analytic Press, 2001), 83-104. The Freud quote first appears in Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud: Life and Work , Vol. 2* (New York: Basic Books, 1955), 421. For Irigaray on feminine language, see Luce Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together," in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 205-218.

[22] In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud explains that he has observed a one and a half year old child play one game constantly: the boy has a wooden reel with a string tied to it, and he throws the reel over the side of his cot, making it "disappear," while holding onto the string. He seems to cry "fort" when he does so, which is German for "gone," and "da" ("there") once he pulls the reel back up. Freud theorizes that the child's game helps him manage his pain at his mother's occasional absence by making himself seem in control of disappearances and returns. See especially pages 12-17, Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, trans and ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Co.), 1989.

understatement. The work of the portrait will not only be to link its spirit with his body, but also to expose how his desire simplistically collapses various female roles into one symbolic one, much as a more famous vertigo sufferer would do under Hitchcock's direction.[23] This condescending collapse is evident when Philip foolishly and rather amusingly pities his mother as a "poor child . . . as if she had been a little sister, a child of mine" (137), placing her in every possible incestual relation to himself without a hint of the consciousness of transgression. To add to what Brooks calls the "generational confusion" that is at the heart of the Oedipus myth, Philip's father remarks, "She is like my—my granddaughter . . . and she is my wife" (137-38).[24] His simile excuses him from engaging with her, which he confesses he fears, but it also importantly forbids Philip's desire for her, skipping right past *his* generation and making her either Philip's mother *or* Philip's daughter, never sister or wife (or cousin). Philip has already accepted the appeal of a sister or daughter, though, making adherence to the aged father's taboos less likely.

Weakening of the father's authority is evidenced also by Philip's willingness to challenge his father regarding his callous business practices after a poor tenant, carrying her infant (a phantom-like presage of the mother's nearing presence), begs Philip, "Oh, speak for us" (132). The family's eternal servant warns Philip, "Master's—not one to be

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[23] *Vertigo*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, perf. James Stewart, Kim Novak, and Barbara Bel Geddes (Paramount, 1958). Oliphant, though, parodies Scottie's voyeurism and fetishism; her Agnes will absurdly be replaced with another, identical Agnes; no performance necessary. Philip *will* have to "create" a replacement Agnes, as Scottie has to to transform Judy into Madeleine, but Philip will do so in a fantastically maternal way: he will simply deliver Agnes to her identical replacement body. Creation for him is a kind of procreation.

[24] The "generational confusion" of Oedipus is highlighted by Peter Brooks as he glosses Lévi-Strauss on the matter. "As Claude Lévi-Strauss has argued, the Oedipus myth may be 'about' the unsolvable problem of man's origins—born from earth or from parents?—a 'chicken or egg' problem that finds its mythic 'solution' in a story about generational confusion: Oedipus violates the demarcations of generations, becomes the 'impossible' combination of son/husband, father/brother, and so on, subverting (and thus perhaps reinforcing) both cultural distinctions and categories of thought" (*Reading*, 9-10).

managed," but Philip rejects the admonition (142). A moment later, his father more forcefully announces the inexorability of his authority: "My law is fixed" (143); but that he needs to proclaim this at all is proof of its vulnerability. There is always a threat to the father from the son; what neither man expects is that power will be usurped by a woman, and, ultimately, by modernity itself. Further into the story, Philip gives us a familiar definition of patriarchal law as rooted in "the Gospel according to Adam Smith," and he reports that its "tenets" are becoming "less binding" (148). By the time Philip narrates his tale, the father's outmoded properties will have been torn down and replaced with modern streets lined with "mean little houses" (125). (Philip might be more enlightened than his father regarding gender, but his class prejudice remains strong. Oedipus is king, after all.)

When father and son leave the drawing-room, where they've "hung [the painting] low, so that she might have been stepping into the room," they lock the door behind them without quite knowing why (140). Several nights later, as each man is in his own study, the narrator undergoes his first assault from the spirit of his mother. It begins with Philip hearing the drawing room door opening and closing. Though Philip has not seen his mother step out of her painting, he has visualized this movement for us several times by repeating that the painting was placed so as to facilitate such an exit for its subject.[25]

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[25] His description of her disembodied movements according to the progression of sounds he hears is not unlike a sequence from another Hitchcock film and another "woman's narrative" that centers on a portrait: *Rebecca*. Tania Modleski describes the scene and its very relevant psychoanalytic dynamics expertly: "the ghost of Rebecca delights in playing what the novel aptly calls 'practical jokes.' Indeed, on one level, Rebecca may be seen as an elaborate castration joke. Rebecca flaunts her 'lack,' making her absence vividly present when the hero and the spectator least expect it. In one scene, in particular, the camera pointedly dynamizes the woman's absence. When Maxim tells the heroine about what happened on the night of Rebecca's death ('She got up, came towards me, etc.'), the camera 'follows' Rebecca's movements. Most films, of course, would have resorted to a flashback at this moment, allaying our anxiety over an empty screen by filling the 'lack.' Here, not only is Rebecca's absence stressed, but we are made to experience it as an active force" (41). Tania Modleski, "'Never to Be Thirty-Six Years Old': *Rebecca* as Female Oedipal Drama," *Wide Angle* 5, no. 1 (1982): 34-41. *Rebecca*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, perf. Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine (Selznick International Pictures, 1940).

And yet, he fears her coming—hence the locked door. In several ways, including this inspiration of desire and fear, she signifies the phallic mother endowed (perhaps) with penis, breasts and the powers of both sexes. Philip's reactions to her spirit always vacillate between these emotions, and understandably so. Her possessions of him combine violence with pleasure, assault with consent. As she enters his room and then his body, he feels as though his

> whole being ha[s] received a sudden and terrible shock. The sound went through my head like the dizzy sound of some strange mechanism, a thousand wheels and springs, circling, echoing, working in my brain. I felt the blood bound in my veins, my mouth became dry, my eyes hot, a sense of something insupportable took possession of me. (145)

While he experiences these sensations of sound, taste, temperature, and so on, he reports later that the picture of his mother "had been faintly showing in my imagination from time to time, the eyes, more anxious than ever, looking at me from out of silent air" (146). Philip is a cinesthetic subject in the extreme, hearing a multitude of sounds, even from a silent screen. The pleasurable image is also so available to him in his visually inclined masculinity that he can summon it to accompany the physical stimulations that place his mother inside his head, her locale being evidenced by the circular echoes (feminine in shape and mythic reference) that he hears. This triggers the rest of his body to respond according to its own physiological instincts. The amalgam of visions and sensations is the result of the portrait's long-confined spirit unleashed on him, combining his visual pleasure with her fantastically augmented tactility to the point that she penetrates him as a matter of course. But this is a troubling scene of cinesthesia; Philip has enjoyed gazing at his mother's image and even fantasized about her coming to life, but he has not agreed to be ravaged in this manner, barring an over-generous interpretation of the terms of his request to be put to use.

He lies down, trying to settle himself, but can only succumb to the force that thrusts itself upon him and inside him. He describes the "extraordinary rush of

sensation" as a "thumping and throbbing of this wild excited mechanism within, like a wild beast plunging and struggling . . . like a maddened living creature making the wildest efforts to get free" (145-46). As the crescendo approaches fever pitch and he fears being "moved . . . to shout aloud," its momentum is checked when Philip "seem[s] to see a movement, as if someone was stealing out of sight," and he follows as if tethered to her, as he had earlier wished (146). She leads him "To look at the picture?" he wonders, "But no; I passed the door of that room swiftly, moving, it seemed, without any volition of my own" (146). He is taken, instead, to his father's study. Philip relates, "My sudden appearance alarmed him," using an ambiguous syntax that at once refers to "the unseen" mother making *her* appearance and to the en*tranced* Philip making an unexpected entrance. Philip's ravished state causes his father to exclaim, "Philip, what have you been doing with yourself?" (146), indicating the sexual frenzy his body has been through and implicitly reminding him of the taboo on masturbation ("You are not a boy, that I should reprove you; but you ought to know better" (147)). But Philip does not respond to his father. His—or rather Agnes's—orgasmic experience takes precedence over all else, and the sight of the father seems necessary for seeing it through.

> I sat down on the nearest chair and gasped, gazing at him. The wild commotion ceased, the blood subsided into its natural channels, my heart resumed its pace. I use such words as mortal weakness can to express the sensations I felt. I came to myself thus, gazing at him, confounded, at once by the extraordinary passion which I had gone through, and its sudden cessation. "The matter?" I cried; "I don't know what is the matter." (147)

That quiescence doesn't come until a final feminine gasp and gaze at her old lover supports the hypothesis that this ferocious "beast" had been the manifestation of Agnes's long-repressed libido gushing forth rather than Philip's. She displays in this extended sequence not only a woman's vigorous sexual desire—itself a Victorian taboo—but also, in her final gaze, a woman's right to sexual looking.

In describing his experience as one of "mortal weakness," Philip seems to acknowledge its blatant sexuality, even as he simultaneously owns it ("I came to myself")

and disowns it ("I was independent of it all the time, a *spectator* of my own agitation" (visualizing again)) (147; italics mine). He achieves self-possession only by the expenditure of energy that his mother's spirit (and image) rouses in him, an experience at once coital and masturbatory. This confusion of the shared body with two agents can make Philip both a mere "spectator" to the sight of his mother traumatically re-embodying herself by usurping his body and its physiological responsiveness, and participant as the "wild beast" of *his* desire also strains to break free. Philip's disowning of both—the body and the beast—could easily be a ploy to save face to his readers, or even to himself. His narration suggests he is attempting to preserve an image of himself as not only sexually experienced but also properly reserved according to upper-class Victorian standards, as opposed to barely managing to contain an animal lust.

His ambivalent syntax in his last statement to his father ("I don't know what is the matter") indicates the vastness of his confusion, covering physical, psychical, and ontological grounds. Materiality itself confounds him. Having undergone a transformative sexual experience, Philip seems to become one of Brooks' "epistemophilic" subjects who "postulat[e] that the body—another's or one's own—holds the key not only to pleasure but as well to knowledge and power" (*Body*, xiii).[26] As Philip has been sharing his body and also his will with a foreign spirit, he seems likely to be uniquely privy to a certain kind of phenomenological and ontological knowledge. But this epistemophilic theory is a fallacy, and, instead, Philip is temporarily bereft of all indications of the demarcations of "matter" and spirit.

Despite his avoidance of mentioning the image during the possession, immediately afterwards Philip looks at the portrait in the drawing-room, but not directly; he goes outside to view it through the mediating and protective veil of the large window

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[26] Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

it hangs opposite. He marks again how his mother seems to be stepping down into the room and "looking for the life which might have been hers" (149). As this is the second time Philip has proposed the notion that his mother wishes to claim the years of domestic life that were stolen from her, this motivation on her part seems more likely, although the thick Philip does not directly connect his mother's picture, or her searching gaze, with the force that had overtaken him. Despite his mother's image accompanying it, he assumes his supernatural experience is not rooted in her new presence in the home because he is made to visit his father instead of the drawing-room. The fact that she does not lead Philip to the portrait confounds the reader a bit, as well, but only as to the mother's motive, not her role in his orgasmic episode. Oliphant's dramatic irony is such that we can't help but see that his mother is behind his possession, having made him her agent.

Because of the lengthily developed sub-plot of the tenants' conditions, it may seem like his mother has selflessly returned to help Philip in his altruistic quest to better the lives of the less fortunate, and therefore makes him confront his father again. But the father is concealing a series of letters that beg him to take in the suddenly-stranded second Agnes, we find out toward the end of the story. The mother's desire to help this girl may also seem selfless, but is ultimately revealed to be in service of her own desires. In fact, getting Philip and his father to help the girl *and* the tenants turn out to both be related to her ultimate aim—which is to take possession of her double, to take up a permanent tenancy, as it were, in the body of the new Agnes, and preside over the family's domestic and economic affairs as she should have been doing these many years.

Her second assault on Philip's body begins in the same manner as the first. He reports, "my heart sprang up with a bound, as if a cannon had been fired at my ear" (150). Again, the orifice of his ear is the initial target of his mother's energy, but this assault will be figured differently. Philip alters his metaphor of the "wild beast" to complicate the dynamics of the sexualized exchange. As opposed to the initial ravishing onslaught,

for which Philip had no defense, this time, he knows to some degree what to expect, and tries to resist. He relates,

> I was like the rider of a frightened horse, rendered almost wild by something which in the mystery of its voiceless being it has seen, something on the road which it will not pass, but wildly plunging, resisting every persuasion, turns from, with ever increasing passion. The rider himself after a time becomes infected with this inexplainable desperation of terror, and I suppose I must have done so: but for a time I kept the upper hand. (150)

In this figuration, Philip is both horse and rider: on the one hand, struggling against an external force that some part of him mysteriously senses, and on the other, trying to discourage the sensitivity and responsiveness of his excitable body. The spirit of his mother here remains at a distance as the something strange on the road, the sight of which arouses the "wild beast" that he now ascribes to his own libidinal and instinctual body. Philip tries to maintain rational control, but ultimately resigns himself to the bodily stimuli: "I tried to work myself into indignation; but all through these efforts I felt the contagion growing upon me, my mind falling into sympathy with all those straining faculties of the body, startled, excited, driven wild by something I knew not what" (150). He again experiences the ravages of lust, but this time the libidinal energy expended seems to be his own. His mother's approach first stirs his blood, so she is figured as responsible for his arousal, but she also seems to remain external to him, as she is figured as a contagion "upon" him rather than inside him. It also seems more likely that this time, his mother is doing him the favor, for after the wild struggle with the metaphorical animal between his legs, he asks repeatedly, "What do you want me to do?" (151). After a calming reverie, he feels as though he is being "drawn by someone whose arm was in [his]" once again to his father's study. This time, though, he goes "with an utter consent of all my faculties to do I knew not what, for love of I knew not whom. For love—that was how it seemed—not by force, as I went before" (151). His mother's seduction of him has been successful; he is devoted to "whomever" it is that brought him such intense release, but he will not admit the obvious, that it was his mother. While he was not given

the chance to work through his oedipal desire in childhood, he has still been raised with full awareness of cultural taboos. Philip's intense denial by this point is utterly comical, particularly to a post-Freud audience. He tells his father, while under this second possession, "I am not here of my own will. Something that is stronger than I has brought me. . . . Some one—who can speak to you only by me—speaks to you by me; and I know that you understand" (152). Why he can't name her seems only attributable to his refusal to acknowledge that he is communing in these orgasmic possessions with the young woman he finds so captivating in the portrait. He already unwittingly exposed his attraction to her at the portrait's unveiling; to tell his father the image has been upgraded in his mind to a fantasy of physical and psychical penetration would be unthinkable, even to someone as obtuse as Philip.

There is evidence, though, that he has had to admit to himself that his mother is his metaphysical lover, in that in his third and final possession, he says he experiences nothing but terror "beyond description" (155). He asserts that he is being used as "a helpless instrument without any will of mine, in an operation of which I knew nothing; and to enact the part of the oracle unwillingly, with suffering and such strain as it took me days to get over" (155). In the previous episode he was moved to fully consent with his body's use as a host and to do so out of love. Now, he regresses to a position of total ignorance and victimhood—at least until he sees the young Agnes sitting outside his father's study. This regression would suggest that his mother is still the "phallic mother" with the real power in the household.

The young Agnes Philip encounters in the hallway differs from the painted Agnes only in that she is "clothed in black from head to foot, instead of the white dress of the portrait. She had no knowledge of the conflict, of nothing but that she was called for, that her fate might depend on the next few minutes. In her eyes there was a pathetic question, a line of anxiety in the lids, an innocent appeal in the looks" (159). The girl, who has conveniently materialized in the home simply because she was "called for"—presumably

by the ever-effective spirit of the elder Agnes—seems a vacant drone, possessing only enough autonomy to tacitly pose a "pathetic question": perhaps Philip's, "What do you want me to do?" She never speaks in the story, or even moves of her own volition. Clearly, she will serve a purpose similar to that which Philip has, but his mother's occupation of this new, female body will be permanent.

Seeing her provides Philip instant awareness of what to do, and he proudly takes action, bringing this replica of the painted woman to his father as proof of his mission. His father, shocked at the sight of the double, screams, "Agnes!" and loses consciousness, believing she is his wife come to escort him to heaven. He is not "recovered" until "after a few days," but this symbolic death has effectually castrated him; he loses all claim to the phallus, to law, and to language. He becomes a kind of replacement phantom, idling the hours quietly in the drawing-room. Philip tells us, "he was willing enough afterwards to leave the management of that ticklish kind of property which involves human well-being in my hands, who could move about more freely, and see with my own eyes how things were going on" (160). Naming the superiority of his eyes, his rightful claim to a masterful gaze, Philip has become "the agent" of his father, as he had initially desired, taking charge of the estate, but also of that other rental property, the "ticklishly" vivacious body that now houses his mother's spirit. Or rather, he *thinks* he assumes power due to the myth of masculine mastery of the visual field, but we know that throughout the story, his mother has determined what is "seen and unseen." His gaze only discerns what she wishes to reveal. Likewise, his claim to power is undermined, but he seems untroubled by the evidence of this or its likelihood.

Philip quickly advances the narrative at this point to tell us of his and young Agnes's happy nuptials. The mother has used her son's oedipal vulnerability to make him challenge his father, fulfill her physical needs as both receptacle of energy and agent of her plans, and deliver her to the living world again, right where she had left off: as a new wife. Things even seem improved this time around. For one thing, she is relieved of

having an all-needy infant to tend to. She has also replaced her conservative and much older first husband with a sympathetic and sensitive younger one. She knows she will always be his perfect object, as she remains with him as the new "Agnes," but is always inaccessible as the real object of his desire within the portrait, which instantly becomes the keeper of his secret. Even though it hangs in plain sight, displaying the true object of his affection, the portrait "is supposed by strangers," he tells us, to be "that of my wife; and I have always been glad that it should be so supposed" (161). This is not surprising, as he would not consciously invite others to recognize the incestuous nature of his erotic life. This way, he can fetishize the portrait without anyone knowing it figures the phallic mother. He is also safe from the threat of his mother's further wielding that power from the disembodied position of which she made such effective use.

The ending offers a partial explanation as to why this story has not been more aggressively recuperated by feminist critics, as I think it should be. In achieving re-embodiment, Agnes may seem to relinquish the pervasive power of the "Unseen" for the chance to live out the life of the "angel" in the house, but the story demonstrates that neither position is true to type. A real "angel" in the house would be a ghost-like figure, blessing the inhabitants while keeping out of their way, but as a roaming spirit, Agnes is insistently disruptive and sexually transgressive. As an embodied woman, she wears the "decorative layer" of the metaphorical angel of the domestic, but the narrative has revealed her to be a woman of powerful intellect and sensuality who prefers carnal privileges to spiritual abstraction. The narrative provides further reason to believe Agnes's power is reified through the conventional veneer of the ending: Philip tells us that Agnes has "her peaceful throne established under the picture" (160), announcing a new reign of the feminine in this reconfiguration of the oedipal triangle. Agnes rewrites Oedipus's tragedy as Jocasta's triumph, where she has traded in the stuffy, old patriarch for the young, manipulable son. She does away with shame and punishment in preference of a simple and wonderfully obvious ruse. Philip may feel as though he has

passed through the oedipal stage of development, but he has, in fact, quite happily married his mother and been suspended forever by her in the mirror stage. And no conflict arises from this taboo union, as it is sanctioned by his father and society because of his mother's clever use of a double—a substitute body to hide in, that looks, amazingly, exactly like herself.

Oliphant delivers what de Lauretis calls for from true feminism: "a rewriting of our culture's 'master narratives'" (*Technologies*, 113). In taking on Oedipus, she also criticizes Victorian devotion to Greek texts. As Dale Kramer reports in her survey of Oliphant's comments on the classics, "Oliphant's firm verdict is that relying on classical myths is 'one of those affectations of the age.'"[27] She hates how "The Greeks deal always with the action of Fate, depending on a dread of 'unseen influence which leads to crime' and a 'whirlwind of ruin.'"[28] In rewriting Oedipus, complete with her own version of an "unseen influence" that works toward a *positive* outcome, Oliphant demonstrates what a feminist redeployment of this myth can look like. After all, an alternative script for Jocasta might be the best place to begin a tradition of women's narrative. At the same time, she shows the absurdity of adhering to such a closed system of development by implicating almost every heterosexual figuration of incest within the family, as Philip consciously figures Agnes as his mother, wife, sister, and daughter. In this way, her parody urges its readers to move altogether beyond the "affectations" of classically narrow domestic relations.

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[27] Dale Kramer, "The Cry that Binds: Oliphant's Theory of Domestic Tragedy," in *Margaret Oliphant: Critical Essays on a Gentle Subversive*, ed. D.J. Trela (Selinsgrove, PA; London: Susquehanna University Press; Associated University Presses, 1995), 157-58. Kramer is quoting from Margaret Oliphant, "New Books," *Blackwood's Magazine* 123 (June, 1878): 701.

[28] Kramer, 155. Here she quotes from Margaret Oliphant, "The Ancient Classics," *Blackwood's Magazine* 116 (September, 1874): 372.

## Fantastic Reciprocity in Hardy: The Poetic, the Pyrrhic, and the Perverse

In Thomas Hardy's "An Imaginative Woman," the titular character is not confined to a portrait. Instead, she is repressed by her conventional marriage to a man who typifies the patriarch. William Marchmill is a successful gunmaker—not only *having* power but producing its major symbols and devices—"and his soul was in that business always" (305). He is unfeeling and pragmatic, in contrast to his wife: "An impressionable, palpitating creature was Ella," "an imaginative woman" "of very living ardours" (306, 313). Ella is "best characterized by that superannuated phrase of elegance 'a votary of the muse'" (305-06). She reads and writes poetry and lives it ethereally in her "daydreams" and "night-sighs" (306). Under the pseudonym John Ivy, she submits poems for publication, but very few are accepted. As "the only daughter of a struggling man of letters" (Hardy, 309), Ella's inclination to write seems already entwined with the complications of her womanly "habit" of "trans-sex identification" in imitating her father's model; her Romantic temperament is likewise suggested to be, perhaps, genetic (Mulvey, "Afterthoughts," 125).

Critical treatments of this story tend, oddly, to ignore Ella's masculine alter-ego; however, the duality of her subjectivity seems integral in interpreting her relationship with the portrait of the respected poet, Robert Trewe. Prior to the outset of the narrative, an editor has united Ella (*as* Ivy) and Trewe on a single page in a journal, where their similarly themed poems harmoniously reside. Ella has been a keen follower of Trewe's rise in the literary world, intensely admiring his craft and passion while coveting his talent and success. The story opens with Ella's husband having unwittingly booked the poet's rooms for the family's holiday by the sea, Trewe having temporarily absented himself so that the property owner, Mrs. Hooper, can secure Marchmill's pricey reservation. Once Ella is informed whose rooms she inhabits, she fixates on her intimate access to the poet, reading his books, donning his clothes, lying in his bed. She indulges

her fantasies easily, as her indifferent husband spends his time yachting, and the children are always with their nurse. Mrs. Hooper tells Ella various things about Trewe, including, eventually, where to find his portrait—in a frame, hiding behind a picture of a duke and duchess. Ella has a kind of seductive séance with the portrait and seems to elicit from it the poet's essence, but she is interrupted by her husband, who unexpectedly desires her. Pregnancy results from this fantastical ménage-a-trois, but Ella never suspects that Trewe could have any relation to the child she carries.

During the vacation and afterwards, Ella tries to introduce herself to the poet but never succeeds. Trewe, never knowing of this ardent admirer, kills himself for want of one; Ella wastes away during the pregnancy, dying in childbirth. So easily brought together in print before the narrative even begins, Ella and Trewe's coincidental desire for union is only successfully realized on the face of their fantastically conceived child. This "transmitted" image is not visible as such until the final sentence of the story, and then, only to the scrutiny of Will Marchmill's coarse gaze, causing him to disown the child: "Get away you brat! You are nothing to me!" (330).

Despite the normativity of woman as scopophilic object, man can easily be framed for a desiring gaze, as mainstream cinema has proven with biblical epics, sports films, and matinee idol vehicles such as the films of Valentino.[29] Steve Neale explains how sexual difference need not determine spectatorial roles, since symbolic castration applies to everyone. "[T]he logic of a fantasy scenario can produce 'male' characters in 'female' positions and vice versa, cutting across the distribution of gender identity constructed at other levels and in other ways by the cinematic text" (126). He adds, more succinctly, that any figure can signify castration so long as it is "specified as lacking, inadequate" (130). As a melodramatic poet, Trewe is feminized several times

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[29] Mandy Merck rehearses this list in discussing Noel Carroll's response to Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure" (14). Mandy Merck, "Mulvey's Manifesto," *Camera Obscura* 66, no. 22.3 (2007): 1-23.

over. Fanciful and sensitive—a bad review helps drive him to suicide—he also lacks proper markers of manhood, like the guns, family, and "squarely shaped sentences" of Will Marchmill (Hardy 306).

And yet, he is still a man; his position is not analogous to what Ella's would be, were she caught in the portrait. Indeed, he fears the vulnerability anyone would be exposed to in this position, telling Mrs. Hooper, "Cover me up from those strangers that are coming, for God's sake. I don't want them staring at me"; but he adds, confident in his right to look, "and I am sure they don't want me staring at them" (315). Trewe begs to be spared subjection to a voyeuristic gaze, but in the latter part of his statement, indicates the power he has from within that frame to surveil and critique in his own turn. He acknowledges a reciprocity—an ability to look out from the photograph with a gaze that is potentially alluring or threatening, but potent, either way. This dualistic position, which he owns matter-of-factly, is so easily assumed because of his sex.

Interestingly, Mrs. Hooper declares that revealing Trewe's photograph to Ella would be sanctioned by its subject, owing to the "good looks" of the woman with whom he would *exchange* looks: "Lord, ma'am," she tells Ella, "he wouldn't mind if he knew it! He didn't think the next tenant would be such an attractive lady as you, or he wouldn't have thought of hiding himself, perhaps" (315). This notion of *mutual* looking between *two subjects* where one is present only via screened image seems possible here precisely because of the characterizations of the subjects involved. The visual dynamics between Ella and the portrayed Trewe are similar to those that Hansen describes between Valentino and his female viewers, where a marginalized but attractive male is offered for the visual pleasure of female spectators, playing upon desires that resonate outside of cultural norms. Hansen writes, "However complicit and recuperable in the long run, the Valentino films articulated the possibility of female desire outside of motherhood and family, absolving it from Victorian double standards; instead, they offered a morality of passion, an ideal of erotic reciprocity" (598). In a footnote, Hansen points out that all but

one of Valentino's lovers in films were mothers, a fact that insists upon this as an alternative model of attraction and narrative desire that strives for fulfillment outside of traditional, oedipal structures. As Ella already has a husband and children and is dissatisfied with them, the connection she seeks with Trewe is not one that would replicate that story. Her desire is for a different relation entirely, one that is multifaceted and even contradictory. As a poet seeking legitimacy, she begs his approval; as a woman recognizing her deficiency *as woman* (in the realm of letters and more generally), she seeks valorization as a desirable object.

Importantly, the potent picture of Trewe is not a painting—a unique, subjective, and artistic rendering of him—but a photograph: the result of a technological process thought to be objective, accurate, and largely unmediated. Photographs, Lynda Nead reminds us, seemed to offer "direct access not simply to an image but to the represented object itself."[30] Photography's empirical qualities paradoxically lent it metaphysical ones, and, by the end of the nineteenth century, encouraged popular enthusiasm for such things as spirit photography, which was thought to provide "visual testimony of life after death."[31] Photography's ambivalent hovering between the material and the metaphysical indicates its ripeness for deployment in a fantastical narrative. Like the cinematic close-up about which Doane has recently written in an "attempt to reassert the corporeality of the classically disembodied spectator" ("Close-Up," 108), the fantastically animate photographic portrait connotes its subject's raw physicality in that it can present "'a nudity of the face much greater than that of the body'" (95).[32] It can offer intense focus

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[30] Lynda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c. 1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 173.

[31] Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 228.

[32] Mary Ann Doane, "The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14 no. 3 (2003): 89-111. Doane is quoting Gilles Deleuze,

on the face's particular features while indicating a "something *beyond*" that is like "the very revelation of the soul" (96). Ella's experience with Trewe's photograph will make use of these levels of intimate gazing while exploiting its fantastic sensuality, as "the close-up transforms," Doane writes, "whatever it films into a quasi-tangible thing, producing an intense phenomenological experience of presence" while it is "a sign, a text, a surface that demands to be read" (94). Ella will read Trewe's face in combination with his poetry, but the poetry alone cannot conjure the poet; only the photograph offers access to Trewe in this stripped down format that makes available his erotic physicality and his sublimely suffering soul.

Hardy seems to have been well aware of the contradictions of the photographic medium and its potential for signification on multiple levels. In her study, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism*, Jennifer Green-Lewis notes that "photography seems to have been something of an unstable signifier for Hardy. As a symbol of realism, it suggests the limits of empiricism; regarded, alternatively, as a romantic practice or symbol of the potency of representation, photography transcends the borders of its frame" (78). Similarly, Mark Durden writes of Hardy, "if his remarks on the art of fiction might use photography as a metaphor for inert and lifeless mimesis, reading his fiction reveals a much more rich reflection on photography."[33] Durden refers not only to "An Imaginative Woman," but also to many of Hardy's poems and his novel *A Laodicean* (1880) as examples of Hardy's habit of fantastically linking photographs with their referents.

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*Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 99.

[33] Durden quotes Hardy from his notes and notebooks as reported in Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 153; 177; 229; Mark Durden, "Ritual and Deception: Photography and Thomas Hardy," *Journal of European Studies* 30 no. 1 (March 2000): 58.

Durden also turns to J. Hillis Miller for support, who establishes this motif of a transmissible spiritual residue in Hardy in a more general sense. "Hardy," Miller writes, "ascribes to human beings the power to imprint themselves on the objects they use, saturating houses, furniture, or musical instruments with their emotions, so that these may be released many years later, even by unknowing strangers. An important special case of this is a transformation of objects which operates only for the entranced vision of a lover" (133). Ella's gaze seems naturally enchanted judging from this early description: "She was dark-eyed, and had that marvelously bright and liquid sparkle in each pupil which characterizes persons of Ella's cast of soul, and is too often a cause of heartache to the possessor's male friends, ultimately sometimes to herself" (306). The "marvelous liquid sparkle" (reminding us, perhaps, of Irigaray's emphasis on woman's fluidity) forcefully attracts the desiring gaze of men, and, also, her own. Ella's main problem, in fact, might be that her own appeal can turn on her, as she vacillates between identifying herself as a desirable object and asserting herself as a subjective authority in her own right. Trewe's gaze also seems marvelously enhanced, as Mrs. Hooper tells Ella that he is "more striking than handsome; a large-eyed thoughtful fellow, you know, with a very electric flash in his eye when he looks round quickly, such as you'd expect a poet to be who doesn't get his living by it" (315). Their heightened optical energy facilitates Ella's and Trewe's connection, even though Trewe's eyes are only accessible via the photograph. Miller reminds us that "the object of love for Hardy is never desired in a direct encounter of one person with another, but is always approached indirectly, in one form or another of mediated access" (121). It is not despite but rather because of the mediation of their longing looks by the photograph that the "marvelous" evocations of their gazes effect a connection, and, more than that, a Frankensteinian blending of her liquidity with his striking electricity, resulting in the spitting image of Trewe on Ella's subsequent son's face.

The mediation of this photographic screen between the lovers suggests that Ella is a cinesthetic spectator, psychically interacting with the image so intensely that she incites its penetration of her.[34] *As* that cinesthetic subject, however, she enacts a female spectatorship that vacillates between an identification with the normative male gaze—where she temporarily sees herself in his image as a poet—and desiring to be the feminine, passive object of the charged gaze the poet emits from his picture. This shifting is first theorized by Freud, who writes: "there is only one libido that serves both the masculine and feminine functions [active/passive]" and that "regressions to the pre-Oedipus phase very frequently occur; in the course of some women's lives there is a repeated alternation between periods in which femininity and masculinity gain the upper hand."[35] This account of the wavering quality of the female libido is germane in the works of feminist film theorists like Mulvey and de Lauretis who will be helpful in illuminating Ella's various relations to Trewe.

She first identifies with him as a fellow poet and hero of his own story. She considers him her "rival"—a word used four times to describe him in focalized narrative—and therefore wishes to imitate but ultimately supersede him as a "rising poet" (311). Her identification with this masculine point-of-view is borne out in Mulvey's terms of putting on "borrowed transvestite clothes" quite literally ("Afterthoughts," 125). She examines the contents of his closet, "possessed of her fantasy," and puts on his mackintosh and cap. "'The mantle of Elijah!' she said. 'Would it might inspire me to

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[34] Ken Ireland reports of the scene where her husband comes to bed, "in a cancelled passage of the MS [Ella] pushes the picture down as far as she could reach with her toes," which more explicitly and decidedly less romantically indicates a vaginal and uterine trajectory for the photograph's energy (64). Instead, Hardy leaves the picture under the pillow during the Marchmills' lovemaking, "crackling" under Mr. Marchmill's head all night (319). Ken Ireland, "Trewe Love at Solentsea? Stylistics vs. Narratology in Thomas Hardy," in *The State of Stylistics*, ed. Greg Watson (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Rodopi, 2008), 61-73.

[35] Qtd in Mulvey, "Afterthoughts," 124 and 123 respectively. She is quoting from Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," *Standard Edition*, vol. XXII (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964).

rival him, glorious genius that he is!" (313). This identification with him, imitation, and wish to be his sacredly anointed successor is always her first reaction when thinking of him, suggesting the depth and authenticity of her literary aims and investment in her own subject position. These feelings always give way, though, to a second reaction, as she recognizes her difference—both in the quality of her poetry and in her sex. Following her outburst while wearing the coat and hat, her feminine body undermines her active ("masculine") aspirations as she becomes a feminine leaking vessel. "Her eyes always grew wet when she thought like that, and she turned to look at herself in the glass. *His* heart had beat inside that coat, and *his* brain had worked under that hat at levels of thought she would never reach. The consciousness of her weakness beside him made her feel quite sick" (313; italics in original). Even while gazing at herself wearing these garments, she places herself outside of them, indicating some "Trewe" phantom that rightfully inhabits his spaces, preventing the maintenance of a pleasurable identification.

The pattern of Ella's identification turning to the despair of abject difference is established earlier when she spends hours studying Trewe's poems, "vainly attempting to rival some of them, till, in her failure, she bursts into tears" (312). Recognition of her poetic insufficiency and sexual difference invariably brings her to a third reaction, one of personal, romantic attraction outside the masculine sphere of letters. She seems to rationalize this resignation not as defeat but as inevitable submission to his palpable allure. "The personal element in the magnetic attraction exercised by this circumambient, unapproachable master of hers was so much stronger than the intellectual and abstract that she could not understand it" (312). After several reflections like this, she determines she is falling in love with him, a condition that would permit her to own a passive, feminine role, rather than struggle to assert herself as credible "masculine" rival. While the intensification of her attraction to Trewe seems natural, the cynical narrator assures us that although Ella feels herself to be in love, "all that moved her was the instinct to specialize a waiting emotion on the first fit thing" (312-13). The narrator at least grants

her, though, that the "chancing material" of Trewe is "of a quality far better than chance usually offers" (313). The "chancing" material of Trewe is also far more appealing than the life she has "Willed" herself to. Ella's "living ardours," we are told, "were beginning to feed" on the various manifestations of Trewe in the rooms. The metaphor of feeding is apt, as it attests to the variously sensory nature of her mediated experiences with him and how they offer nourishment she does not otherwise receive.

When Ella learns where to find Trewe's photograph, her husband is conveniently expected to be away until the following day. Knowing she can savor her time with the portrait, she anticipates its unveiling in the evening "with a serene sense of something ecstatic to come," when the romantic potential of the encounter can be maximized with the soft sibilance of "silence, candles, solemn sea and stars outside" (316). Ella's postponing of the final revelation by indulging in "the subtle luxuriousness of fancy" demonstrates the picture's narrative power and increases its erotic potency (316). She works up to the unveiling of the photo like a striptease, which Barthes equates with classical narrative development, as it is "concerned precisely with the nature of temporality and its erotic rendering" (Nead, 190). As the portrait is the *raison d'etre* for the narrative, its revelation will naturally be drawn out for pleasurable purposes. Brooks writes, "The 'eroticization of time,' as a factor of human sexuality, . . . presides at the creation of narrative temporality. This temporality, like a force-field of desire, impels both fictive persons and real readers forward in a search for possession and truth, which tend to coincide in the body of the object that finally stands in the place to which desire tends" (*Body,* 20). Brooks couldn't be more fortuitously aligned with Hardy's example, where the narrative is headed toward a revelation of Trewe *as* truth. But Brooks also reminds us, in quoting Charles Pinot Duclos, "that truth is female, and naked, and that it is thus 'from a secret love of Truth that we pursue women with such ardor'" (*Body,*

34).[36] Hardy has reassigned the gender roles, instilling Ella with "very living ardours" as she seeks to know Trewe through Brooks' combination of visual pleasure and epistemophilia (Hardy, 313). She will strip the photograph of its royal disguise and its frame, and attempt to elicit the very essence of "Treweth."

Hardy insists upon this as a male strip-tease for Ella's erotically charged gaze rather than as a scene for the reader to linger over Ella's own denuding. Her attentions to her own body in preparation for the sensual evening are emphatically understated; they include only "getting rid of superfluous garments and putting on her dressing-gown" (316). There is undoubtedly some coyness in the vagaries of superfluity, but it is not played upon; her undressing is decidedly not a spectacle or a durational striptease "with a strong narrative element . . . created by the removal of layers, the gradual revelation and the viewer's waiting and longing to see" (Nead, 190). The reader may pause to picture this attractive female anticipating a romantic liaison, but the prose discourages all detail. We are identifying with Ella and therefore more curious what Trewe looks like, how his "electrified" eyes will project from his portrait. The only further information we get about her physicality regard her hair and face, and those only in their relation to the magnetized items around her that seem imbued with Trewe's essence.

Before revealing the photograph, Ella rereads some of his "tenderest utterances," calling forth his love with his own language (316). Then, she takes the photo from its frame, noting Trewe's "striking countenance" with "luxuriant black mustache and imperial"—the last adjective referring to his style of beard but also to his authentic nobility of spirit in contrast to that of the pedestrian royals whose commercial image he

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[36] Brooks is quoting Charles Pinot Duclos, *Oevres complètes de Duclos* (Paris, 1820-21), 9:424. He supports Duclos' claim when he first introduces it in his first chapter. He writes, "We have only to think of representations in painting and sculpture to acknowledge that Truth, in our culture, is indeed a woman. She may be naked, or she may be veiled, in which case the veils must be stripped away, in a gesture which is repeated in countless symbolizations of discovery, which will often give a narrative similar to Duclos' 'pursuit.' In a patriarchal culture, uncovering the woman's body is a gesture of revealing what stands for an ultimate mystery" (12).

had been hiding behind (316). His eyes prove indeed large and dark, and show "an unlimited capacity for misery" (316), which can elicit Ella's compassion as she imagines the extraordinary depths of sorrow from which her love, perhaps, could recover him. But the next clause suggests her ambivalence and fear, as well: his eyes "looked out from beneath well-shaped brows as if they were reading the universe in the microcosm of the confronter's face, and were not altogether overjoyed at what the spectacle portended" (316-17). This could simply be an objective description of the photo, a testament to Trewe's general disappointment with the modern world, but it could also represent how Ella interprets the image as responding to *her* "confrontation" of it. After her observation of his expression, "Ella murmured in her lowest, richest, tenderest tone: 'And it's *you* who've so cruelly eclipsed me these many times!" (317). Her first address to the photo, then, is as a jealous rival facing her foe—not, as her romantic preparations indicated, as a lover whose gaze she's been imagining all day. In a subject-to-subject confrontation, she addresses him as one poet to another. Her identification gives way, again, though, to a resignation to her role as love-object, one with which, historically, she has had more success than that of poet.

"As she gazed long at the portrait she fell into thought, till her eyes filled with tears, and she touched the cardboard with her lips" (317). For the third time, her defaulting to a traditional feminine position results in her moistened eyes, and now, a kiss. She seems to be drawing him out of the photograph with liquid tactility, the previously identified "magnetic attraction" between them working reciprocally to merge her responsive body with the site of its stimulation. She feels momentarily guilty for indulging her sexual impulses toward "a stranger in this unconscionable manner," but feels justified when she thinks that she and Trewe have "the self-same thoughts and feelings" (317). She thinks, "He's nearer my real self, he's more intimate with the real me than Will is, after all, even though I've never seen him" (317). Identification and desire are sublimely conflated here, as the lovers are "self-same" but also "intimate."

And in an instance of name signification typical of Hardy, Ella's proclamation indicates that instinctive nature is superior to willed behavior, her marriage requiring of her a strong "will" in both a husband enormously confident in his masculine power, and in her own labor to be a "good" wife and mother to a family for whom she does not much care. No doubt her name being derived from a Latinate feminine pronoun implicates all women to some degree in this characterization. Hardy's story seems to dramatize woman's desire as it responds to masculine "Will" and a "Trewely" "picturesque heart" (319).[37] And while the narrator is quite cynical, scholars like Ken Ireland remind us of the likelihood that Hardy's own devotion to a married poet is the inspiration for the story, which indicates that Hardy is not mocking Ella as much as the narrative voice might at times suggest.[38]

Once Ella sanctions her romantic séance, she lies back on Trewe's pillow and rereads some of his "most touching and true" verses, again inviting the embodied interaction of touching "Trewe," and sensing Trewe's touch. Lying with his photo on the bed, she then reads the fragments he has fervently scribbled on the walls, "the thoughts and spirit-strivings which had come to him in the dead of night, when he could let himself go and have no fear of criticism" (318). His uninhibited effusions are figured here as both lyrical and seminal, uniting Trewe's intellectual and biological creative energy in tandem with Ella's efforts to elicit multiple aspects of his romantic nature. Her success is suggested by the embodied vitality the inscriptions assume. Even the least of his lines is "so intense, so sweet, so palpitating, that it seemed as if his very breath, warm and loving, fanned her cheeks from those walls, walls that had surrounded his head times

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[37] When Will sees the portrait, he teases, "A friend of yours? What a picturesque heart!"

[38] Ireland writes, referring first to the duke and duchess that hide Trewe's image, "royal couple overlaying poet echoes the narrative palimpsest of the Marchmill/Trewe plot overlaying another private, covert plot, Hardy's own . . . personal subtext: his attraction to a married woman, the writer and poet, the Hon. Florence Ellen Hungerford Henniker, concealed beneath the fictional text of the Ella/Trewe relationship" (64-65).

and times as they surrounded her own now" (317). His intimate utterances have assumed an embodied life, "palpitating" in sync with her own nature, and conjuring his own mouth's answer to her kiss with a breath. Ella seems to be experiencing a quintessential cinesthetic moment, feeling her body "as only one side of *an irreducible and dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity* that has as its other side the figural objects of bodily provocation on the screen" (Sobchack, 79), where the screen is both the photograph from which his face can emerge and the walls that whisper his poetry to her in pulsating breaths, his "spirit striving" with intense, fantastical energy to reach its unknown object. His is the condition of the cinematically screened hero, able to communicate his desires in heightened language and close-up shots, but only through pre-recorded means; he cannot know his audience or her level of responsiveness. This tragic ignorance only adds to his appeal for his spectator.

While she is experiencing his body as if it were beside her, she also considers it merged with her own, in a confounding blend of identification and desire. She mimics his actions in inscribing what she thinks of as his "'Forms more real than living man,/ Nurslings of immortality'" on the wall (319):[39] "He must often have put his hand so—with the pencil in it. Yes, the writing was sideways, as it would be if executed by one who extended his arm thus" (317). In enacting his movements, inhabiting the very coordinates of his arm's curve in an improvement upon her earlier imitation in the rain coat, she evidences the vacillation theorized as an innate part of female subjectivity, by turns identifying with her screened hero, then wishing to elicit his desire in response to her own. From imitation, indeed, back to desire—a fantasized and fantastical exchange as "her hair was dragging where his arm had lain when he secured his fugitive fancies:

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[39] This quote with which she describes Trewe's lyrical fragments is appropriately from Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound* I.748-49. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts*, 1820; 1839, ed. G. Lowes Dickinson (London: J.M. Dent and Co., 1898), 38.

she was sleeping on a poet's lips, immersed in the very essence of him, permeated by his spirit as by an ether" (318). Where temporality has denied their union, spatiality generously compensates. Their fugitive fancies, which, for both require linguistic artistry and deep passion, are sought in the same intimate space. She is both outside his body, feeling his lips against her—all of her, in an Irigarayan example of woman having "sex organs more or less everywhere"—while also being inside his movements and his "essence."[40] He is also, though, inside *her* now, his "spirit" having successfully "striven" to at least one of its goals, even if he remains unconscious of its particular object or its success.

This mystical erotic union is cut short by the "heavy step" of Ella's husband. She hurriedly "slip[s] the photograph under the pillow just as he [flings] the door open with the air of a man who had not dined badly" (318). After being assured she is not ill, Will kisses her and explains his unexpected return: "I wanted to be with you to-night" (318). It's as if Ella's fantastically heightened arousal has unwittingly summoned her rightful partner, not unlike the effect that Emma Bovary's "irresistible" allure following a passionate tryst has on her husband, Charles, who finds her newly "delicious."[41] Hardy's narrative next whisks us with Victorian discretion to the following morning, sparing us the incongruously crude intercourse Ella has with an otherwise gorged Will and preserving the sublimated version of intimacy from her cinesthetic union with the pining Trewe. In complicity with this narrative weighting, the poets' romantic exchange

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[40] Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 28.

[41] Peter Brooks discusses this effect in the fourth chapter of *Body Work*, entitled "The Body in the Field of Vision," as part of an extended study on the ways in which the body in literature bears the marks that reveal its narrative. Emma Bovary's body, this section argues, is almost impossible to represent because there is no authentic romantic core within Emma toward which the narrative can aim—it's all derived from other textual accounts of romantic experience (92). Ella's body is fairly abstract as well, but the real look of her desire is in the portrait and on her child's face at the end of the story. Those images bear the inscription of Ella's desire, which drives the narrative throughout.

proves its staying power, providing Trewe "nursling immortality" in the child conceived that night. Though desperately forlorn, Ella senses this physical link without knowing what it means. While he is ever the "rival talent," he is also the man "to whose person she was now absolutely attached" (320). "Person" in this use is an insistently material term, supporting the notion that a fantastical crossing of the senses has taken place, implicating Trewe's body in the exchange. Ella's encounter with various screens that present Trewe—his portrait and the papered wall that bears his nocturnal inscriptions—has been unaccountably charged to produce—reproduce, in fact, Ella and Trewe in one being. Neither will live to see this offspring, proof of the connection they both psychically strive to make.

The poetry Trewe writes after the Marchmills' departure is described by a fatuous painter friend as "rather too erotic and passionate . . . for some tastes" (323). The volume is entitled, "Lyrics to a Woman Unknown," indicating his aching awareness through some sixth sense of a soulful lover's presence and absence. His suicide note evidences the tragic failure we expect from Hardy, as he confesses that he cannot continue in his "present existence" without a woman "tenderly devoted" to him. He writes, "I have long dreamt of such an unattainable creature . . . ; and she, this undiscoverable, elusive one, inspired my last volume" (325). He wishes no blame be ascribed to any particular woman for his death, as his focus has been "the imaginary woman alone" (325). We may never see Trewe in his own room, but his fantasies of this woman have undoubtedly played out in the same theater as Ella's. She has "imprinted" herself on the objects there, "saturated" them with her emotions, as he had done before her. This reversal of positions enacts not only a successive mapping of their bodies onto each other's traces, but the merging of their imaginary registers across time. They are each aware of being at separate ends of some fraught romantic tether, but without the ability to bring their respective objects into close proximity. He cannot because he simply has no idea who his imaginary woman is; but Ella has several options. She tries

to visit him, and she invites him to her house, but both of these attempts fail. She connects with him by letter in the guise of John Ivy, but Trewe is uninterested in forging a friendship with a lesser male poet. In complaining of his bad reviews, Trewe has said that he can take fair criticism, but "it is the misrepresentation that hurts him so" (323). This could easily apply to Ella's decision to hide behind her pseudonym. Had she been truthful in representing herself to him, she could perhaps have saved them both. This would certainly have been transgressive—a married woman writing love letters to a stranger—but also honest, as she would be reaching out to her own "true" nature. They are, after all, "self-same," in her idealized fantasy that permits the identical enough difference to inspire desire.

The ironic revelation of the child's resemblance to Trewe occurs two years after Ella's death. Will Marchmill is cleaning out a desk in preparation for his new wife's arrival. He finds the photograph of the poet in an envelope with a lock of hair that Ella requests from Mrs. Hooper following the poet's suicide. The photo is marked with the date of their stay at Solentsea.

> Marchmill looked long and musingly at the hair and portrait, for something struck him. Fetching the little boy who had been the death of his mother, now a noisy toddler, he took him on his knee, held the lock of hair against the child's head, and set up the photograph on the table behind, so that he could closely compare the features each countenance presented. By a known but inexplicable trick of Nature there were undoubtedly strong traces of resemblance to the man Ella had never seen; the dreamy and peculiar expression of the poet's face sat, as the transmitted idea, upon the child's, and the hair was of the same hue. (329-30)

The portrait's *expression* (as opposed to simply Trewe's features) is copied permanently onto the child's face—rendering him, nameless and illegitimate, a walking reproduction of a portrait that, with tragic irony typical of Hardy, proves the success of Ella's and Trewe's efforts to commune across the ether without either of them knowing it.

Several critics do not see this as a fantastical inheritance, but rather a transfer of Ella's "imaginativeness" to her husband. Kristin Brady writes that "Marchmill

eventually begins out of his own jealous imagination to believe Ella's fantasies, becoming as much an imaginative man as she is an imaginative woman."[42] She continues, "The story's meaning is distorted . . . by the narrator's own willingness to believe in the 'known but inexplicable trick of Nature' which causes Ella's child to look like Robert Trewe" (103). Using the poem "San Sebastian" as evidence, she argues that Hardy partially held to the superstitious belief that would allow for such a transmission, but the narrator is decidedly cynical at every turn, and Marchmill not at all inclined to imaginative fancies *or* jealousy. (At best one could argue that Hardy equivocates in the debate then current about whether a child will look like the man the mother thinks about during its conception or its biological father.)

The story earlier establishes a precedent that children indeed look like their fathers—at least Ella's do. When she seeks solace with them, she feels "a sudden sense of disgust at being reminded how plain-looking they were, like their father" (324). Contrary to cliché, procreation here produces faces a mother *can't* love; fatherhood alone seems to leave its reproductive trace, and that trace seems a prerequisite for parental investment. In a paradoxical reversal, motherhood becomes more dubious than fatherhood, a mother's innate emotional connection to her children the stuff of mere myth. Oedipal dynamics are subverted once again, as this narrative has been entirely "cut to the measure" of Ella's desire, and that desire is wholly disinterested in origins and familial relations. While her plotted actions bring about a new son, he is just an unfortunate by-product of her pursuit of desire's fulfillment. That the story ends on the image of the orphan's face proves, almost literally, Brooks's dictum that narrative desire "to reach the end is the desire to see 'truth' unveiled" (19). And while "truth" here is a subjective inheritance, it does not propagate the oedipal family. The "truth" is that

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[42] Kristin Brady, *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy: Tales of Past and Present* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, Ltd, 1982), 102.

technologically conceived offspring will not develop in a traditional format; this child is on his own. His imprinted expression is a look, we recall, "not altogether overjoyed at what the spectacle" of the future "portend[s]." He is a newly modern subject, bearing ironic—and iconic—witness to the proliferating conscription of the photographic age as it becomes cinematic, as he is himself a moving picture.

## *The Aspern Papers* and Modern Looking

Henry James's *The Aspern Papers* is unique in this chapter in that it interrogates oedipal relations and cinesthetic exchanges between a portrait and *two* beholders, one of whom is the unsavory narrator/literary editor who details his quest to obtain what are assumed to be private letters between his "god," the long-dead Romantic poet, Jeffrey Aspern, and Aspern's now elderly lover, Juliana Bordereau, who is the other cinesthetic viewer (and who also refers to the poet as a "god") (46, 87). Juliana lives in Venice with Tina Bordereau, whom she calls her niece, but who is likely the illegitimate daughter of Juliana and Aspern, as several critics (most notably, Milton Reigelman) have argued.[43] Because Juliana is famously hostile to literary professionals interested in Aspern, the narrator assumes what he tellingly calls a "*nom de guerre*" (52) to become her lodger. Once installed in the decaying home, he attempts to gain access to anything relating to Aspern through casual conversations, manipulative appeals to Tina, and, finally, searching Juliana's room one night, giving her a fatal scare. These tactics provide him with hints about "the papers," but no direct access to them. Tina, to whom the narrator confesses his real aims, seems personally disinterested in Aspern and his personal effects,

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[43] Reigelman writes: "All three women James mentions so early and so prominently [Sarah Siddons, Queen Caroline, and Lady Hamilton] in relation to Juliana bore daughters under suspicious, if not provably adulterous, circumstances. Does this fact not strongly suggest that Juliana also bore a daughter under not quite legitimate circumstances?" (55) Milton Reigelman, "An Unnoticed Clue Turns the Screw in Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*," *Kentucky Philological Association Bulletin* 20, nos. 4-5 (2005): 52-56.

admitting, "I've never looked at any of those things," even though she has "seen them when [Juliana] has had them out" (99).[44] After Juliana's death, the editor assumes Tina will give him the papers since he is much more interested in them than her (in both senses: more interested than she is in the papers, and more interested in the papers than in her); he imagines his feigned romantic interest was kindness enough in exchange for the gift. But Tina is more savvy than this. She freely gives him the portrait of Aspern that Juliana has shown him in an earlier scene, but insists that he marry her to get the papers. The disgusted narrator consults with Aspern in his portrait, who fantastically offers the advice, "Get out of it as you can, my dear fellow!" (135-36), and the narrator flees. The next morning he has a change of heart, but it is too late. Tina tells him she has burnt the letters "one by one"—a detail that draws out her revenge and the narrator's torment in imagining it, adding, "It took a long time—there were so many" (142). The narrator wraps the tale up quickly after this, reporting that "later," he sent Tina a large sum of money, telling her he had sold the portrait on her behalf. He confesses to the reader, though, that he keeps the picture "hang[ing] above my writing-table" (142). In this way, we learn that the portrait has been gazing at him throughout his writing, and is the very reason for, the instigator of, the narrative.

As in Oliphant's "The Portrait," we have an immature, unreliable, adult male narrator fantastically interacting with a portrait of a parental figure, but with two important differences: first, that the figure is only metaphorically parental to the narrator, and second, and of greater consequence, that it is to the male parent that the male narrator is drawn. This creates what William Veeder identifies as a Negative-Oedipal narrative, where the male child feels rivalrous with and murderous toward the mother (Juliana, in this triangulation) so that he may secure the father's affection. Veeder's extensive

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[44] "I've never had them in my hands," she says, indicating the vital role tactile engagement plays in perception and comprehension (99).

analysis of the narrator's archaic and oedipal desires is exemplary in most aspects, but his treatment of the portrait underestimates the extent of its significance. While his article is titled "The Aspern Portrait" and takes as its point of departure the supposition that "the portrait is not the booby prize critics take it for" (23), Veeder only sees the image as valuable to the narrator. "The portrait, for Juliana, is a throwaway," he writes, while the papers of the title "constitute an intercourse . . . that has outlasted the limitations of their bodies," and thus become *her* fetish, too fueled by Aspern's heterosexual virility to be desirable objects to the narrator (32).[45] But Juliana still has a body, and Aspern, a prized representation of one in his "striking" portrait (James, 108). Oddly, Veeder notes that Juliana engages with the portrait sexually, but he maintains that she is disinterested in it. And the "papers," we might point out, are so beyond the reach of the narrative that Jacob Korg can argue that there never really were any to begin with.[46] While I do take the letters to exist, and agree that Juliana is actively attending to their version of her "intercourse" with Aspern, Veeder's dismissal of her body as a sensitive site of engagement seems all too typical of much psychoanalytic and cultural assumption about post-menopausal women. The misogynistic narrator may describe Juliana as ghoulish, and she most certainly is old and infirm, but she is not a disembodied subject, and her relationship with Aspern maintains its physicality until her death.

The notion of the portrait is first introduced by the narrator (long before he mentions letters), who asks Tina if Juliana has got "a portrait of the god," adding, "I don't know what I wouldn't give to see it" (88). Perhaps not incoincidentally, it is not many

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[45] Veeder and many other critics discuss how the narrator most likely *wants* these papers destroyed, as they bespeak Aspern's heterosexual passion. The narrator prefers to think of Aspern as "not a woman's poet" (James 48), and therefore seeks to cleanse Aspern of any sordid sexual entanglements. William Veeder, "The Aspern Portrait," *The Henry James Review* 20, no. 1 (1999): 22-42.

[46] Jacob Korg, "What Aspern Papers? A Hypothesis," *College English* 23, no.5 (1962): 378-81. Referred to in Reigelman, 54.

days before Juliana condescends to speak with her suspicious lodger. The narrator describes their conversation as an elaborate game where Juliana knows the real motive for his presence, but he determines he will not be the one to voice the truth—or even the name of Jeffrey Aspern.[47] With the tension mounting in their circumlocution, Juliana, always purporting mercenary motives, produces "out of her pocket with an embarrassed hand a small object wrapped in crumpled white paper" (108). She asks if he knows how much "curiosities" sell for, then hands him the "small oval portrait." He reports:

> I possessed myself of it with fingers of which I would only hope that they didn't betray the intensity of their clutch, and she added: "I would part with it only for a good price."
>
> At the first glance I recognised Jeffrey Aspern, and was well aware that I flushed with the act. As she was watching me, however, I had the consistency to exclaim: "What a striking face! Do tell me who he is." (108)

While the narrator here and in the passages that follow makes clear his excitement in grasping the image with eye and hand, it is perplexing that Juliana is willing to publicly air the portrait like this, and to entrust it to a vulture like the narrator. He offers this speculation as to her motive: "What she wished was to dangle it before my eyes and put a prohibitive price on it" (109). One rival to another, Juliana may indeed be flaunting her claim to a mutual fetish object, and, judging by the narrator's diction, she is successful. But the risk inherent in not just flashing the portrait but relinquishing it becomes clear to her when the narrator voices various relations to the image in quick succession: "'The face comes back to me, it torments me . . . . Now who is he? I can't put my finger on him'" (109). He first indicates a prior claim to Aspern's face in that it returns to him, asserting his own long-standing relationship with Aspern, but he then invokes a curious expression for the pain of trying to recall a name: "it torments me."

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[47] As Hardy's Ella demonstrates, speaking the name of a secret beloved is risky for anyone, but this is particularly the case in a homoerotic context such as this, where there are grave reasons to "dare not speak" Aspern's name and confess his transgressive desire to himself or anyone else.

Power instantly transfers to Aspern's image, and the narrator's visual pleasure here is unequivocally masochistic as he sits under the gaze of his god. His final metaphor of touching the figure, however, is what stirs Juliana to rare action. He tells us, "She neglected to answer my question, but raised her hand to take back the picture, using a gesture which though impotent was in a high degree peremptory" (109). His description is meant to contrast his robust masculinity with her weakness and infirmity, his kinship with the strong, youthful figure of the portrait with her discordance with it, but he instantly puts himself on equal footing with her: "I didn't restore the charming thing; not from any vindictive purpose, but because I instinctively clung to it. We looked at each other hard while I retained it" (109). Their gazes are equally rigid, their stand-off seemingly at a draw. But despite the narrator's bias, Juliana's superior strength is evident. For one thing, she knows what she wants and why, as the next passage reveals. The narrator, meanwhile, has almost no understanding of himself, and so "finds" himself acting on unreasoned instinct, just as later, in explaining how he could be moved to thievery in Juliana's room with her and Tina in it, he insists, "I found myself given up . . . to something else. I . . . felt myself held to the spot" (123). He likewise figures his consciousness elsewhere when his body flees the scene of Tina's proposal. He mysteriously reports, "I made a wild vague movement, in consequence of which I found myself at the door" (137). His instincts and drives go unexamined but relatively unhidden as well, since he knows not what he reveals. And while he variously desires different things—identification, erotic fulfillment, visual mastery—he desires them all from Aspern. The poet is his object no matter in what unconscious level the desire originates, but the narrator avoids acknowledging this.

Juliana, by contrast, entirely owns her desire. She has not only experienced an erotic relationship with Aspern in their youth, but has continued it through the objects that are imbued with his essence—his papers, his portrait, and his poetry, presumably. The narrator reports, "She made a movement, drawing herself together as if in a spasm of

dread at having lost her prize, she had been impelled to the immense effort of rising to snatch it from me. I instantly placed it in her hand . . . . She turned the small oval plate over in her lap, with its face down, and I heard her catch her breath as after a strain or an escape" (110). Or after both, we might add, in this orgasmic affirmation of her re-possession of Aspern. She flaunts not only her active intimacy with the poet, but her mastery of pleasurably "putting a finger on him" in an act that is at once autoerotic and sadistic.[48] She likely did not intend for her taunts with the fetish object to progress to this desperate level, but the swiftness and ease of her simulated sex with the image could attest to this being a habit of hers, and perhaps why her hand in first revealing the portrait is described as "embarrassed."[49]

This complicated instance of cinesthetic engagement might be helpfully illuminated by comparison with Ella Marchmill's experience with another romantic poet (though with a lower case "r"). Like Ella, Juliana seems to prize the sensorial metaphor of "sleeping on a poet's lips," as, we learn from Tina, she keeps Aspern's letters "in her

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[48] Where Sobchack teases out the difference between certain forms of cinesthetic touching and masturbation is tricky. She writes, "insofar as I cannot literally touch, smell, or taste the particular figure on the screen that solicits my sensual desire, my body's intentional trajectory, seeking a sensual object to fulfill this sensual solicitation, will *reverse its direction* to locate its partially frustrated sensual grasp on something more literally accessible. That more literally accessible sensual object is *my own subjectively felt lived body*. Thus, 'on the rebound,' from the screen—and without a reflective thought—I will reflexively turn toward my own carnal, sensual, and sensible being to touch myself touching, smell myself smelling, taste myself tasting, and, in sum, sense my own sensuality" (76-77). She clarifies further on, "The form of 'self-touching' I'm discussing here—a form that is consciously 'other' directed—is thus different in structure from forms of conscious self-touching in which both one's body and one's consciousness are self-directed; in this latter kind of reflexivity the doubled intention and attention toward oneself often become so highly reflective that despite one's autoerotic goals, it can undo carnal pleasure" (78). Unlike the typical spectator, Juliana can touch the screen, creating a special case. Since her self-touching is directly mediated by the screened figure and is motivated by a desire to unite her body with his in erotic possession, her action seems to qualify for Sobchack's special category of the "consciously other-directed" self-touching.

[49] While Veeder explicates the scene with nice close reading ("'face down' is redundant after 'turned . . . over' but is insistently erotic"), he glosses over its meaning for Juliana, noting merely that "despite her relative indifference to it, Juliana can experience the portrait's sexual charge" (33).

bed. . . . Between the mattresses" (132). But where Ella's cinesthetic engagement with Trewe's image is a sensuous and slow seduction that luxuriates in prolonged visual and tactile stimulations, Juliana's with Aspern's is sadistic and aggressive. Whether this is particular to the urgent and public circumstances or simply a result of this being a decades-long cinesthetic relationship, the fact remains: in the most extreme testimonial to the truism that women are tactile and men visual, Juliana has the portrait do its work directly, without any mediation of the eye, even if such visual channeling is usually accomplished, as Sobchack says, "without a thought." In making direct use of the image as erotic object pressed "face down" into her lap, looking isn't even involved, though the visual nature of the portrait is essential to its effectiveness in this exchange.

To make matters more complicated still, directly following her reunion with Aspern's picture, Juliana asks the narrator why he would "buy a likeness of a person you don't know by an artist who has no reputation" (110). The syllabic congruity of the description of the painted figure with that of the artist indicates that they have equal weight for her in determining the portrait's value. Juliana then reveals, "the painter was my father." As the portrait's painter is as saliently part of its value to her as its subject, this revelation immediately casts an oedipal light on her erotic relationship with it, and at least partially re-casts the role of her libidinal object. She sexually engages with the poet's image, but also with the "hand" of the painter, her father. The picture becomes more valuable to the narrator as well, indicated by his reply, "That makes the picture indeed precious!" (110). The portrait is now linked not only with his "divine" father, but with an authoritative patriarch, a fellow gazer so appreciative of the "remarkably handsome face" that he records it for future admiring eyes and thereby sanctions the narrator's attraction to it (109). The narrator is also affirmed in his suspicion about Juliana's father having been a painter, and assumes with relief that Aspern was "drawn" to the father rather than Juliana. She can be excised from the idea of the portrait altogether, as its origins predate (in his interpretation) her relationship with the poet and

trump the events that intervene between the homoerotic creation of the image and its proper home in the visual and tactile possession of another admirer in the patriarchal line.

This new relation to the portrait, devoid of Juliana's mediation, parallels the narrator's initial exchange with Aspern's enchanted image, which he conjures well before he even knows of the portrait's existence by conflating his own titillated optimism at the outset of his adventure with Aspern's ghost:

> That spirit kept me perpetual company and seemed to look out at me from the revived immortal face—in which all his genius shone—of the great poet who was my prompter. I had invoked him and he had come; he hovered before me half the time; it was as if his bright ghost had returned to earth to assure me he regarded the affair as his own no less than as mine and that we should see it fraternally and fondly to a conclusion. (73)

He cannot seem to decide how to figure agency or power structure here, as he is "prompted by" Aspern but must also "invoke" him; he finally determines that the Venice mission is shared equally between them. And while Juliana's cinesthesia combines visual with tactile engagement, the narrator, phobic of actual bodies, requires auditory stimulation in conjunction with the visual. Aspern's voice, after all, is reported to have been his most seductive quality, and the reason women—to whom, by the narrator's account, his poetry could not have appealed—were devoted to him. Swooning seems to have been inevitable "when the man's own voice was mingled with his song. That voice, by every testimony, was one of the most charming ever heard" (48). The narrator has no trouble in conjuring the voice along with the face, as it seems to say to him, "'Poor dear, be easy with her; . . . Strange as it may appear to you, she was very attractive in 1820. Meanwhile, aren't we in Venice together . . .?" (73). The dialogue, like the image, rings in different registers, from the tender, to the defensive, to the flirtatious. Even in his conscious fantasy, the narrator has not worked out what he desires from Aspern, what his ideal of interacting with the poet involves. Aspern's "poor dear" can refer either to the narrator or Juliana, just as the referent "we" in the triangulated scene over the portrait

where "we looked at each other hard" can refer to the narrator and Aspern or the narrator and Juliana.

The oscillations of the narrator's desires have inspired a rich critical tradition in analyzing him. For instance, critics have variously argued that the narrator is overtly sexually interested in Aspern (Reeseman); entirely without homoerotic desire, being so self-absorbed (Person); wishing to imitate Aspern in his exploitation of the Bordereau women (Rivkin); longing for archaic fusion with Aspern (Veeder); and, in his intense fear of women and femininity, seeking the safety of a "textual necrophilia" with Aspern (Church, 37).[50] All of these diagnoses are well supported by the text, but none is sufficient on its own, since James's brilliance here, as in *The Turn of the Screw*, lies in his endowing the narrator with confounding layers of obsessions, repressions, and imaginative augmentations, not to mention the potential for supernatural influences. But consideration of the intermingling of his aural and visual exchanges with Aspern in comparison with Juliana's visual and tactile ones offers new access to the story, affirming that his relationship to the portrayed figure is in perpetual flux as he struggles for both mastery and approval.

When Tina gives the narrator the portrait at the end, he can finally unite an actual rendering of Aspern's face with the conjured voice and keep the animated portrait with him as a constant companion. Aspern's responses to the narrator, however, are not always clear. When Tina proposes marriage to the narrator and Aspern beckons, "Get out of it as you can, my dear fellow!", his meaning is substantially open to interpretation. He could mean that while he himself has long been trapped by a Bordereau woman, the

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[50] Jeanne Campbell Reeseman, "'The Deepest Depths of the Artificial': Attacking Women and Reality in 'The Aspern Papers,'" *The Henry James Review* 19 no. 2 (1998): 148-165; Leland Person, "Eroticism and Creativity in The Aspern Papers," *Literature and Psychology* 32 no. 2 (1986): 20-31; Julie Rivkin, "Speaking with the Dead: Ethics and Representation in *The Aspern Papers*," *The Henry James Review* 10 no. 2 (1989): 135-141; Joseph Church, "Writing and the Dispossession of Women in *The Aspern Papers*," *American Imago* 47 no. 1 (1990): 23-42.

narrator should escape this fate as *he can*, being possessed of a body. He can also mean, "Get out of the marriage *however* you can," thereby sanctioning any action the narrator takes, however cruel. Likewise, the "my," "dear," and "fellow" can each refer to a different figuration of their relationship: one of possession, affectionate intimacy, or fraternity. All of these interpretations indicate Aspern's cognizance of his victimhood at the hands of Juliana, at least as the narrator projects him. Since Aspern then seems to need saving, the editor can, like Oliphant's narrator, try to maintain an innocent image of himself by disowning his transgressions, ascribing them to someone else's cause. Philip foists responsibility for his questionable acts onto his mother's ghost with some legitimacy, though. The editor figures himself as Aspern's accomplice, acting on behalf of his god. He giddily describes his situation—even as he is in the tense climax with Tina and her unanswered proposal—thus: "I had gotten into a pickle for him—as if he needed it!" (134). This is, in his fantasy, a story of adventure and fellowship, and one of "general romance" and "general glory" (73) where he and Aspern are a heroic pair whose desires supersede all other considerations. This imaginary romance is more real to him than the actual woman who stands in front of him, her future in the balance. But despite its imaginary status, this "romance" with Aspern never stabilizes: as Joseph Church writes, "He has received Aspern's portrait . . . and as it has served Juliana, so the miniature will serve him," as "a fetish" (38-39); but as Arnold Davidson argues, Aspern can be "viewed as Orpheus and as the innocent object of others' improper desires" (45). Leland Person notes that in conjuring Aspern's image and voice, the narrator "creates an imagined *present* in which Aspern can fantastically appear. More than simply a 'spirit' of Venice, Aspern is almost tangibly recoverable" (22). The narrator's relation to Aspern's image is always in flux such that each of these figurations is valid. The image is alternatively the fetish he can worship or dominate; a portal of access to Aspern at his most palpable; and a kind of mirror to assure the narrator that he and Aspern are "self-

same," as Ella would say, bound together through the thick and thin of Aspern's wavering subjectivity.

While the narrator is keenly tuned to the aural, he is also obsessed with optimizing his comprehension of the visual, each of which complements Juliana's zeal for the tactile. In peering into her room while she lies on her deathbed, he reports, "I turned my eyes once more all over the room, rummaging with them the closets, the chest of drawers, the table" seeking out Aspern's papers (116). He feels "rebuked" when Tina notices "an appetite well-nigh indecent" in his scavenging eyes "in the presence of our dying companion" (116). His looking is aggressively embodied in this way, and is consistent with his earlier instinctive clutch of the portrait, holding fast to his material "feast for the eyes" that Sobchack names in embodied looking. His hungry gaze also evidences the way hyper-visuality in a culture saturated with visual stimuli can become an addiction, as Charles Baudelaire observes in 1859, noting that the portability of the photograph had created "greedy eyes" that perversely and insistently sought out scopophilic material everywhere.[51]

His intense visuality is of course accompanied by grave anxiety about his inferior grasp of the visual. He assumes Juliana's eyes are just as searching, suspicious, and perverse as his own, and he is terrified that she has visual mastery over him. While his gaze is exposed, she keeps her eyes covered with a green shade "which served her almost for a mask" (60). He worries that she "had put it on expressly, so that from underneath it she might take me all in without my getting at herself" (60). She remains "impenetrable" but able to effortlessly consume him. He also worries that she toys with him just for "the amusement of looking on the face of such a monster of indiscretion" (63), while she remains safely hidden. He has no means of mastering her, visually or otherwise, and no

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[51] Charles Baudelaire, "The Modern Public and Photography," in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed.Amy Weinstein Meyers (New Haven, Connecticut: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 87. Qtd in Nead, 180.

hope of doing so until after she dies, when he fancies he can "pounce on her possessions and ransack her drawers" (60). The violent physicality of this fantasy emphasizes that even after her death he would not dare challenge her visual power. This fear seems warranted, as Tina reports that Juliana's eyes terrifyingly haunt her after her death: "I see them—they stare at me in the dark!" (134).

Juliana's eyes are described as "magnificent" and "extraordinary" by Aspern (in his poems) and Tina, but when they are finally revealed to the narrator—in her wrath at seeing him breaking into her secretary—they are "like the sudden drench . . . of a flood of gaslight" (125). Her eyes seem to have been covered to protect others from their "glare," to keep access to their blinding brilliance limited (125). But while her eyes may look powerfully perceptive to an observer, Tina intimates that Juliana is blind. At an earlier point, the editor worries that Juliana can't stand "the sight of him." Tina responds with incredulity: "The sight of you? Do you think she can see?" (115). The narrator often seems like a poor interpreter of the events he reports, but moments like this indicate just how wildly unreliable he might be. His fears project a Juliana that has been visually deconstructing him continuously, as he cannot imagine how one can gain *in*sight without *sight*. He ascribes to her the power that he most fears while anxiously attempting to invigorate his own visual acuity with aggressive optical "rummaging."

The titular papers turn out to be nothing more than a red herring, despite the well-rehearsed last sentence, which reads, referring to the portrait: "When I look at it I can scarcely bear my loss—I mean of the precious papers" (142). The narrator has been trying to affirm his visual mastery throughout the story, but the portrait resists submission; though Aspern is trapped in the portrait and finds himself hostage to another devotee, he can still wield a threat from it, effectually castrating the narrator who "cannot bear [his] loss." On the other hand, the narrator can exercise private control over the portrait and have it "serve him" as he has seen it serve Juliana. The hyphen and the "I mean" that introduce the "clarification" of the loss indicate an embarrassment that is

perhaps not unlike that ascribed to her guilty hand when she presents the portrait to *her* audience. Neither of Aspern's keepers wishes to reveal the extent of his/her erotic engagement with the portrait. The dissembling nature of the narrator's final addendum is meant to misdirect the reader in identifying the loss, to keep his own derivation of pleasure from the portrait secret, whether that be through the portrait's infliction of torments on him, or through some imitation of Juliana's mastery. The papers hardly seem a real "treasure" to the narrator, anyway, as by the end he refers to them as "Juliana's crumpled scraps," which have become "odious" to him (139), and are symbolically aligned with the "crumpled white paper" with which she sheaths the portrait after her sexual encounters with it (108).

The cinesthetic engagement of Juliana and the narrator with Aspern's image is curiously linked to James's own description of sensory access to the past in conceiving of this, his favorite tale. In the Preface of 1910, he writes,

> I delight in a palpable imaginable *visitable* past—in the nearer distances and the clearer mysteries, the marks and signs of a world we may reach over to as by making a long arm we grasp an object at the other end of our own table. The table is the one, the common expanse, and where we lean, so stretching, we find it firm and continuous. That, to my imagination, is the past fragrant of all, or of almost all, the poetry of the thing outlived and lost and gone, and yet in which the precious element of closeness, telling so of connexions but tasting so of differences, remains appreciable. With more moves back the element of the appreciable shrinks—just as the charm of looking over a garden-wall into another garden breaks down when successions of walls appear. (31)

The narrator's writing desk is an analog of James's metaphorical table across which Aspern can be grasped as an object, inhaled as a fragrance, heard as familiar, but tasted, ostensibly, as strange. The view of the past, in James's terms, interestingly requires a new metaphor, that of looking over a garden wall, where a single barrier can be scaled, but a succession of them reveals only the barriers themselves. The Byronic age for James was the most intense moment "when the scales of the balance hang with the right evenness . . . between liking to feel the past strange and liking to feel it familiar" (32).

This was the "special effect" James was thinking of as he "projected" Aspern (32)—one almost identical in definition to Freud's uncanny in uniting the familiar with the strange. The fictional poet is thus uncannily available to Juliana and the narrator cinesthetically through at least three senses that we observe in their interactions with his image.

But James's table is deceptive; the past is not really "palpable," and this acknowledgement represents the real "loss" at the end of the story. In Oliphant's tale, the past is sensible through a portrait, so much so that the dead can be reborn, re-embodied palpably in the present. The portrait of Robert Trewe in Hardy is likewise procreative, conscripting a new generation into technologically alienating times, but creating it all the same. In James's story, no new body is wrought from Aspern's image. In fact, the body likely descended from his, that of Tina, is unrecognizable as such. No one can even bother to suspect such a connection, including Tina herself, who is utterly indifferent to Aspern and the objects that are so evocative to those who are fixated on him. In *The Aspern Papers*, parenthood and reproduction are altogether alien concepts; erotic engagement persists, but only to quell anxieties of vulnerability and loss.[52] A modernist insistence on isolation and interiority has won out over oedipal lineage and logic. We recall Barthes's diagnosis of the loss in modern narratives:

> Death of the Father would deprive literature of many of its pleasures. If there is no longer a Father, why tell stories? Doesn't every narrative lead back to Oedipus? Isn't storytelling always a way of searching for one's origins, speaking one's relationship to the Law, entering into the dialectic of tenderness and hatred? Today, we dismiss Oedipus and narrative at one and the same time: we no longer love, we no longer fear, we no longer narrate. As fiction, Oedipus was at least good for something: to make good novels, to tell good stories. (*Pleasure*, 47)

The ending of *The Aspern Papers* signifies the end of the reign of traditional narrative. Not only is the father dead, he is inconsequential, capable of being desired in

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[52] Aspern is "almost tangibly recoverable," as Person notes, via the narrator's cinesthetic conjuring, I would add, but is ultimately elusive, as Reeseman insists: "unreachable, undefinable, and unsayable" (22; 149).

his loss but no longer credited with metonymic power, spurring on the course of history in re-conceptions of his own indelible image. The narrative ends on a loss precisely because we do not get a new body. Brooks explains, "narrative desire, as the subtending dynamic of stories and their telling, becomes oriented toward knowledge and possession of the body. Narrative seeks to make such a body semiotic, to mark or imprint it as a linguistic and narrative sign" (*Body*, 8). The bodies of Agnes and Hardy's photographic toddler are imprinted in just these readable, knowable ways, offering new epistemophilic pleasures in a rereading of their respective texts. James's narrator is left without the "palpable" body he seeks, and remains in an imaginary, non-productive relation to the virtual image of Aspern that alternately castrates him and suffers in its own turn under the narrator's anxious and sadistic gaze.

## Narrative Rules Unraveled

These stories by Oliphant, Hardy, and James have managed to disrupt classical narrative and visual pleasure in several exceptional ways. Oliphant's story "demonstrate[s] the non-coincidence of woman and women," in de Lauretis's terms, to dispel the long-standing cultural prejudices that collapse a woman's dynamic and individuated character into mere mother and/or maiden figure (*Alice*, 7). In redefining the power of "the Seen and Unseen" in "The Portrait," Oliphant addresses the feminist problem of "how to make visible the invisible" but also shows "how to produce the conditions of visibility for a different social subject," one that is not the stereotyped female object offered for the (also stereotyped) male gaze (*Alice*, 8-9). Her heroine is strong-willed, resourceful, libidinous and carnal, despite her phantom-like status. She displays mastery of the visual and the sexual in ways that only confound the story's male spectators, defying multiple taboos on femininity while simultaneously casting herself ("Agnes") as the idealized "angel in the house" in a move at once profound and parodic.

Oliphant's narrative challenges oedipality with the "vengeance" that de Lauretis calls for, and she does so through appropriation of the fantastic register that allows the currents of the visual and the tactile to coalesce in the normative male spectator's perception of a woman's image. Thus, the cinesthetic subject can be made not just to acknowledge but to corporeally and psychically experience a particular woman's subjectivity and passively serve in a narrative that is "cut to the measure" of *her* desire and determined by her will.

Hardy's story somewhat allegorically poses normative masculine "will" against the fantasy life of "An Imaginative Woman." Ella Marchmill is herself the cinesthetic subject, claiming the embodied rights of spectatorship and adding to them her sensuous fantasies that are compelling enough to defy biology and produce a "trick of Nature"—a reprint on her child's face of the photo with which she ethereally communed. Ella is "a different social subject" than a typecast Victorian wife in that she has a range of transgressive desires that span the professional, the familial, the emotional, and the sexual. The object of her fantasies, Robert Trewe, is also unconventional in his sensitive and poetical nature that avoids contact with anything robustly patriarchal. In these characters, Hardy shows an appreciation for the diversity of positionalities a subject, male or female, can inhabit. This is particularly true of his insistent and detailed attention to Ella's vacillation between "feminine" and "masculine" desires (as outlined by Freud) that she experiences due to "the duplicity of [the oedipal] scenario and the specific contradiction of the female subject in it, the contradiction by which historical women must work with and against Oedipus" (*Alice*, 157). While Ella's desires fluctuate, the intensity of her imaginative power and its various sensory effects is evident; she possesses, like Agnes, the ability to fantastically unite visual with tactile modes of perception and, in this case, to thereby penetrate and be penetrated by her conjured, photographically imaged lover. The power of the technologically enabled exchange through the medium of the photograph calls forth a radically new social subject: the modern child born of technology and fantasy rather than of traditional parents. The

narrative determined by Ella's "imaginative" mojo sets plot, pleasure, and the meaning of origins on a very different track than that of Oedipus, one where embodiment means being subject to fantastical forces and technological metonymies that together overwhelm oedipal norms of lineage, identification and desire.

In a similar drive toward the virtualized modern, James offers in *The Aspern Papers* a female cinesthetic subject who sadistically masters a man's image in a reversal of the gendered hierarchy of omnipotent gazer and vulnerable object.[53] Aspern is cinesthetically available in his image in that he can be seen and heard and also used as erotic image for direct tactile stimulation. But he is also illusory, since the accounts of his fantastic interactions come to us through a deeply unreliable narrator, one who avoids meaningful reflection on his own desires and behavior and therefore misreads all of the other characters as well. Though he is a male protagonist, his is not the narrative of Oedipus precisely because his desires are contradictory and transgressive, as Ella's were before him. Because of its grounding in both the homoerotic and the self-concerned, his narrative does not tend toward the revelation of a new body, but rather toward a glimpse of a private screening, the dynamics of which surely fluctuate in response to the shifts in his conception of an ideal relation to Aspern.

Oliphant's and Hardy's stories end in contemplation of their ekphrastic portraits *and* the identical faces they have created, defining these images as instigators of alternative plots that track women's desires. The ending of *The Aspern Papers*, though, leaves us off in largely unexplored territory. In all the stories, heterosexual visual pleasure available via fantastic images is successfully figured for both sexes, and complicated for them as well, combining psychical, emotional, and physical exchanges with what had previously been a domineering scopophilia. But James's narrator's most

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[53] But, as Reeseman points out, "James inverts sex roles not so much to comment on the nature of society as to comment on the nature of representation and reality" (151).

revealing interactions with Aspern's image happen out of sight, just beyond the final misleading sentence of the narrative. The chapter that follows will turn to *fin-de-siècle* tales that more openly address homoerotic relations in imaging and perception, tales that embrace fantastic ekphrastic portraits and fictional spectators that are slippery and elusive, queer in the broadest sense of not adhering to any neatly standardized figurations of representations, identities, and desires. Portraiture itself, in this newly expansive milieu, becomes an inherently dubious medium as its subjects resist definitive representations and modes of perception.

# CHAPTER THREE

# EKPHRASIS *EN-ABYME*: AESTHETICISM'S ANDROGYNY AND PORTRAITURE'S PROLIFERATION

The arc of the previous chapters has shown how conventional Victorian definitions of gender roles and progeny are challenged into partial dissipation by the end of the nineteenth century. Continuing this trajectory, I demonstrate in this final chapter how texts of the Aesthetic movement use the magic picture genre to provide further alternatives to patriarchal narratives through deployment of the gaze and its increasingly animate cases of ekphrasis. As authors aligned with homosexual identity and expression, Walter Pater, Vernon Lee, and Oscar Wilde explore in coded and complex terms the effects of same-sex desire on narrative and imagistic development. This is particularly true in the texts with which this chapter is concerned: Pater's "Sebastian van Storck" (1886), Lee's "Oke of Okehurst; or, The Phantom Lover" (1886), and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890; 1891).[1] Whereas patriarchal lineage was nullified in Thomas Hardy's "An Imaginative Woman" and all but dismissed in Henry James's *The Aspern Papers*, biological procreation is entirely absent, understandably, from tales where libidinal energy is same-sex directed. In its place is the assertion, derived in part from Hellenistic ideals, that the kind of productivity—spiritual, intellectual, artistic—that results from homosexual union is nobler than simple human reproduction. Michael F. Davis notes this conception in Pater's writings from the "Winckelmann" chapter (1867)

[1] Pater's story initially appeared in Macmillan's Magazine in 1886, and was published in *Imaginary Portraits* a year later. Lee first published her story as "The Phantom Lover" in 1886, then changed the name for its reissue four years later. Wilde published *Dorian Gray* initially in *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* in 1890 and expanded it for its release as a novel in 1891. Walter Pater, "Sebastian van Storck," *Marius the Epicurean and Other Short Works* (BiblioBazaar, n.p. 2007), 333-52. Vernon Lee, "Oke of Okehurst; Or, The Phantom Lover," *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, ed. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2006), 105-153. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

of *The Renaissance,* arguing that Pater's turn to the "alternative semiotic system" of visual art instead of language is "the primal scene for modern queer theory itself" (283).[2] Following Davis's lead, I argue that in his *Imaginary Portraits*, and "Sebastian van Storck" in particular, Pater deploys ekphrasis to represent not only same-sex desire and its resultant artistic procreation, but also the causes for and difficulty inherent in this generative power. Lee's short story and Wilde's novel augment this meditation with the supernatural enhancements of the gothic mode. Since language that describes visual art is the vehicle for theorizing same-sex desire and homosexual identity, the new codes Pater proposes as applied to ekphrasis are necessarily central to narratives that foreground homoeroticism and its unique products. In this way, not only are Pater's aesthetic texts and those of his followers seedbeds for a burgeoning queer theory, but also, as consummate hybridizations of the visual and the verbal, fecund sites of cinematic expression as it exists in the literary imagination before 1895—the date of the first Lumière screening.

In all of these stories, the main characters are objects of the gaze for diegetic artists who feel compelled to paint these figures on account of their ethereal beauty and ambiguous relation to gender. Where desire has previously been assessed as a largely unambiguous sexual attraction between a character and a figure in a magic portrait, here the nature of the characters' desires must be couched in artistic terms. As Dennis

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[2]Davis writes, "Plato acknowledges in the *Symposium* that only heterosexual coupling can lead to an actual physical procreation, but extends the metaphor to same-sex coupling to maintain that such an erotic union can and does lead to the nobler end of a spiritual or intellectual procreation, and therein conceptualizes the notion of homosexual conception, that runs throughout the history of thinking through the subject of same-sex desire, and that is clearly operative in 'Winkelmann''s opening image of Goethe pregnant with Winkelmann's intellectual issue" (279). Davis argues that once Pater figures *himself* "inseminated by Winkelmann, he makes . . . a radical turn to visual art, an alternative and, for Pater at least, more appropriate field through which to reconceptualize the subject of same-sex desire" (279). Michael F. Davis, "Walter Pater's 'Latent Intelligence' and the Conception of Queer 'Theory,'" in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2002), 261-85. Walter Pater, "Winckelmann," *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 114-149.

Denisoff observes, "The Aestheticist claim to purely artistic appreciation devoid of ethical or political interests made the erotic element of appreciation less direct a threat to conventional Victorian morality and enhanced the opportunity for same-sex and other less accepted forms of erotic admiration."[3] By defending the sensibility of the aesthetic artist and his or her interests, the movement's major authors shifted the onus for eroticism onto the individual viewer. Reina Lewis notes that in this new configuration of the significations of the gaze, "Meaning does not reside in the image itself, but is generated in the interaction between viewer and text in which the codes of the text will be more or less decipherable to different viewers, depending on their historical and cultural moment. . . . In other words, it is the act of interpretation itself that is eroticized."[4]

By displacing the eroticism between image and viewer onto the act of interpretation, an essential component of representation itself, aestheticism creates a proliferation of such acts as "art for art's sake." In this way, there is a generative energy inherent in the Aesthetic version of the scopic drive. The multiple portraits that result from this procreativity within these stories are *mises-en-abyme* that reflect the narratives and their aims of theorizing queer subjectivity and desire. The structural concept of the *mise-en-abyme* is first described by André Gide in 1893 to refer to a text's containing within it a smaller, second version of itself. As examples, he suggests the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet*, the mirror-images in Velasquez's *Las Meninas*, and the scene in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" where a character reads a story similar to the one unfolding. But he elaborates: "None of these examples is altogether exact. What would be much more so . . . is a comparison with the device of heraldry that

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[3] Dennis Denisoff, "'Men of My Own Sex': Genius, Sexuality, and George Du Maurier's Artists," in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 156.

[4] Reina Lewis, "Looking Good: The Lesbian Gaze and Fashion Imagery," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 1998), 466.

consists in setting in the escutcheon a smaller one '*en abyme*,' at the heart-point."[5] Lucien Dällenbach has given the trope its most extensive treatment in *The Mirror in the Text* and notes that, generally, *mise-en-abyme*'s "essential property is that it brings out the meaning and form of the work" and is therefore "a kind of *reflexion*"—hence, the mirror metaphor he privileges (8; italics his).[6] He identifies several kinds of *mise-en-abyme*, including, "simple" ones, where there is one "mirror" that reflects the larger text; "infinite" ones, where the effect mimics that of two mirrors facing each other, such that an image's replication of itself seems endless; and "paradoxical" ones, where the mirror creates an endless, irresolvable spiral between the text and its abyssal replication.

In his recent dissertation, "Text as Proxy: Identity and Aesthetics of Control in André Gide's Works" (2003), Matthew R. Escobar provides an important corrective to Dällenbach's interpretation of Gide.[7] He argues that Dällenbach embarks on "a conscious 'rewriting' of the Gidean concept to make it useful for the *Nouveau roman*" (6). The English translation of Dällenbach's text covers up this rewriting—and admits as much in a footnote—by defining Gide's concept as "'a comparison with the device from heraldry that involves putting a second representation of the original shield '*en abyme*' within it'" (7). Escobar points out that Gide does not invoke "the original shield" at all in his statement; instead, he uses the adjective "second" for the inscribed shield. Tracing Gide's knowledge of heraldry, Escobar highlights that it would actually be a *different*

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[5] André Gide, *Journals: Volume 1: 1889-1913*, trans. Justin O'Brien (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 30.

[6] Later in the book he notes, "the practice of most critics shows that the *mise-en-abyme* and the mirror are sufficiently interchangeable for us to combine the two and to refer to 'the mirror in the text' whenever the device appears" (35). This seems a convenient avoidance of the insufficiency of the substitution of "mirror." Gide, after all, never mentions a mirror but a heraldic device which would not face the shield but be affixed to it. Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley with Emma Hughes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

[7] Matthew R. Escobar, "Text as Proxy: Identity and the Aesthetics of Control in André Gide's Work" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2003).

shield inside the main one—never a replication—as these were used to denote different bloodlines feeding into a family's genealogy. The difference of the second shield "is indeed its very reason for being," Escobar writes (14). The genealogical model invoked by Gide and emphasized by Escobar implies the possibility of not just the productivity of difference, which adding a different shield achieves, but of a productivity that, via the very notion of lineage (if not its heraldic emblem), gestures toward successiveness. In this way, the *mises-en-abyme* that appear in the ekphrasis-laden texts discussed in this chapter point toward a graduation from the shield metaphor altogether into something akin to the cinematic progressions imprinted on a strip of film, where small differences are registered in each image. These primary texts also deploy Dällenbachian or abyssal *mises-en-abyme*, mirrors in these texts that produce the same image repeatedly and therefore do not progress laterally or narratively but only descend ever deeper into the significations of emphatic repetition. With both versions of *mise-en-abyme* on display in these works, the process of representation itself is vigorously interrogated by Pater, Lee, and Wilde.

Walter Pater's early essay, "Diaphaneitè" (1864),[8] is frequently referred to in analyses of his works as well as those of other writers associated with the Aesthetic movement. Delivered to a select group at Oxford and never published in Pater's lifetime, it was foundational for the discourse emerging at the time about same-sex desire and queer subjectivity by defining some of its codes. "Diaphaneitè" describes a "rare type" of person—male or female, importantly—for which the world has no place. This figure is distinct in its "evanescence" and has no choice but to embrace its difference and separation from others. The essay opens:

> There are some unworldly types of character which the world is able to estimate. It recognises certain moral types, or categories,

[8] Walter Pater, "Diaphaneitè," in *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays*, 1895 (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1924), 247-254.

> and regards whatever falls within them as having a right to exist. The saint, the artist, even the speculative thinker, out of the world's order as they are, yet work, so far as they work at all, in and by means of the main current of the world's energy . . . There is another type of character, which is not broad and general, rare, precious above all to the artist . . . It crosses rather than follows the main current of the world's life. The world has no sense fine enough for those evanescent shades, which fill up the blanks between contrasted types of character . . . For this nature there is no place ready in its affections. This colourless, unclassified purity of life it can neither use for its service, nor contemplate as an ideal. (247)

While this "evanescent" figure is not an artist, Pater stresses that it is especially appealing to the artist for its other-worldly, unconventional beauty. At a later point in the essay, he discusses the "impotence" of this type in terms of serving the natural order of the world: "The beauty of the Greek statues was a sexless beauty; the statues of the gods had the least traces of sex. Here there is a moral sexlessness, a kind of impotence, an ineffectual wholeness of nature, yet with a divine beauty and significance of its own" (253). Richard Dellamora provides a historically and biographically sensitive reading of this essay and the conditions under which it was delivered, noting that it expresses a cultural ideal of desire between men "in discreetly coded" terms "so as to 'miss' some of Pater's listeners while reaching men sympathetic to expressions of desire between men."[9] Dellamora notes that the "moral sexlessnesss" to which Pater refers is not sexual innocence so much as androgynous or hermaphroditic features coextensive in these figures, as the Greeks would utilize such combinations in their statuary to aim for the highest beauty.

Androgyny, as Dellamora points out, is a key trope for nineteenth-century writers, particularly those wishing to depict homosexual characters or others at odds with strict gender norms. Martha Vicinus's influential essay, "The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale?", inventories the use that writers of both sexes made of the androgynous figure, often an adolescent boy but sometimes a cross-dressed female, to

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[9] Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 58. See in particular his third chapter, "Pater at Oxford in 1864: Old Mortality and 'Diaphaneitè,'" 58-85.

represent not radical alterity but "the sexually proximate."[10] As Pater's, Lee's, and Wilde's stories all rely upon such an androgynous, transgressive figure as the object of a homoerotic gaze, Vicinus's explication of the patterns inherent in *fin-de-siècle* fiction that turns on an androgyne or adolescent boy is worth lingering upon:

> All encounters were by definition hazardous and fleeting; violence metaphorically expressed the socially deviant desire and demonstrated its feared outcome. Death stalked the most loving relationships; the boy committed suicide for reasons known only to the initiated . . . He represented action without responsibility, a transvestite disguise that permitted either sexual or emotional aggression or child-like responsiveness. (92-93)

These generalities, which often echo Pater's description of the diaphanous type, hold true for the central characters in the stories discussed in this chapter. I consider the uses each author makes of the "rare" figure—where "rarity" conflates queerness, which has already been aligned with a particular kind of coded ekphrasis, with the fantastic—cut by their respective diaphanous characters. In keeping with Pater's guidelines, these characters—Sebastian van Storck, Alice Oke, and Dorian Gray—all have artists in thrall. They are the subjects not only of painted works within the narrative, but of the literary narratives themselves, as at least two of the titles indicate. (That Lee's does not is a point of some interest, particularly as both the "phantom lover" and the protagonist's husband, "Oke of Okehurst," seem like red herrings—though markers of patriarchy and therefore targets for subversion.)

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[10] Martha Vicinus, "The Adolescent Boy: Fin de Siècle Femme Fatale?" *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5, no. 1 (1994): 92. Jonathan Dollimore analyses the significance of the sexually proximate in his work on *Sexual Dissidence*, to which Vicinus refers. He introduces the term via analysis of Oscar Wilde's strategy for establishing a place for non-normative sexuality. Dollimore writes, "for Wilde transgressive desire is both rooted in culture and the impetus for affirming different/alternative kinds of culture. . . . In fact it is because and not in spite of this shared cultural dimension that Wilde can enact one of the most disturbing of all forms of transgression, namely that whereby the outlaw turns up as inlaw, and the other as proximate proves more disturbing than the other as absolute difference. That which society forbids, Wilde reinstates *through and within* some of its most cherished and central cultural categories—art, the aesthetic, art criticism, individualism" (15). Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Sebastian, Alice, and Dorian have fantastical relations to their portraits, which seems a condition of their "diaphanous" natures. All are described as other-worldly in some sense, exquisitely beautiful, inaccessible, and dangerous. The quality of their "otherness" is such that it suggests a strange source for their narrative and pictorial representation. Davis notes that the obscure title of Pater's "Diaphaneitè" refers to "a state of being transparent," but also derives from the Greek, "in which it has the related but obverse meaning of 'a state of shining through'" (267). He continues by explaining the difference between mere transparency and luminosity: "The Greek etymology signifies an important shift in agency, so that the meaning of the text is not just on the other side of it and merely accessible through it, but originating on the other side of the text, emanating through it, and providing a kind of illumination or enlightenment" (267). The texts themselves, then, are fantastically presented as emanating from their diaphanous characters who remain paradoxically invisible to a disconcerting degree. The energy motivating the artistic renderings comes from within the objects themselves. These stories all provide painters as characters to demonstrate something of the creative process between artist and muse, but emphasize the compulsion to paint that is caused by something within the alluringly elusive objects that attracts the artist's gaze and makes him feel fated to paint the figure.[11] Androgyny and the aesthetic impulse both serve to camouflage for the masses and code for the initiated the homoerotic attraction between sexually ambiguous figures and the artists/intellectuals that are intrinsically "drawn" to them. I use the metaphor purposefully, as the attraction the artists feel causes them to draw, sketch, paint, or even photograph the evanescent figures persistently, generating the series of similar images that can never quite capture their object.

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[11] As Thomas Waugh points out in relation to nineteenth-century gay photography, this is just one means of creating an alibi for the characters' desires: they are driven by artistic desire rather than transgressive sexual desire for their same-sex objects. Thomas Waugh, "The Third Body: Patterns in the construction of the subject in gay male narrative film," in *The Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicholas Mirzoeff (London: Routledge, 1998), 431-47.

These diaphanous characters perform dual service as material for both visual artists and literary ones—painters and (both diegetic and authorial) storytellers, making Sebastian, Alice, and Dorian particularly fascinating figures for a study of fantastically *cinematic* literary portraits. The narratives that depict them each aim to be a single, extensive instance of magic-picture ekphrasis. As at least two of their intermedial titles suggest by identifying themselves as visual artworks rather than literary narratives, there is an abiding alliance within the texts between the plastic and the temporal arts, between the fantastic paintings they present and the prose with which they paint them. In these cases, the extensive ekphrases aim to overlay the narratives entirely, and succeed to varying degrees. The trope of ekphrasis is promoted in these texts from a periodic visual interlude within a developing narrative to a pictorialistic version of narrative itself. Narrative must attempt to adhere to ekphrasis's visuality and track the changes within the "imaginary portraits" as those images develop. Several critics have noted how the narrative of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for instance, is essentially written into the painting that is created at the novel's opening and "finished" in the closing sentence: as Garrett Stewart succinctly puts it, "The *Picture* . . . justifies its reflexive title not cheaply but strenuously."[12] The same can be said of Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*, which precede Wilde's tale by several years. Neither title of Lee's story suggests an ekphrastic totality, but the tale, narrated by a portrait painter, nonetheless strives toward this model as he tells the story of the bizarre, half-finished painting that sits in front of him.

While each text privileges a special magic portrait of its protagonist as a comprehensive instance of ekphrasis, it also includes a proliferation of secondary portraits with which to compare the main image. As *mises-en-abyme*, these portraits within the "portraits" comment upon the process of artistic rendering in general and the

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[12] Garrett Stewart, *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 350.

qualities of each picture's subject in particular. This last role is crucial as the main characters that are depicted are singular in their ambiguous sexual identities and desires, in their diaphanous natures, and in their simultaneous fantastical existence both within paintings and in three-dimensional diegetic space. Ontologically, these are mysterious figures, and their mystery extends to their resistance to ordinary, static portraiture, to social conformity, and to narrative order. The impossibility of satisfactory access to them is overdetermined in these ways. And since desire directed at them is figured as purely artistic, that desire is procreative without ever being consummated, thereby continually producing copies of its own efforts, evidenced in the secondary portraits within the literary ones. Artistic creation, figured in Aestheticism as nobler than basic human reproduction, is therefore prolific if sometimes abyssal (i.e., repeating rather than advancing representation), achieving, in progressive steps, from Pater, to Lee, to Wilde, a successfully hybridized product of visual and temporal expression.

As Ed Cohen writes in his oft-cited essay, "Writing Gone Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation," the positive treatment of homoeroticism necessitates "new discursive strategies" on the part of these authors.[13] The totalizing ekphrasis and resultant *mises-en-abyme* that characterize the form of all three of these texts seem to me to be the most pronounced of such strategies, though Cohen does not stress this. He does remark of Dorian Gray's portrait, "Where once the painting had been confined to the atemporality of the aesthetic moment, it now becomes the surface that records the narrative of his life" (810). Especially with comparable texts of the period in view, we might say the magic portrait enacts the mobilization of an aesthetic moment into an Aesthetic *movement* that can exalt the productivity of homosexual desire and

[13] Ed Cohen. "Writing Gone Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation," *PMLA* 102, no. 5 (1987): 807.

identity while mirroring the concurrent emergence of modern moving pictures, which require a multiplicity of related images.

## The Stakes of Queer Visibility: "Sebastian van Storck" and Resistance to Representation

Pater's tale of a lonely, beautiful, self-denying and self-effacing boy opens on a picturesque winter skating scene described, in fact, as a *genre* painting: "It was a winter-scene, by Adrian van de Velde, or by Isaac van Ostade" (333). Pater goes on to describe particular aspects of the scene—trees, snow, ice-skaters, and so on—and even later to tell us that van Ostade is himself *on* the scene, observing from a distance. This painter's presence makes clear the tension Pater strives for between a true ekphrastic image—a description of a *painting* of a winter scene—and an ekphrastic effect that *approaches* the state of a painting but misses just enough to serve instead as metaphor. (This is similar to saying of a character, "She was a Renoir portrait," which would not denote an actual painting but rather conjure a particular painterly vision of its referent.) By way of this tension between true ekphrasis and an appropriation of an artistic terminology, Pater asymptotically approaches the fusing of one artistic medium into another that he extols in *The Renaissance*. This effect is clearly intentional on Pater's part, as all aspects of his *Imaginary Portraits* drive toward a theoretical analysis of visual art translated into fictional narratives of various kinds.

Most critics take the opening line literally—i.e., as indeed a description of a painting that the narrator observes—or at least treat Pater's proximation as precision. Regardless of the semantic disjunction, this inaugural image quickly turns into a cinematic character study by tracking in on one figure in the scene: the marginalized title character. The elements of the skating scene never entirely disappear, making the image linger and thereby coincide with the narrative *in toto*. The story ends in a similar setting,

but one where the ice has turned into tempestuous waters that take Sebastian's life. (His death, we will see, is overdetermined. He is suicidal, but also sickly, and, as a diaphanous type, doomed to early death regardless of circumstances.)

The intervening narrative takes us through the evidence of Sebastian's "peculiar temper" (333), the cause of his isolation and longing for an immaterial, abstract existence. He is melancholy from the start, preferring, in contrast to the vibrant colors the narrator describes, the frozen grays of winter, and asceticism over aestheticism, which is his tragic flaw. He has a "passion for a vigorous intellectual gymnastic" which becomes, as he grows older, a morbid fascination with rationalist philosophy (334). Early on, he relishes the activity of his mind, and while perturbed by aesthetic valuations, can tolerate the material world and his place in the symbolic order. His parents exult in the prosperity and cultural wealth of the Dutch Golden Age as it unfolds and wish their son would take pleasure or interest in its leisure activities, such as painting, as they (along with everyone else) seem to. But since Sebastian is the "diaphanous type" rather than an artist, he maintains his disinterest. He is actually repulsed by all artwork except for certain landscapes of foreign countries. He even returns a portrait of his mother that had been hanging in his room. He increasingly and abrasively rejects representations of the human face and figure, especially his own. All told, there are eight attempts by various characters to paint Sebastian, frequent *mises-en-abyme* that demonstrate the profound difficulty of capturing a rare, evanescent figure and the potential aversion such a person, despite his uncanny beauty, can feel toward visual representation. Of course, the irony is that all along he is in the *Portrait* by which we study him. Pater seems to be painting Sebastian against his will, but as he is modeled somewhat on St. Sebastian, a figure famously aligned with homosexual identity and suffering, Pater arguably presents him to serve a greater good. He seems to offer Sebastian van Storck as a martyr for his coded cause of those for whom the world has no place and who subsequently feel foreclosed from life.

St. Sebastian seems a likely choice of icon for Pater to draw on since, as Richard Kaye notes, the saint has long been associated with homosexuality and tragic but eroticized self-sacrifice, and was figured as a "'decadent' androgyne throughout the nineteenth century."[14] The many Renaissance paintings that depict him cast him as a beautiful boy, arrows protruding from his youthful flesh, his neck suggestively on offer as he gazes upward. The viewer is thereby invited to contemplate St. Sebastian's beauty and suffering without the threat of having the gaze returned. In this way, the viewer can maintain a kind of anonymity in the sense that the picture, at least, does not "see" him looking, and the possibility of a reciprocity and its inherent invitation is safely avoided. As Kaye observes, "The martyr's self-absorbed detachment of visual effect is a fundamental aspect of his intricate mythology, for the archetypal image of an ecstatically self-preoccupied nude male would seem to grant erotic permission to nobody, and, yet, paradoxically, to every viewer" (90). This anonymity provides a desirable alibi for the nineteenth-century queer viewer and, more specifically, a coded figure for Pater to invoke in his narrative portrait of a queer subject who cannot be revealed in clear terms.

While Pater borrows from the subcultural codes inherent in references to St. Sebastian, his updated, philosophical version is no mere imitation.[15] Sebastian's excessively "practical" mind makes him perhaps well-suited to military service—the occupation and undoing of St. Sebastian—but his body is too weak and underdeveloped for such a vocation (334). Relatedly, while St. Sebastian has the protective guise of sanctioned homosocial devotion to his fellow soldiers (for whom he dies), Pater's

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[14] Richard Kaye, "Losing his Religion: Saint Sebastian as contemporary gay martyr," in *Outlooks: Lesbian and gay sexualities and visual cultures*, ed. Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (London: Routledge, 1996), 87. Kaye's article gives a well developed account of St. Sebastian's significations over the centuries.

[15] For an account of the "subcultural codes" of queer discourse, see Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman, "The Gaze Revisited, or Reviewing Queer Viewing," in *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, gay men and popular culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 13-56.

Sebastian shuns all personal relationships. The saint represents this isolation in the many iconic images where he is "self-preoccupied," but his narrative depends on the intensity of his feelings for the men with whom he serves. This solidarity with other men allows St. Sebastian's character to be fully conceptualized as his history, his cultural significations, and the trademarks of his iconicity are made clear. Sebastian van Storck, on the other hand, is necessarily denied comprehensive treatment as Pater depicts not just a queer subject who attracts the gaze of other men, but the near impossibility of such a subject to persist in a homophobic world. In this way, and conceived as a result of Sebastian's diaphanous nature, Pater cannot help but keep Sebastian's "portrait" somewhat obscured, his narrative's development perforated by the gaps of the unnarratable, rendering the story ultimately incomplete.[16]

As Martine Lambert-Charbonnier writes, in Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* "ekphrasis . . . can be seen as a principle of both creativity and composition" in a deliberate alignment of form with content.[17] In "Sebastian van Storck" in particular, she notes, "the opening *ekphrasis* allows Pater to frame the narrative within the spatial limits of a portrait" (202).[18] That Pater intends for his story to itself be received as a kind of painting via narrativized ekphrasis is emphasized not only by invoking a *genre* painting

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[16] Elisa Bizzotto observes narrative irresolution in each of Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*, which makes sense as each ultimately addresses similar issues. Elisa Bizzotto, "The Imaginary Portrait: Pater's Contribution to a Literary Genre," in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2002), 213-223.

[17] Martine Lambert-Charbonnier, "Poetics of *Ekphrasis* in Pater's 'Imaginary Portraits,'" in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, Carolyn Williams (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2002), 202.

[18] Lambert-Charbonnier argues that Pater uses ekphrasis as a means of invoking previous historical periods and cultures and uniting them with a current British readership. She also urges an understanding of his use of ekphrasis to help fiction "tend toward the condition of painting" (212). This brief but provocative essay ends with what reads as an invitation to pick up where she leaves off in her observations about "Sebastian van Storck" quoted above. She writes, "The study of *ekphrasis* as a unifying element in the narrative structure will prove useful in the definition of the 'imaginary portrait' as a literary form" (212). This chapter aims, in part, to prove her correct in this prediction.

to open the tale, but also later telling us that "Those innumerable *genre* pieces [of seventeenth-century Holland]—conversation, music, play—were in truth the equivalent of novel-reading for that day" (336). In "The School of Giorgione" (1877), Pater had set up the precedent of conflating the spatial and temporal arts, writing that rather than imitate one another, "each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art" (133-34).[19] His transposition in "Sebastian van Storck" of a painting "into the condition" of fiction explicitly links his story's historical setting during the peak of the *genre* painting with his own cultural moment of the age of the novel. The first few sentences of the story at hand demonstrate his insistence that this medial transcendence can indeed be realized. He injects the opening frozen image with narrative motion and zooms in, camera-like, on the rarefied figure that the narrating "I" will follow (345):

> It was a winter-scene, by Adrian van de Velde, or by Isaac van Ostade. All the delicate poetry together with all the delicate comfort of the frosty season was in the leafless branches turned to silver, the furred dresses of the skaters, the warmth of the red-brick house fronts under the gauze of white fog, the gleams of pale sunlight on the cuirasses of the mounted soldiers as they receded into the distance. Sebastian van Storck, confessedly the most graceful performer in all that skating multitude, moving in endless maze over the vast surface of the frozen water-meadow, liked best this season of the year for its expression of a perfect impassivity, or at least of perfect repose. (333)

Pater's painterly aims are clear from the start. Not only does he ascribe the image to one of two actual painters whose works and style we can call up to enhance the precision of our own picturing, but he provides aesthetic descriptions of every object mentioned in vivid brushstrokes. He uses this technique throughout the story (as well as in the other *Imaginary Portraits*), never losing sight of his intended effect. And while painting is the medium whose "condition" he wishes his narrative to "pass into," portraiture is his specific goal, and he quickly moves in from the "skating multitude" to the title character,

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[19] Qtd in Lambert-Charbonnier, 204. The Pater essay provides fascinating elaboration on this concept. Pater, *The Renaissance*, 83-98.

worthy, in his exceptionality, of special focus. This transition from a generalizing pictorial mode to the narrativized representation of a singular personality exemplifies the aim of Pater's theoretical fiction: "In effect," James Eli Adams observes of the *Imaginary Portraits*, "the familiar Paterian merging of human being and artwork is . . . translated into narrative."[20]

The story's opening passage isolates Sebastian not only in his being "the most graceful performer" in the scene, but in his actions taking place in the present tense while the story opens on what seems to be a still image pulled from the past: "It *was* a winter scene"; "the delicate poetry . . . *was* in the leafless branches"; the soldiers "receded." While there is a hint of the precarious between the frozen past and a living scene from the start created by the evocation of "warmth" and "gleams" of light, it is only when the narrator picks up Sebastian that anything is set squarely in motion. In the two dependent clauses that separate "Sebastian" from the definitive predicate "liked," live action is strongly suggested by his *being* "the most graceful performer in all that *skating* multitude, *moving* in endless maze. . ." until the postponed past tense is finally settled upon—and not just from mere grammatical necessity. For Pater's *Portrait* is of a life prematurely ended, and the reader might guess, even from this opening, that Sebastian's death is a foregone conclusion.[21] The above passage continues:

> The earth was, or seemed to be, at rest, with a breathlessness of slumber which suited the young man's peculiar temper. The heavy summer, as it dried up the meadows now lying dead below the ice, set free a crowded and competing world of life, which, while it

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[20] James Eli Adams, "Transparencies of Desire: An Introduction," in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, Carolyn Williams (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2002), 9.

[21] As Laurel Brake writes, "from the beginning of Sebastian (van Storck)'s narrative life, he is greyed by death." Laurel Brake, "The Entangling Dance: Pater after Marius, 1885-1891," in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, Carolyn Williams (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2002), 34.

> gleamed very pleasantly russet and yellow for the painter Albert Cuyp, seemed wellnigh to suffocate Sebastian van Storck. (333)[22]

This further elaboration associates Sebastian with "breathlessness" and death as if he were already dead, diaphaneitè a more literal otherworldliness here in its fictionalized representation than in Pater's initial theoretical piece. Sebastian instinctively turns away from life—and therefore toward death—even as he carves in ice an "endless maze" with exceptional grace and "youthfulness of aspect" (333). One cannot skate "endlessly," particularly in circles over seasonal ice, though, and so his directionless journey will end as predictably as the season. The story indeed closes with his death, as the ice of the opening image unfreezes in a torrential storm utterly at odds with Sebastian's need for "silence" and impassivity (342).[23]

While the populous image that opens the story becomes an isolated representation of its central figure, the same resistance that keeps the tale from being a true ekphrasis-as-story (in favor, rather, of an approximation) keeps a stable image of its title character and a satisfying conclusion to his narrative just out of its scope. Resistance to picturing is a definitive quality of Sebastian himself: "all his singularities appeared to be summed up in his refusal to take his place in the life-sized family group (*très distingué et très soigné* remarks a modern critic of the work) painted about this time" (343). This *mise-en-abyme*, which "sums up" Sebastian and his relationship to representation, is just one of many that evidences his "continual effort at self-effacement" while the "artist tribe" that

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[22] Other critics, like John Coates and Sigi Jöttkandt, claim Sebastian's alignment with the "perfect impassivity" of the frozen works against any "delightfulness of interest" or lively animation the imaginary portrait attempts to conjure ("Sebastian," 336). Jöttkandt quotes Pater's later assignation of "delightfulness of interest" within Dutch paintings (183). Sigi Jöttkandt, "Effectively Equivalent: Walter Pater, 'Sebastian van Storck,' and the Ethics of Metaphor," in *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 60, no. 2 (2005): 163-198. See also John Coates, "Aspects of the Intellectual Context of Pater's 'Imaginary Portraits,'" in *The Yearbook of English Studies* 15 (1985): 93-108.

[23] Sebastian thinks of one of the few portraits he admires, which depicts a Carthusian prior, that "could it have spoken, would have said "Silence!" (342). Sebastian, identifying with the lonely ponderousness of monastic life, does not seem to get the irony of using the gift of speech solely to quiet everyone else.

surrounds him wants nothing more than to assert and sublimate his fantastical visage to make his "difference"—which fascinates them—permanently visible (349; 334; 343). By their sheer number, the artists in the story testify not just to the ubiquity of painters in seventeenth-century Holland, but also to the intensity of Sebastian's appeal to the artistic eye. In addition to Adrian van de Velde, van Ostade, and Albert Cuyp, Pater includes Thomas de Keyser, Philip de Konnick, Gabriel Metsu, Jan Steen, William van Aelst, Gerard Dow, Willem van de Velde, Bartholomeus van der Helst, and Ludolf Backhuizen. Even philosopher Baruch de Spinoza makes an appearance—two, in fact—hoping to record the likeness of the alluring Sebastian.

Along with being the possible author of the opening *genre* painting, van Ostade is identified as the one person who has successfully painted Sebastian in the past, though he had to do so "from a sketch taken at one of those skating parties" (333), as Sebastian's refusal to sit for a portrait seems a lifelong principle. When another artist, famous for his portraiture, is taken with Sebastian's rarity, the boy's response is as cold as his philosophy:

> Thomas de Keyser, who understood better than any one [*sic*] else the kind of quaint new Atticism which had found its way into the world over those waste salt marshes, wondering whether quite its finest type as he understood it could ever actually be seen there, saw it at last, in lively motion, in the person of Sebastian van Storck, and desired to paint his portrait. A little to his surprise, the young man declined the offer; not graciously, as was thought. (335)

The reference to classical Greek aesthetic values in conjunction with Sebastian's uncanny appeal makes this a model passage for illustrating how artists could be fascinated by Sebastian and desirous of recording his looks without being accused of transgressive sexual aims. As the narrator reports, some eyes (at least those of mothers with marriageable daughters) that follow "the movements of Sebastian van Storck" can be "well-satisfied" in that alone (334); hence, scopic pleasure can be divorced from sexual aims. The cinesthetic subjects discussed in my previous chapter, whose bodies are so

implicated in scopophilia as to result in pregnancy in one case, are precluded here in service of the assertion of a visual pleasure that does not threaten the normative social order. The artist's eye can be enthralled with any object, as desire is figured in purely artistic terms. The sexuality of the artist becomes irrelevant, as the artistic drive takes precedence over the sexual, and is entirely dissociated from the artist's/viewer's embodied subjectivity.

Hence, I am not making any claims about the sexuality of the historical figures Pater places in this story but rather arguing that he includes so many to underscore his point that aesthetic pleasure and appreciation is not immoral but noble, as it is not an invention of the late Victorians or a Hellenistic archaeological project on their part. If artists *by nature* are instinctively taken with the particular beauty of the ephebe, the androgyne, or any other figure that does not adhere to society's narrow gender norms, the subject *as artist* is the safest alibi, as Thomas Waugh indicates, for indulging a homoerotic gaze and "making visible" another "invisible" subject in patriarchal society.[24] This quest for power in the visual field had been the project of women, as my previous chapters have explored, but through the emphases of the Aesthetic movement (and, as Waugh explains, the discreet production and distribution of photographs) in the latter part of the nineteenth-century, it becomes, if in coded terms, a vital undertaking for queer subjects. As Davis argues, Pater, after all, can be seen as "a first-rate, if not the first, queer theorist" (262).

In "Sebastian van Storck," Pater shows the inevitably of a true artist's affinity for a figure as "evanescent" as the elusive title character. Even an artistic *sensibility* is enough to cause such aesthetic compulsions. Sebastian's father, for instance, likes to picture Sebastian "[a]dmiral-general of Holland, as painted by Van der Helst, with a marine background by Backhuizen" (341). Spinoza, too, while in conversation with

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[24] See Waugh, especially 431-36.

Sebastian (who "most unexpectedly . . . found himself in sympathy" with the philosopher), "very ready with the pencil, had taken his likeness as they talked on the fly-leaf of his notebook" (342). At another social gathering, de Keyser tries "to sketch by stealth the likeness of Sebastian" since Sebastian would not comply with his initial request (338).

The flip side of this liberation of (a version of) same-sex scopophilia is Sebastian's innate resistance to being on display, particularly in any recorded sense.[25] While the artist can at least partially enjoy a (still subversive) queer gaze, Sebastian, like his namesake, is not permitted to reciprocate a pleasurable look. Instead, he is incessantly made aware of all the eyes he attracts and must vigilantly guard against his image being taken to avoid exposure as a queer subject himself. He may figure his difference in philosophical terms, but the irreconcilability he feels with the world "order" is not caused by abstract intellectualizing. While early on Sebastian takes some pride in his nihilistic rationalism and subsequent distancing of himself from others, his isolation loses its novelty, and he becomes profoundly melancholy. A particular moment late in the narrative reveals the deeply personal and emotional nature of his existential crisis. What had been an aversion to others studying his looks becomes something more dangerous and self-directed: he "desired but to fade out of the world like a breath" (343-44). Where he had initially rejected the gaze of others, he now rejects his own visibility and the illusion it can nourish about the possibility of love based on material assessments:

> What he must admire, and love if he could, was "equilibrium," the void, the *tabula rasa*, into which, through all those apparent energies of man and nature, that in truth are but forces of disintegration, the world was really setting. And, himself a mere circumstance in a fatalistic series, to which the clay of the potter

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[25] This could be read through Lee Edelman's notion of homographesis—where heteronormative homophobic society wishes to "put a face" on the non-normative. Sebastian seems aware of the potential for this sinister motive for recording his special "look," even though Pater stresses the genuine appreciation of each of Sebastian's would-be portraitists. See Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

> was no sufficient parallel, he could not expect to be "loved in return." (348)

Sebastian's philosophy becomes more bleak with each iteration of someone attempting to lay a claim on him, whether to artistic objecthood by the various painters and intellectuals, to filial duty by his mother, or to a marital engagement into which he is tricked. His efforts to protect from view what others long to make visible, then, fail in increasing degree as the story progresses. Manipulation into a heterosexual betrothal fortifies Sebastian's will to escape his life, as it makes clear his incongruence with the world and what it demands of him. The morning after he has fled, his mother finds his notebook filled with "the studious record of the abstract thoughts which had been the real business of Sebastian's life, in the room . . . littered with the fragments of the one portrait of him in existence" (345). The notebook circulates as a kind of explanation for Sebastian's history of misanthropic behavior, but what ails him is not so much his intellectualizing as his intense phobia of the personal, best expressed in his act of destroying his own image. Significantly, *we are not* privy to this act of tearing up the picture, likely because it would be accompanied by a too-revealing emotional nakedness.

Sebastian is clearly headed toward suicide, but merely ending his life is not enough. To truly achieve the safety of disappearance, he must erase the evidence of his own materiality and deny the possibility of even postmortem exposure. "To restore *tabula rasa*, then, by a continual effort at self-effacement!" becomes his mantra by the end of the story (349). He must erase all instances of his potentially legible face, and therefore shreds the one portrait of which he is aware. The other one, the one we are reading, is unavailable to him, but he would clearly wish it snuffed out. By continuing our readerly gaze on his representation, we are uncomfortably assigned the position of voyeurs who knowingly violate Sebastian's ephemeral body.

With Sebastian plunging headlong into the project of self-erasure and restoration of a clean slate (or canvas, perhaps), the story seems destined for the lack of narrative closure that Elisa Bizzotto notes in each of Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*.[26] As Sebastian thwarts his own representation and even undoes the work of previous representational efforts, Pater's *Portrait* of him cannot be completed either. The story ends rather unsatisfyingly with Sebastian fleeing to the coast, where the turbulent sea, furiously agitated by an unnatural storm, takes his life, but not before he performs an oddly humanitarian act for an abruptly introduced new character:

> when the body of Sebastian was found, apparently not long after death, a child lay asleep, swaddled warmly in his heavy furs, in an upper room of the old tower, to which the tide was almost risen; though the building still stood firmly, and still with the means of life in plenty. And it was in the saving of this child, with a great effort, as certain circumstances seemed to indicate, that Sebastian had lost his life. (351-52)

Many critics read this ending as Sebastian becoming Christ-like (or St. Sebastian-like) in his self-sacrifice. Lambert-Charbonnier, for instance, writes: "The portrait closes on an image of rebirth with the saving of a little child. Sebastian was able to find some element of stability amid the flux of life" (211). While this interpretation seems invited on a superficial level, the scene itself seems too contrived and laden with symbolism to be taken as a real event, a hastily arranged act of redemption as plot-device to sidestep anger, alienation, and suicide. After all, Sebastian's story up to this point has been presented in heavily coded terms that even require intertextual cross-referencing with Pater's earlier writings like "Diaphaneitè," "Winckelmann," and "The School of Giorgione."[27] Sebastian's demise, like the destruction of his portrait, does not happen

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[26] Bizzotto builds on earlier criticism in this vein by Wendell Harris in his *British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth* Century (1979), but she argues that this narrative irresolution is one of the features that marks Pater's *Portraits* as modernist texts (219-20). See Jöttkandt also for a more recent take on the lack of narrative closure in these stories (180).

[27] Dellamora credits Francis Roellinger with first assessing the similarities in "Winckelmann" and "Diaphaneitè." In *Masculine Desire*, he provides further contextualizing and analysis of these parallels.

before our eyes. We are presented with "circumstantial" evidence for the martyring of Pater's tragic hero, but an onrush of humanitarianism is not convincing as the real cause for which he is martyred. The most striking evidence for what is at issue seems to be the mysteriousness of the child that replaces Sebastian in the world. This new, non-gendered life seems to materialize out of the water itself, the very element with which Sebastian is linked from the skating scene through to his drowning. The most generous reading we can allow, it seems, is that Sebastian hopes this child, seemingly as "out of order" with the world as himself, will have a better chance at survival and being "loved in return." This is not a "seizure of stability" for Sebastian, but rather of an infinitesimal hope for the possibility that subjects like himself will not always be fatally marked.

Further, the story does not end with this quick-fix salvation myth, but instead with various rationales for why Sebastian's death would have happened then regardless of the storm or the random child in need of rescue.

> His parents were come to seek him, believing him bent on self-destruction, and were almost glad to find him thus. A learned physician, moreover, endeavored to comfort his mother by remarking that in any case he must certainly have died ere many years were passed, slowly, perhaps painfully, of a disease then coming into the world; disease begotten by the fogs of that country—waters, he observed, not in their place, "above the firmament"—on people grown somewhat over-delicate in their nature by the effects of modern luxury. (352)

Sebastian's poor health has been alluded to throughout the story, but only here is it linked to a cause, or causes, rather: to water, to nature, and to a cultural and historical moment. The words of this physician are not meant to be taken as factual explanation, either, as he clearly has his prejudices and is, after all, speaking with the desire to comfort a grieving mother rather than provide an accurate thesis. What the litany of causes of Sebastian's death seems to really indicate is the myriad of ways fate was stacked against him. The

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Francis X. Roellinger, "Intimations of Winckelmann in Pater's Diaphaneitè," *English Language Notes* 2 (1965): 277-82.

first sentence of "Diaphaneitè" makes clear the harsh judgment of the world on people of Sebastian's rare type, essentially denying them "a right to exist." While the tone of this early essay is understandably bitter and that of "Sebastian van Storck" bleak, Pater's ultimate point seems not to be the inevitable doom of the queer figure, but that with each generation, perhaps, a better reception is possible. The new life at the end of this approximate portrait is perched, isolated, in the highest part of a flooded tower—not too auspicious a start, but not hopeless either. For *tabula rasa has* been reintroduced into the world with this identity-less child. Faceless, genderless, borne of the elements, its image cannot be taken and its gaze not yet established.

This child, even if a narratively awkward symbol, importantly represents what has been impossible in the story all along: the pure potential of a new kind of representation, a challenge to accept and accommodate a person *as tabula rasa*, part of a project for rewriting the rules of representation. While the story itself could not offer a true ekphrasis of Sebastian's *Portrait* and the artists within it could not, in turn, reflect the diaphanous figure in their own "mirrors in the text," a repetition with a difference is achieved, a representation of potential rather than a portrait of its failed realization in Sebastian. This is still not a satisfying end for *his* narrative, but such an end was always an impossibility. As Sigi Jöttkandt writes, "the real opposition in 'Sebastian van Storck' is not between practical action and theoretical reflection but between memory and forgetting—or, even more broadly, as Sebastian's central figure of the *tabula rasa* suggests, between writing (inscription) and erasure" (186). Sebastian may feel it vital to erase himself, but he is not so nihilistic as to also eradicate one who may find a future where *self*-inscription is possible. While Pater may make this outcome seem unlikely, his followers, like Lee and Wilde, will be able to envision similar figures more fully inscribed into social order and artistic representation. This will lend their stories not only the ekphrastic elements Pater approaches but meaningfully avoids, but also the proto-cinematic motifs that come to be so strongly associated with Aestheticism.

## A Storyboard of Sketches: Vernon Lee's Art for Narrative's Sake

While Pater's imaginary portrait of Sebastian van Storck is full of artistic attempts that ultimately fail to capture a diaphanous figure, Vernon Lee does much to get the imaginary portrait narrative on solid representational ground, creating not just one enduring image of her androgynous heroine, but a robust series of them that suggests succession and momentum. These are progressive *mises-en-abyme* that put to use the changes in content that Gide and Escobar highlight in the trope, where each picture is not simply a replica of the one in which it is enclosed but an expression of difference in tension with the larger image. Lee's story will not, however, mobilize this lateral drive sufficiently to grant the tale full cinematic motion via these instances of ekphrasis. As Vicinus notes, Lee "could not imagine either a successful work of art or a successful [homosexual] relationship," which makes a fully realized totalizing ekphrasis equally impossible to imagine (112). Still, the appealing androgynous figure in "Oke of Okehurst" is more fully developed, liberated, and celebrated than Pater's Sebastian. Lee is able to provide all of the *parts* of a proto-cinematic series of *mises-en-abyme*; she stops short, though, of setting them into the magical motion we will find in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

In "Oke of Okehurst; or, A Phantom Lover," Lee turns, as Pater had in the same year, to the seventeenth century to locate a diaphanous figure on which to base an aesthetically intermedial "imaginary portrait" narrative. She sets the story in the late *nineteenth* century, however, conflating different generations within the same aristocratic family while contrasting their historical moments and resultant behaviors. Catherine Maxwell writes of how Lee "inherits Pater's interest in the androgynous type which can represent the male homosexual, but also shows how she revises this [Sublime] figure and

then counters it . . . in a way which brings out the full impact of its female power."[28] Hilary Fraser also notes that in Lee's writing, "questions relating to gender and sexuality in the visual field are most insistently raised."[29] Interestingly, though, Lee's is not so much a feminist appropriation or "[usurpation of] the gaze," as Fraser calls it, but rather a queer one, where the multiplicity of spectatorial possibilities she presents inherently empowers women but also "appears to be as disconcertingly ungendered as [Jonathan] Crary's" (94).[30]

"Oke of Okehurst," narrated by a portrait painter, is the story of the enigmatic Alice Oke, an androgynously appealing woman who is identical in name and appearance to a seventeenth-century ancestor, as is evidenced by a 200-year old portrait. Alice has hired the narrator to journey to her country estate to paint her own and her husband's portraits. While she lets the narrator sketch her constantly, she does not seem interested, actually, in his artistic products, but rather in telling him about the scandalous history of her namesake that involves ambiguous and transgressive sexuality, a love triangle, a murder, and a family curse. Alice seems to desire above all a mastery of this story that would allow her to trigger its final events, which seem as yet unrealized, owing to her mysterious link to the past as well as the haunted, atemporal nature of the country manor itself. According to family lore, early in the seventeenth century, Nicholas Oke had married Alice Pomfret, who was wealthy and beautiful but from a "different sort of people—restless and self-seeking" (121). A Cavalier poet named Christopher Lovelock

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[28] Catherine Maxwell, "From Dionysus to 'Dionea': Vernon Lee's portraits," *Word & Image* 13, no. 3 (1997): 258.

[29] Hilary Fraser, "Women and the Ends of Art History: Vision and Corporeality in Nineteenth-Century Critical Discourse," *Victorian Studies* 42, no. 1 (1998): 86.

[30] This regrettable observation (as Fraser presents it) is at the heart of a debate not uncommon about lesbian and bisexual women writers and very pronounced in Lee studies in particular. Some critics identify misogyny in her writing and a determination to privilege the terms of male Decadent Aesthetics. Others see Lee in a more positive feminist light, or, alternatively, in one that empowers the queer *fin-de-siècle* figure that resists conforming to conventions of masculinity or femininity.

forged a friendship with Nicholas and Alice, "too great a friendship, apparently, with the wife, either for her husband's taste or her own" (121). While it seems Alice and Lovelock had an affair, she and Nicholas murdered Lovelock, with her, cross-dressed as a groom, delivering the fatal (and literal) shot in the back. Soon after, Nicholas threatened to kill Alice, cursed the family to come to its end the next time a head of Okehurst married another Alice Oke, and precipitately expired. The motivations for all of these actions remain a matter a speculation. Two hundred years later, William Oke has indeed married his cousin, Alice Oke, whom he adores, but who hasn't the faintest interest in him or in the Oke line. She considers herself linked only to the original Alice Oke, wearing the woman's clothes and keeping the home itself upholstered with seventeenth-century furniture and art. The nature and extent of the connection between the two Alices remains an enigma throughout the fantastical story.

The current Alice could have been born a *tabula rasa* figure such as Pater presents at the end of his story, only to become inscribed by the former Mrs. Oke after her marriage. Alice reports: "I didn't know [in childhood] that I was like the original Alice Oke; I found it out only after our marriage" (123). The timing of this realization suggests that it is tied to her aversion to heterosexuality, awakening in her a registration of shared lesbian identity (as the original Alice rejects her husband and her other male suitor) and same-sex desire. Several other possibilities also suggest themselves: she could be a reincarnation of the other Alice; she could be merely delusional and obsessive; she could be in love with the original Alice; or she could intensely identify with her as a transgressive female subject. At times, she seems "to know every word that Alice had spoken, every idea that had crossed her mind . . . For Mrs. Oke . . . entered completely and passionately into the feelings of this woman, this Alice, who, at some moments, seemed to be not another woman, but herself" (131). So entwined is the present Alice with the former that even the narrator exhibits confusion about Mrs. Oke's relation to her predecessor: she has "no interest in the present, but only an eccentric passion in the past"

(*in* the past, curiously, rather than *for* the past). "It seemed to give meaning," the narrator continues, "to the absent look in her eyes, to her irrelevant and far-off smile. It was like the words to a weird piece of gypsy music, *this that she*, who was so different, so distant from women of her own time, should try and identify herself with a woman of the past—*that she* should have a kind of flirtation—But *of this* anon" (122-23; italics mine). The narrator indicates in the loaded parenthetical of "this that she" that "this" Alice could be "that" one, and that both are equal parts thises and thats and shes, in their androgyny, doubling, and other-worldliness. He also quickly distinguishes between the two and suggests that the contemporary Alice tries to identify herself with the other woman but has more success in having "a kind of flirtation" with her. Conversely, "*that* she" of the past may well be the one pursuing the attentions "of *this*" one. Another reading of the truncated line is also possible; the em-dash allows for an interpretation with Lovelock as the object of her (this Alice's) flirtation, probably for the sake of a perfunctory nod to heteronormativity as much as for keeping Alice's desires obscured. This reading is supported by Alice's frequent reference to the poet and his passions, inherent in the writings that survive him.

Alice herself speaks confoundingly about her link to her namesake. She says, "If I am like that Alice Oke, why I am" (119). She indicates a greater distinction than the narrator does between herself and the other Alice with the word "that," but this emphasized difference is countered by the sameness she is claiming, rendering the statement a paradoxical puzzle. Does she mean she is *similar to* that Alice, or rather that she *is* that Alice? Her diction, like many of her traits, is tantalizingly inscrutable. She likewise evidences a passion for Lovelock—or his ghost—as she has memorized his poems, and reads one to the narrator in a voice "shadowy, like her person," and with "a curious throbbing cadence" and "as one might fancy a woman would read love-verses addressed to herself" (127). While this interpretation of the narrator's is valid, he misses its alternative: she could relate to Lovelock's passion for Alice, sharing his object. She

exclaims of the poems, "Those are all written for Alice Oke—Alice the daughter of Virgil Pomfret" (127). Clearly, the other Alice is very much present to her in her emotional response to the poetry. These vacillations suggest that Alice's erotic interests as far as particular objects are concerned are irresolvable, or at least, as Patricia Pulham notes, "not mutually exclusive."[31]

I would propose that rather than favoring a particular figure in the love triangle (triangulated either by the non-entity Nicholas, or by herself), her libidinal energy seems substantially cathected into the process of narrativization itself. She is obsessed with the *story* of Alice, Lovelock, and Nicholas, and she is devoted to mobilizing the final act of the Alice Oke drama, even if, as all clues indicate, the spectacle ends with her death. Her commitment to dramatization is evidenced when she discovers a play by Lovelock and sets about planning its production at Okehurst. But this particular masque is of no real interest to her. The narrator reports, "I saw very plainly that the performance would never take place, and that Mrs. Oke herself had no intention that it ever should" (141). This play has no direct relevance to the Oke drama, despite its being written by one of the key players. It is therefore of no value as a *mise-en-abyme* that can advance Alice's own theatrical performance (unlike Gide's example of *The Mousetrap* within *Hamlet*). Having her portrait added to the visual record of the narrative has the potential to serve that function, though, as it would represent both the sameness and the split between the two Alices, the tension of which might produce real action. To have a competing portrait made, a repetition with a difference, Alice needed a portrait artist present, and one of a particular type. This is what brings our narrator, the portraitist Alice hand-picks, to Okehurst in the first place.

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[31] Patricia Pulham, *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatual Tales* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 131.

This unnamed artist bears some signs of the dandy, with his urbanity, fondness for velvet coats (which makes William Oke uncomfortable, the narrator notes with pride), and appreciation of the lush décor of his room at Okehurst, which he describes as having "a special kind of voluptuousness" (112). His ability to conflate aesthetic appreciation with scopic pleasure seems a clear signal of his ability to appreciate Paterian diaphaneitè when he sees it in Alice. He describes her as "diaphanous," in fact, multiple times (123, 141), and overall cannot seem to provide enough descriptors to convey her androgyny and evanescence: Alice has "short hair," "something of the stag in her," and "grace and exquisiteness recognised at once as perfect, but which were seen in her for the first, and probably, . . . for the last time"; she is "the most marvelously rare and exquisite and baffling subject for a portrait," "peculiar and enigmatic" with a "psychological peculiarity . . . that might be summed up in an exorbitant and absorbing interest in herself—a Narcissus attitude—curiously complicated with a fantastic imagination, a sort of morbid day-dreaming, all turned inwards, and with no outer characteristic save a certain restlessness, a perverse desire to surprise and shock" (114, 116). Alice has carefully selected this artist as he seems someone who can appreciate and represent the ambiguities of her identity. He is also in need of employment and therefore likely willing to spend several weeks at Okehurst in her artistic service. Both of these points are clear from the narrator's admission that he was surprised to receive the offer, as he had recently painted an "influential . . . fat lady" rather unflatteringly and was thus "considered as a painter to whose brushes no woman would trust her reputation" (108). This anecdote exemplifies Mrs. Oke's prerequisites, as it shows the painter to have neither innate nor artificial deference to social norms and standards. He is an artist before a diplomat, interested in aesthetic truth, and uninterested in women. His queer gaze and aesthetic principles suit Alice's peculiar needs.

The occasion for the story's telling is the narrator's desire to explain to a silent auditor in his studio this enigmatic woman, the strange events he witnessed at Okehurst,

and his inability, ultimately, to paint her portrait. It is the story of his fascination with her—an almost purely aesthetic and hermeneutic one, in this case—and with her innate elusiveness.[32] In preparing to paint her portrait, he produces over 130 sketches of her—a quantity indicating his obsession with his task, his drive to represent her changing aspects, and his inability to get beyond crude attempts at capturing her essence. He shows his auditor the canvas that was meant to be saturated with her image, and in the process provides several interesting clues about the dynamics at Okehurst, including the husband's irrelevance and his own entrenchment with Alice and her "story" through this bizarre canvas.

> Yes; I began the picture, but it was never finished. I did the husband first. I wonder who has his likeness now? Help me to move these pictures away from the wall. Thanks. This is her portrait; a huge wreck. I don't suppose you can make much of it; it is merely blocked in, and seems quite mad. You see my idea was to make her leaning against a wall—there was one hung with yellow that seemed almost brown—so as to bring out the silhouette.
>
> It was very singular I should have chosen that particular wall. It does look rather insane in this condition, but I like it; it has something of her. I would frame it and hang it up, only people would ask questions. (106)

Not only does this introduction suggest the easy dismissal of the husband and his picture, but it makes blatant that there is "something of her" even in this most abstract of renderings. The picture itself was "leaning against a wall" as she was supposed to be within the picture, a reflection of form from one layer of representation to another. Before he can go on with his tale about her, he must again place her against the wall, but this time facing it, presumably so he can tell her story without her fantastical eyes on him: "It's too dark to paint anymore today, so I can tell it to you now. Wait; I must turn her face to the wall. Ah, she was a marvelous creature!" (107).

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[32] His lack of sexual attraction to her seems clear from his never thinking of her as a body but rather "merely as a wonderful series of lines" (114). He is also relieved when he realizes that she is not trying to solicit his interest (116).

And yet, despite the suggestion of her presence within the "huge wreck," this portrait, which should have ideally been able to convey her whole essence, personality, and story, cannot. The narrator must paint her portrait with words, even in their relative inadequacy, as he sees it. His passively unfinished, uncanny abstraction of a picture is an important site of potentiality for a fully fledged magic portrait such as we will find in *Dorian Gray*, but it does not realize that potential. The picture requires a "voice over," as it were, to make the narrative it *should* contain perceptible. Lee seems to understand the factors that would contribute to a "new discursive strategy" of expression for tales that reflect her own transgressive notions of sex and gender, complicated though they are. She endows her portrayed character with diaphaneitè and, pushing further, marvelousness in the Todorovian sense. She also has a painter with aesthetic sensibilities and a queer gaze represent the best chance at success in this artistic endeavor. While the "huge wreck" that was meant to be the essential image of Alice is uncanny (if abstract), the proliferation of images of Alice in the story, in all manner of dress, activities, and moods registers "something of her" in every iteration. Put together, these images could tell the whole story of Alice Oke, particularly if they were flipped through in filmic succession, but we are privy to only a few of these in highly significant instances of ekphrasis.

The story opens, for example, on the sketch of the 130 that the narrator clearly favors—the one that necessitates the qualifier of "almost" when describing his *almost* purely aesthetic gaze. We enter the narration *in medias res*. The narrator's first word—a deictic "That"—indicates that he has already been discoursing upon Alice Oke. It would seem that we are granted access to the imaginary portrait narrative at this very moment because it is the first instance of a picture's evocation. An ekphrasis, as "Sebastian van Storck" suggests, must open the tale. The first lines read, "That sketch up there with the boy's cap? Yes; that's the same woman" (105). The picture depicts Alice dressed in the groom's outfit in which the original Alice had killed Lovelock. The narrator seems to have his best access to an effectively charged painterly gaze when his subject is

convincingly cross-dressed, as this is the image he *does* hang of her, and, in describing the figure in the picture as "that," reveals his hesitation in associating womanhood with the image, one upon which he obviously enjoys gazing.

In the scene in which she dons this outfit, the Okes are hosting a party, itself an unlikely occurrence, but the guests have decided to dress in the clothing of the Okes' ancestors. During this segment of the party, the narrator wonders where Mrs. Oke has gone.

> But a moment later, as we were all noisily preparing to go in to dinner, the door opened and a strange figure entered, stranger than any of these others who were profaning the clothes of the dead: a boy, slight and tall, in a brown riding-coat, leathern belt, and big buff boots, a little grey cloak over one shoulder, a large grey slouch hat over the eyes, a dagger and pistol at the waist. It was Mrs. Oke, her eyes preternaturally bright, and her whole face lit up with a bold, perverse smile. (137-38)

Again, the narrator defers identifying Alice's gender to emphasize both her androgyny and his preference for not seeing the woman in her. She goes from being "a strange figure," to "a boy," to a gratuitous "It," finally, to "Mrs. Oke." Either boy or woman, she seizes the phallus twice over with the superfluity of dagger *and* pistol. Her "boldness" and "perversity" are also aptly noted, as she takes pleasure in defying gender norms in her own performance and in inviting the scopophilic gaze of a man upon herself *as* a dangerous but alluring boy. Her particular joy in dressing up at once as a murderess *and* a beautiful boy seems to encapsulate the various libidinal and representational tensions that are highly strung throughout the story. One imagines Alice might favor the narrator's sketch as much as he does for its commanding conflations that find their climax in her favorite part of the seventeenth-century narrative—the murder, where gender norms are not merely reversed but dizzyingly dislodged, owing to the triangulated scene with the master who cannot shoot, the virile lover who is emasculated, and the woman as a fearless boy ready to dispatch with all men who assert normative privileges.

Alongside this image of Alice as a brashly triumphant adolescent, there is an insistently conventional portrait in the story, also central to Alice's self-conception. Okehurst Manor is copiously paneled with ancestral portraits, with the one of the original Alice Oke notably featured. Its specialness lies only, however, in its having a living replica of its painted figure outside its frame. The narrator, with his informed artistic eye, reports:

> The picture in question was a full length, neither very good nor very bad, probably done by some stray Italian of the early seventeenth century. . . . The lady was really wonderfully like the present Mrs. Oke, at least so far as an indifferently painted portrait of the early days of Charles I. can be like a living woman of the nineteenth century. There were the same strange lines of figure and face, the same dimples in the thin cheeks, the same wide-opened eyes, the same vague expression, not destroyed even by the feeble painting and conventional manner of the time. (118)

Externally, this painting has all the makings of a magic portrait—the doppelganger and the eerie mausoleum-as-home, with its furnishings "that looked as if they came out of some Vandyck portrait," to name two prominent tropes (111). The conflation of elements in the painting with the diegetic space and main character suggest this portrait will play a vital role in the fate of the current Alice Oke. But the picture is oddly vacuous, a *mise-en-abyme* that leads nowhere but to contemplation of its own emptiness. Even though this is a portrait within a literary portrait that depicts a different generation—a *mise-en-abyme* that meets Gide's criteria of particularizing the larger frame's genealogy—the oversameness of this pictured Alice with the Alice of the nineteenth-century denies it the progressive and productive quality that difference could create.

This genealogical tension—or lack thereof, with an abyssal uncanny repetition in its place—seems thoroughly intentional on Lee's part. Denisoff notes that "Throughout Lee's life, portraiture reinforced the view of genealogy as an essential identificatory trait"

with its authoritative attestations to a family's heredity and traditions.[33] This indicates that Lee would recognize the importance of portraits in registering inherited qualities as well as changes across time within a family's lineage. But Denisoff also points out the complexities of the old portrait in "Oke of Okehurst": "While the Okes' chain of tradition and heredity is severed, a same-sex line of admiration and affection continues through portraiture," even though this has "become a painting of the same woman" ("Forest," 103). (There is, though, a problematic conflation here of narcissistic reflection with same-sex desire if the painting portrays both the same and different women.)[34] This paradoxical lineage through identical repetition is particularly unsettling as the story-as-imaginary-portrait attempts to solve for the difference in the Alice of the present, to arrive at a new and satisfying ending for the plot begun in the seventeenth century. As Peter Brooks points out in his analysis of a different genealogy, "The past needs to be incorporated *as past* within the present, mastered through the play of repetition in order for there to be an escape from repetition: in order for there to be difference, change, progress."[35] The narrative of "Oke of Okehurst" seeks to reveal this difference and its significance; this original portrait though, compared to its new referent, is a repetition that defies advancement. To quote Brooks again: "Repetition creates a *return* in the text, a doubling back. We cannot say whether this return is a return *to* or a return *of*: for

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[33] Dennis Denisoff, "The Forest Beyond the Frame: Women's Desires in Vernon Lee and Virginia Woolf," *Sexual Visuality from Literature to Film, 1850-1950* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 101.

[34] This conflation calls for the parsing of what in the 17th century portrait makes it *not* a painting of the 19th century woman, despite the obvious need to accept a fantastical "transhistorical bonding" that Denisoff postulates. One might turn to Steven Bruhm, *Reflecting Narcissus: A Queer Aesthetic* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), to think through this tension, which he figures as one of aesthetic surfaces and psychological or psychoanalytic depth: "Optical models collide . . . as a hermeneutic of surfaces comes axiologically to clash with a hermeneutic of depth—psychoanalysis, the figurations of desire, the epistemology of the closet" (56).

[35] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 134.

instance, a return of origins or a return of the repressed. Repetition through this ambiguity appears to suspend temporal process . . . " (100). This fantastical suspension of time, created either by the new Alice turning back to the old, or the old one resurfacing, is emblematized in the seventeenth century portrait and its invitation to follow an abyssal and false narrative lead.

The effect of this portrait is similar to that which Thomas Elsaesser notes in the film *Experiment Perilous*, where the portrait of the female protagonist creates a fantastical lacuna.[36] He notes that painted portraits in films are usually not very impressive as artworks, just as our narrator has informed us, with his studied eye, that Alice Oke's portrait is not striking in its execution: Elsaesser stresses that "the mediocrity of these portrait-paintings is less a matter of aesthetics and more a question of ontology, so to speak: mediocrity being here the effect of a certain void or vertigo emanating from the portrait, or rather its pretence of a presence . . . a physical manifestation of a radical form of absence, an abyss or void into which all life drains and disappears."[37] The terms of Elsaesser's analysis are serendipitously (if not altogether unsurprisingly) aligned with those relevant to Alice Oke's curiously *un*fantastical portrait in a magic picture tale: the painting of her draws us into a void, and a particularly unsettling one as it lacks an impressiveness appropriate to a privileged image. This original portrait is, therefore, decidedly *not* haunted; its enigmatic effect lies in its seeming projection of itself into a new woman, its hermeneutic promise to inform the narrative that goes unfulfilled.

While the portrait in *Experiment Perilous* is one of the diegetic character, Allida, Elsaesser's commentary is apt, as Alice is so ambiguously identified with her namesake. What is haunting about the portrait in the film is that it is "the very emblem of [Allida's]

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[36] As Lee's text participates in the hybridized literary genre of the imaginary portrait, her story *is* cinematic in its aims, if not as a fully described "moving picture."

[37] Thomas Elsaesser, "Mirror, Muse, Medusa: *Experiment Perilous*," *Iris* 14/15 (Autumn 1992): 147, 154.

physical non-existence, as that which imposes on her an a-temporal and sterile repetition" (154). The current Alice embraces the possibility of herself as an atemporal repetition, but she, as a voluntary engineer of narrative, hopes to be a repetition *with* a difference; she aims to extend the transgressiveness of the previous Alice to fully eradicate a patriarchal dynasty. Elsaesser notes that what is disturbing about the film's portrait for the male characters is "the fact that the portrait does not stand for [Allida], does not substitute for her, does not replace her. . . . Allida is present in the film as her own ghost: the portrait being her memorial, her mausoleum, her shrine. She is—hence the troubling malaise the film provokes—superfluous, fatally threatened by her double" (154). Alice's seeming superfluity in being a double indeed proves fatal, as her husband, believing he is shooting a lover of hers, shoots her, a fate the particulars of which are surprising but the outcome not at all. The fatality of duality—of existing both within and outside of a portrait—is predetermined. As Elsaesser writes, "it is the coexistence, in the same narrative space, of portrait *and* woman that appears to be the ultimate perilous experiment" (158; italics his). Alice is, like Allida, a kind of ghost. She is more enigmatic however, in that we cannot determine the source of this fantastical quality, or prove its exact nature: is she a projection from the seventeenth century, or is she a product of her own time, uniquely capable of channeling a past and conducting it to its narrative destination? The fact that the narrator's "huge wreck" of a painting has "something of her" in it while this vacuous painting does not demonstrates that the seventeenth-century painting (like Allida's) cannot substitute for her. In fact, the reason she is finally able to effect narrative progress is because of her insistence on her simultaneous identicality with her ancestor and difference in self-consciousness regarding her role as a *new* double.

Alice's confusion about her own identity and, relatedly, her erotic investments lead her to sublimate her energy into a desire for narrative creation itself; she loves the first half of the Oke-Lovelace melodrama acted out in the seventeenth century. She

relishes all but the patriarch in the situation, never losing an opportunity to talk about Alice or Lovelock or present further details of their relationship to the narrator. Despite her authoritative speeches regarding the matter, she also offers some conflicting interpretations of the relationships. For instance, when the narrator asks her why Alice would kill her lover, she gives an answer that suggests a resistance to male desire and demands: "She may have felt that she had a right to rid herself of him, and to call upon her husband to help her do so" (124). Later, however, when she is waxing romantic about Alice and Lovelock, the narrator asks, "But how could she do it—how could she kill the man she cared for?" Alice answers, "Because she loved him more than the whole world!" (131). She then bursts into tears and excuses herself, saying "Don't let us talk any more about it . . . I am ill to-day and silly" (131). This could indicate her uncertainty about her homoerotic bond with Alice being reciprocal, as the earlier Alice's feelings are inaccessible and her actions ambivalent at best. The multiple rationales Alice provides also indicate her lack of absolute knowledge about what has happened or what will. Usually confident in her expertise on the subject, in this rare moment of weakness, Alice reveals her own vulnerability as a character in search of a script—or of an author, which the painter can be, if only by proxy.

In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud defines sublimated desire and its products: One "result of an abnormal constitutional disposition is made possible by the process of sublimation. This enables excessively strong excitations arising from particular sources of sexuality to find an outlet and use in other fields, so that a not inconsiderable increase in psychical efficiency results from a disposition which in itself is perilous. Here we have one of the origins of artistic activity" (104). This "perilous disposition," "abnormal" and "perverse" in Freud's terms, can be said to refer to a queer desire which the subject has experienced since childhood and the resultant "instincts" and "constructions achieved by means of sublimation" along with "other constructions, employed for effectively holding in check perverse impulses which have been recognized

as being unutilizable" (104-05). From childhood, Alice reports, she "insisted upon dressing up in shawls and waterproofs, and playing the story of the wicked old Mrs. Oke" (123). She has been focused on this ancestor who is striking in her looks, transgressive sexuality, and blatant resistance to patriarchal social structures. This desire aimed at the former Mrs. Oke would of course seem "unutilizable," as it is not only socially transgressive on multiple levels, but because, as the narrator points out, she has "no interest in the present, but only an eccentric passion in the past" (122). She is libidinally invested in a time to which she should have no access, and in a love triangle that is already overburdened by its cast. She may or may not be seeing ghosts of Lovelock or Alice, but her passion in the past and her fantastical link to it as an ethereal doppelganger make her a potential player in the narrative's completion. Alice seems to have sublimated her "unutilizable" desire into the desire—artistic in its theatricality and creativity—to see the Oke-Lovelace narrative through to its end, perhaps as it is predicted by Nicholas on his deathbed. Alice seems uncertain what will happen—predicting, vaguely, that the yellow drawing room is haunted anachronistically: "Perhaps something is destined to happen there in the future." Realizing she has hit upon a potential catalyst, she adds, suddenly, "Suppose you paint my portrait in that room?" (125). Alice seems enlivened here by the possible clue of the "haunted" nature of the drawing room being a sign of what is to come, should she be able to set the right elements in motion. Painting a duplicate portrait—as she intends to wear the same dress as her ancestor in the older portrait—in a haunted "drawing room" surely has fantastical narrative potential.

Excited by the prospect, she takes the narrator into that room and begins looking for Lovelock's poems, which she reads aloud, perhaps in the hope that they will have new conjuring power. To get at them, "a complicated arrangement of double locks and false drawers had to be put into play" (126). This is a very suggestive sentence, as the "double locks" of two Lovelocks, perhaps, will have to be produced to go with the two Alices. Also, our narrator is indeed a "false drawer," commissioned to paint a portrait he

will never complete. He is also false in that he is not the real "drawer" of the rest of the story, which Alice desperately wants enacted. He *thinks* he is, often claiming that he "draws her out," and that in order to paint her he "required to put her into play" (128, 122). But it is really a joint effort; she is a key player in the narrative of which she is also a devoted fan, and he is the artist with procreative impulses that result in a representation of the story—both in his 130 sketches and in his telling of it. Even though he proudly claims, "it all took place under my eyes" and with his pulling the strings of the key player, the story's progression relies upon both the narrator and his sitter playing their parts and putting *each other* "into play" to assume their roles of non-procreative lover and creative artist (107).[38] Alice is committed to enacting the rest of the narrative and needs, in order to set these events in motion, the presence of an artist—specifically one with a queer gaze—who will be not only *not* focused on her as a sexual object but committed to the nobility of artistic reproduction for its own sake. He proves to be fascinated by her enigmatic diaphaneitè and determined to capture her essence, obsessively producing images of her in order to learn how best to set her in paint. Unlike Sebastian, then, Alice invites and encourages—indeed, requires—that her image be incessantly recorded, despite the impossibility inherent in this act, as the painter never will be able to paint her quintessential portrait. One possible reason for this could be Denisoff's proposition that her portrait has already been in existence for 200 years, if he is right that the original portrait depicts both women. Another, more historically relevant and compelling reason, though, would be that static portraiture is insufficient to capture the airy diaphane. As the narrator explains in the quote below, movement is an essential

[38] Denisoff phrases this contrast nicely: "Although she is unable to have children, the painter finds himself instilled with a reproductive energy beyond his control." Dennis Denisoff, "Vernon Lee, Decadent Contamination and the Productivist Ethos," in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, ed. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 83.

aspect of her aesthetic, and therefore must be attained, somehow, in a proper rendering of her image.

Despite failing to capture her in a singular, definitive image, he shows his auditor the images he has been able to produce:

> Here are a lot of pencil-sketches I made while I was preparing to paint her portrait. Yes; there's nothing but her in the whole sketch-book. Mere scratches, but they may give you some idea of her marvelous, fantastic kind of grace. Here she is leaning over the staircase, and here sitting in the swing. Here she is walking quickly out of the room. That's her head. You see she isn't really handsome; her forehead is too big, and her nose too short. This gives no idea of her. It was altogether a question of movement. (106)

He describes all of the pictures as capturing movement, including one that depicts the *speed* of her walking, while lamenting that his art is "altogether" inadequate for representing such life. He acknowledges that "real beauty is a thing in time," and, thus, that inanimate art is not equipped to represent it. Ironically, he does not realize that, even if each portrait can only gesture toward the movement it depicts, observing the portraits in rapid succession would create the "real beauty . . . in time" that results from captured movements (115). His sketches, already bound together, could be a flipbook that would produce the illusion of movement, the speed, even, with which she exits a room.

His lengthy narrative with its many visual aids to the diegetic auditor—and ekphrastic snippets as visual aids for us—provides all of the components of a cinematic narrative, of a totalizing ekphrasis that captures movement, dynamic change, and essence. If not a flipbook, his sketchbook could certainly serve as a storyboard for the tale's cinematic visualization. Accompanied by the verbal account, it serves its purpose in conveying in some measure the diaphanous Alice Oke, but it fails to wed the narrative completely to its visual representations, owing both to the narrator's (and by extension, Lee's) own lack of faith in painting's potential to overcome the traditional parameters of its medium as a spatial rather than a temporal art.

With Lee being, as Vicinus points out, more pessimistic about the success of art and homosexual relationships than Wilde, her story ends tragically, but ambiguously so; it is not nearly as tragic as Pater's. For one thing, Alice seems happy to have met her end after her husband shoots her. Some critics take this as a sign of her reunion with Lovelock, but this seems to miss the mark. Lovelock, while an integral part of the seventeenth-century love triangle, is ambiguous in his role even there: did he force himself on an uninterested Alice? Did she use him as a mere tool in her plot against patriarchal dynasties? And can he not be simply a symbol of a woman's rejection of heterosexual demands upon her? William's Alice has no sexual interest in her husband and has no qualms making this known. He laments that she never even turns her gaze upon him: "if only she would look for two minutes as if she liked me a little" (144). Instead, he cries, she goes on "day after day mocking me with her Lovelock" (150). The diction here, had there been any doubt, renders transparent Lovelock as a symbol of Alice's denying William sexual, emotional, and even scopophilic access to her. It seems likely that Lovelock served this same purpose for the former Alice, but that he then, as an actual subject, would have had to be dispatched with in literal terms. The diaphanous woman felt she had "the right to be rid of him," even if he was, for a time, a protective barrier between herself and her marital duties. This dual role of Lovelock as libidinous man (he had already been barred from Court for an earlier sexual scandal) *and* tool in a woman's resistance to her heterosexual marital duties indicates the "double locks" that had to be put into play. William already believes a man, whom his wife *fancies* is Lovelock, is trying to seduce her; it is only when he realizes she is also using Lovelock as a metaphorical chastity belt that he is finally moved to action.

With this realization on William's part that it is "her Lovelock" that she uses against him, the final scene of the narrative is triggered as he attempts to seize, for once, phallic power and privilege by accosting his wife and her "lover" in the haunted drawing room. She is, of course, wearing the white dress from the old portrait, and William—

delusional or not—sees what he thinks to be his wife's lover between himself and Alice, who is seated on the couch, "her head slightly thrown back, a large red rose in her hand" (152). The lover he "sees" is invisible to the narrator, who watches the scene through a window, then crosses the threshold into the room when he becomes concerned about William's intentions. The narrator's sight is obscured by a flash that coincides with "a loud report, a sharp cry, and the thud of a body on the floor" (152). What he observes, eventually, is Oke standing over Alice's body, which had "sunk down from the sofa, with her blond head resting on its seat, . . . a pool of red forming in her white dress. Her mouth was convulsed, as if in that automatic shriek, but her wide-open white eyes seemed to smile vaguely and distantly" (152). Instead of indicating that she sees Lovelock or Alice, her smile and surprise may well be the result of realizing that she has finally roused her meek husband to action. He was the key character who had been refusing to play his role. His brutal and sexually suggestive attack (her reclining pose, white gown, and bleeding from his first deployment of a phallic instrument) is fundamentally out of sync with his character, but the final realization that she "mocks" him with "her Lovelock"—where earlier he maintained her blamelessness in whatever flirtation she was entertaining—drives *him* to action, and *the play* to its final scene. Ill-cast and instantly shattered by his own misguided performance, he attempts a final "heroic" act but is no longer operating under the force of his wife's narrative drive. Oke tries to shoot himself, but, pathetically, merely "fracture[s] his jaw" and dies several days later, raving mad (153).

In "The Blame of Portraits," Lee writes that the portrait is "one of our most signal cravings after the impossible: an attempt to overcome space and baffle time; to imprison and use at pleasure the most fleeting, intangible, and uncommunicable of all mysterious

essences, a human personality."[39] The frustration she expresses here seems inevitably linked to her insistence throughout her adult life to sleep beneath the photographic portrait of a friend with whom she was in love, Annie Meyer, who died a few years before "Oke of Okehurst" was written.[40] Pulham provides an extensive account of Lee's obsession with the photo and how its influence can be read into her aesthetic writings. She proposes that "the photograph's inanimate nature allows a static surface for the projection of fantasy" on Lee's part, placing it "at the mercy of Vernon Lee's imagination" (118).[41] While Lee herself seems to have pondered daily (or nightly) the cinematic life that can be activated in a portrait, her diverse writings on art and portraiture in particular do not present a clear picture. Her ultimate cynicism in matters of artistic representation and same-sex desire seems to keep her from envisioning a fully narrativized, magical ekphrasis, from setting the "original" portrait of Alice, perhaps, in motion away from the void into which it is abandoned; or from activating the veritable flipbook that contains the proliferation of sketches—which individually present movements—into an advancing reel of connected images. These contrasting uses of *mise-en-abyme* demonstrate her understanding of what artistic representation *ought* to be able to achieve through its own generative force, but her tale's turning back on the past keeps it from realizing its own potential as a fully animated imaginary portrait.

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[39] Qtd in Denisoff, "Forest," 102. He is quoting from Vernon Lee, "The Blame of Portraits," *Hortus Vitae: Essays on the Gardening of Life* (London: John Lane, 1904), 140.

[40] Pulham reports that she died in either 1883 or 1884.

[41] Of course, the differences between painting and photography have vast significations. These will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter and in the conclusion.

## *The* Moving *Picture of Dorian Gray*: Cinematic Ekphrasis and its Embedded Genealogy

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is the quintessential example of the magic portrait genre;[42] of an ekphrasis coextensive with an entire narrative; of Aesthetic literature; and of, as Waugh says, works that "posit artistic representation as some kind of metaphoric analogue of gay identity, and the artist-intellectual as the gay prototype." [43] It tells the story of the Adonis-like Dorian Gray who at the book's opening is having his portrait painted by the noble artist, Basil Hallward, who is in love with Dorian. At times, this love is described according to the aesthetic alibi of valuing Dorian as an artistic ideal, but Basil also confesses his adoration in fairly blatant terms (which would famously be used against Wilde in his trials). Basil's friend from his (Paterian) Oxford days, Lord Henry Wotton, is the dandy-aesthete who charmingly spouts shocking witticisms on life and Society and who, from his first introduction to Dorian in Basil's studio, "influences" him to the young man's detriment. Between the vanity that Basil's portrait teaches him and the worship of youth and beauty that Lord Henry further inculcates, Dorian is driven to sob a "mad prayer" that he maintain the look of beauty captured in the portrait while the picture ages in his stead (121). His wish is granted, splitting Dorian's subjectivity between his marvelously preserved body in which he pursues all manner of sensuous experience and the morphing portrait that is "to him the most magical of mirrors," "the

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[42] See Kerry Powell's survey of magic portrait literature from which Wilde likely drew. She cites more than forty mostly obscure and forgettable tales, but catalogues the elements they ascribe to magic pictures. Powell writes, "Gathering his materials from the tradition at large rather than from one or even a few sources, Wilde constructs a work of tighter structure, greater power, and more teasing subtlety than any other work of its kind. His novel can thus be viewed as both a compendious and consummate expression of a literary tradition whose outlines have been largely forgotten by us, but which flourished in the popular literature" of the nineteenth century (164). Of course, in the nearly thirty years since Powell's foundational essay appeared, the magic picture tradition has been receiving healthy critical attention. Kerry Powell, "Tom, Dick, and Dorian Gray: Magic-Picture Mania in Late Victorian Fiction," *Philological Quarterly*, 62 no. 2 (1983): 147-170.

[43] Waugh, 437.

visible emblem of conscience" and his "diary," recording all of his illicit actions in readable form (91, 79, 130).

Many rumors circulate about Dorian's depravity, causing Basil, whom Dorian has largely abandoned, to confront Dorian in the hopes of clearing his name. Basil insists that Dorian must be innocent because, as he puts it, "Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed" (126). But rather than written on his own face, Dorian's sins are inscribed on the *representation* of his face, underscoring Wilde's interest in interrogating representation itself within his novel. Eventually, Dorian kills Basil in a misguided attempt at revenge for his split subjectivity, and, when this fails, attempts to destroy the portrait. Stabbing the picture causes the blade to pierce his own heart, though, and the image to be returned to its original beauty. Dorian's corpse is found, unrecognizably decrepit, beneath the exquisite portrait. The novel's end here is abrupt, as the overarching ekphrasis of the Picture seems to have finally been "finished," but Wilde's novel, like Pater's and Lee's stories, exhibits evidence of narrative irresolution, particularly in regard to the status of various ekphrases.

As in "Oke of Okehurst," desire for process in *Dorian Gray*, for narrative development and its expression, is a sublimated and foregrounded drive. Unlike in Lee's story, however, there is a perfect adhesion of the narrative to a moving image. Wilde's narrative as a *Picture* represents a controlling ekphrasis that achieves the blending of visual (spatial) and narrative (temporal) arts in proto-cinematic fashion. The other ekphrastic images within the novel, aside from the titular portrait, demonstrate both stagnant *mises-en-abyme* that only move inward upon themselves as well as progressive ones that place differences in tension with the encapsulating image of the overall *Picture*. Not only is Wilde's novel successful, then, in its achieving a fully realized cinematic ekphrasis-as-narrative, but it also meditates extensively on the kinds of pitfalls and progressions that are possible when artistic creation is a generative force. Wilde's novel is nothing if not a thorough interrogation of the drive for and significance of

representation itself at multiple levels of a text, and it lays out, through its *mises-en-abyme*, a blueprint for cinema's mechanisms.

In the first scene of the novel, Basil is telling Lord Henry about his new muse, Dorian, as the possessor of an extraordinary "personality" and who has become "all my art to me now" (10, 12). He explains an astonishing convergence of Dorian's rare essence with his own artistic moment.

> I sometimes think, Harry, that there are only two eras of any importance in the world's history. The first is the appearance of a new medium for art, and the second is the appearance of a new personality for art also. What the invention of oil-painting was to the Venetians, the face of Antinoüs was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of Dorian Gray will some day be to me. It is not merely that I paint from him, draw from him, sketch from him. Of course I have done all that. . . . his personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before. (12)

Basil gives voice to the same observations that Pater had in his writings about the queer subject, using "personality" as a term to connote androgynous beauty, a specific kind of "ideal." He invokes the same periods of art and philosophy as Pater to indicate that homoeroticism has historically been an indelible aspect of celebrated art. The "new medium for art" in the late nineteenth century seems to be that of a totalizing, fantastic ekphrasis that mimics cinematic expression—a "recreation of life." Ronald Thomas hints at this with his observation that *Dorian Gray* introduces a "new modern aesthetic connected with the transition in representation the novel traces from book to picture by way of the theatrical."[44] He writes, "The emergence of a new medium for art, a picture in motion, and the attendant new notion of a modern personality require a corresponding new aesthetic vision to be understood and appreciated" (186). But while Thomas defines this "new aesthetic" as "vulgarity," a modern condition of which Dorian's debauchery is

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[44] Ronald R. Thomas, "Poision Books and Moving Pictures: Vulgarity in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," in *Victorian Vulgarity: Taste in Verbal and Visual Culture*, ed. Susan David Bernstein and Elsie B. Michie (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), 186.

a hyperbolic example, a reading of the novel that is sensitive to Wilde's careful treatment of the relationships among his three main characters, particularly in his revisions from the 1890 version to the expanded 1891 novel, makes the representation of same-sex desire and queer identity clear as his aim. For example, in the 1890 version, Basil tells Henry he has put "all the extraordinary romance" that characterizes his relationship with Dorian into the portrait. In the 1891 version, as Joseph Bristow notes, "Basil Hallward claims, with greater discretion, that he has 'put into it some expression of this curious artistic idolatry.'"[45] "Elsewhere," Bristow writes, "Wilde tactfully changed the painter's 'romance' to his 'ideal'" (xxvi).[46]

Aestheticism and the introduction of a fully narrativized ekphrasis—a verbal picture in motion—make the new expression of queer desire possible as the emergence of motion pictures coincides with the cultural moment when homosexuality is being defined and theorized by both homophobic social and legal institutions and queer subjects themselves in subcultural and coded discourses.[47] In this precarious environment, a writer like Wilde seeking more than subcultural status would have to use particular finesse in his execution and employ the "new discursive strategies" to which Cohen refers. The overarching Picture and its resultant *mises-en-abyme* are part of this project of setting aesthetic images in motion such that they generate further incarnations of their expression, engendering a modernist duration via the artistically productive force of same-sex desire.

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[45] Joseph Bristow, introduction to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, by Oscar Wilde (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), xxv-xxvi.

[46] However, while Wilde makes many emendations to the text to code in artistic terms Basil's romantic devotion to Dorian, he importantly maintains the unequivocal statement that "it was really love" that Basil felt (102).

[47] See Davis's essay for an account of how the dominant, Foucauldian understanding of the coinage and theorization of homosexuality should not be subservient to the efforts of people who were experiencing "'irregular' desire" initiated their own discourses of such desire (263).

At the opening of Wilde's novel, Dorian is like the figure of *tabula rasa* about which Pater's Sebastian fantasizes. He is a clean slate possessing diaphanous purity. Lord Henry notes "that he had kept himself unspotted from the world," an utterly uninscribed figure (17). Gray's name itself indicates the "colourlessness" Pater ascribes to those evanescent figures, despite the rich colors that adorn his face, like the "scarlet" of his "finely curved" lips, the "frank blue" of his eyes, and his "crisp gold hair" (17). His androgynous beauty is universally appealing in its ideality (he attracts men and women of various backgrounds throughout the novel) but does not contradict the figuration of him as a blank canvas, as in the inaugural scene of his last sitting for the portrait, Dorian's identity will be born.

Before Dorian's entrance, Lord Henry corroborates this notion of Dorian as an empty vessel. He tells Basil that "beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins. . . Your mysterious young friend . . ., whose picture really fascinates me, never thinks. I feel quite sure of that. He is some brainless, beautiful creature," as yet uninscribed by a mode of thought or action (6-7). When Dorian finally sits for Basil as the painter puts (what he thinks are) the finishing touches on the masterful, magical portrait, Lord Henry entertains and famously "influences" Dorian with his charming proclamations about the need to make every possible use of youth and beauty while one has them: "Be always searching for new sensations," he tells Dorian, since "Time is jealous of you, and wars against your lilies and your roses" (22).[48] In these two acts of interpretation and representation—Basil's painting and Henry's resonating aphorisms—Dorian will be "reveal[ed] . . . to himself" and an actual personality will emerge, a self-consciousness accompanied by a hyperbolic narcissism proportionate with his extraordinary beauty (21): "I am in love with it," he declares of the picture (27). And

[48] Dorian's immediate phobia of time's passage is registered not just in his "mad prayer" to have the portrait age instead of him, but even in his annoyance at the literal ticking of a clock at the opening of the fourth chapter (40).

while Dorian's development from pure, evanescent potential into a particular disposition is Gothically tragic, as he is not just an Aesthetic object but a grossly, misguidedly, decadent subject, it is important to note that Wilde is not suggesting this as the inevitable course for the androgynous figure but rather the result of an unfortunate coincidence of an iteration of diaphaneitè with a supernaturally abetted immoralism.

Wilde's tale is not just about the trials of the diaphanous "type," as had been Pater's charge, but, like Lee's, about the significations of representation and desire in and of themselves. In his influential essay, "Representation and Homophobia in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," Dellamora remarks that the novel's "tendency to substitute the representation of desire for desire itself" is part of its cautious expression of homosexual desire to a largely homophobic readership.[49] Narrative as a comprehensive ekphrasis seems an integral part of this strategy. As Stewart writes, "Wilde's novel cites [desire], quotes it—it, not its object" in that its "Picture" *as ekphrasis* "renders desire as a *function of words* to begin with—words received and savored, words registered in the full materiality of their sensuous persuasion, words lingered over as if read rather than listened to" (349-50; italics his). The "subtle fluid" of Henry's wit is one medium of seduction's verbal transmission (Wilde, 33). But the mediation of language for Basil's same-sex desire has this same effect of presenting desire with precision yet at the remove of a carefully articulated representation. His desire is inscribed, after all, in his painting of Dorian just as Dorian's mysterious nature—whether sexual, moral, or metaphysical—is. And Basil well knows that a suspicious gaze could decipher his forbidden ardor in the image. He tells Henry, "The reason I will not exhibit the picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul" (8). Upon further inquiry, he elaborates: "Because, without intending it, I have put into it some expression of all this curious

[49]Richard Dellamora, "Representation and Homophobia in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," *Victorian Newsletter* (1987): 29.

idolatry, of which, of course, I have never cared to speak to [Dorian]. He knows nothing about it. He shall never know anything about it. But the world might guess it; and I will not bare my soul to their shallow, prying eyes. My heart shall never be put under their microscope" (13). Verbally rendered in Wilde's ekphrastic novel, Basil's secret is indeed legible, but able to be couched somewhat safely in the terms of artistic admiration and aims.[50] Were it to exist unmediated by language, the picture would threaten direct exposure of the homoerotic nature of Basil's gaze.[51]

Before Dorian's problematic, actual personality is created via Basil's image and Henry's words, his position as one possessing such extraordinary beauty is explicitly not to be envied. Basil explains—seemingly having read Pater's "Diaphaneitè"—"There is a fatality about all physical and intellectual distinction, the sort of fatality that seems to dog through history the faltering steps of kings. It is better not to be different from one's fellows" (7). Basil, particularly as a queer subject, understands the terrible risk of being visually identifiable as different from others, particularly in matters of sex and gender. The fatality to which he refers is by now a clear quality of diaphanous figures, and Dorian's death, like Sebastian's and Alice's before him, is prefigured in this early scene.[52] When the painting is finished and Dorian is made mad with jealousy "of everything whose beauty does not die," especially the portrait, which will "mock" him

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[50] The qualifier "somewhat" is necessary here, as the words Wilde puts in Basil's mouth are not only controversial upon publication but famously used against him in his trials.

[51] The novel makes explicit the wondrous power of ekphrasis and other representations in language. Dorian, moved by Henry's philosophizing, thinks, "Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear, and vivid, and cruel. One could not escape from them. And yet what a subtle magic there was in them! They seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things" (19).

[52] Surely enough, Basil's forbidden love is, in several senses, the death of him, just as Dorian's unique beauty proves lethal. For more on "Wilde's Love-Deaths," i.e. homoerotic murders and/or suicides in *fin-de-siècle* fiction, see the chapter of that title in Kopelson, 15-48. His analysis specifically considers the narrative finale of the "love-death" as an historically determined method of sentimentalizing same-sex desire in showing its cultural risks and the costs of its expression in the late nineteenth century. Kevin Kopelson, *Love's Litany: The Writing of Modern Homoerotics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

someday, Basil, in a gesture that foreshadows Dorian's later wielding of a lethal dagger, picks up "the long palette-knife, with its thin blade of lithe steel. . . He was going to rip up the canvas" (26). Dorian rushes to tear the knife from Basil, crying, "Don't, Basil, don't! . . . It would be murder!'" (26). Dorian is proven correct, as, when he himself takes a knife to the portrait, he will receive the lethal blade instead.

His tantrum here, though, about the portrait's autonomy, beauty, and "mocking" personality, invites closer study. Basil clearly regrets ever painting an image that can so devastate his beloved. He blames Lord Henry, however, for Dorian's reaction, rather than the picture. Dorian's complaints, rendered more fully, will help demonstrate the overriding, paradoxical *mise-en-abyme* that is the source of the tremendous generative power of Wilde's riddling novel. Dorian cries,

> "I am jealous of everything whose beauty does not die. I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me. Why should it keep what I must lose? Every moment that passes takes something from me, and gives something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way! If the picture could change, and I could be always what I am now! Why did you paint it? It will mock me someday—mock me horribly!" . . .
>
> "This is your doing, Harry," said the painter, bitterly.
>
> Lord Henry shrugged his shoulders. "It is the real Dorian Gray—that is all." (26)

While Dorian wishes for a simple reversal of the effects of time on himself and his portrait, his "mad prayer" necessarily grants the painting more life and power than he intends. By the end, the painting will have drained Dorian's body of all its life, in fact. As Dorian here points out, with "every moment that passes," the portrait "takes something from [him]," but in a much more sinister way than he means. The clever Lord Henry seems to already sense the confounding split in Dorian's subjectivity, employing the vague deictic terms of "It," "that," and "all" to name "the real Dorian Gray." His phrasing begs the question, "*Which* is the real Dorian?"—but only retroactively. If Dorian's "soul" is transferred to the portrait, is *that* the "real Dorian," while his body is a

conscienceless, highly decorative shell? Or does Dorian, capable of struggling against what the portrait reflects in him, maintain the claim of being the "original"? Henry's ambiguous statement pits the two versions of Dorian face to face, creating a paradoxical reflection that is impossible to read definitively. This is an exemplary instance of "life" and "art" engaged in an endless mirroring which, Thomas Otten writes, is "what aestheticism depends on."[53] Dällenbach offers the statement "I am lying" as an example of paradoxical reflection (196). This crucial scene in *Dorian Gray* where the title character is divided into two distinct entities presents a similarly uninterpretable—or only paradoxically interpretable—statement: "It is the real Dorian Gray—*that* is *all*." Henry's statement is even doubly confusing as it is unclear whether the "It" and the "that" have the same referent. Still further, the "all" is suggestive of the overwhelming totality of the portrait, as it contains *all* there *is* to tell of Dorian—including what is unnarratable, like the specifics of Dorian's "sins" and the denouement that is conspicuously missing from the novel.

Prior to the "realistic" portrait Basil paints of Dorian, he had painted him many times, but always in costume with his own adoration cloaked in historical contrivances, rendering these images flat and unreflective. He painted him as Paris, as Adonis, as Antinoüs, and as Narcissus (98). "And it had all been what art should be, unconscious, ideal, remote," Basil confesses to Dorian:

> One day, a fatal day I sometimes think, I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually are, not in the costume of dead ages, but in your own dress and in your own time. Whether it was the Realism of the method, or the mere wonder of your own personality, thus directly presented to me without mist or veil I cannot tell. But I know that as I worked at it, every flake and film of colour seemed to me to reveal my secret. (98)

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[53] Thomas J. Otten, "Slashing Henry James (On Painting and Political Economy, circa 1900)." *Yale Journal of Criticism: Interpretation in the Humanities* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 298.

Basil's initial paintings achieve their safe "remoteness" in employing what Dellamora calls the "highly allusive coding of desire" that many texts deploy to covertly address same-sex desire (*Masculine* 69).[54] Basil's paintings of Dorian as mythical figures may gesture toward *mise-en-abyme* in their attempt to represent an unnarratable homoeroticism, but their "remoteness" from the particulars of Dorian's personality and from what Basil really desires—not his love-object in performance, as Dorian wants with Sybil Vane, but in the "wonder" of his "own personality" (which is its own hall of mirrors)—effectively sterilizes them and keeps them out of an abyssal relation to *The Picture*. As Basil's own description indicates, they remain cloaked in a "mist or veil" that keeps them from directly registering and thus reflecting active desire.

Another insufficiency in Basil's earlier paintings is their static impotence. While the scopic drive in Pater's *Portrait* is channeled epidemically into an insatiable drive of artistic creation, it becomes, in Wilde's *Picture* (as in Lee's "Okehurst"), not just linked to the generative power of interpreting an object and re-presenting it artistically, but figured as the desire to observe *change in representation*, so that productivity has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions—resulting in a number of images that all have observable movements occurring within them. The Wildean scopic drive, unlike Lee's, though, is a drive to *see* process rather than achieve its end. Dorian is fascinated by his portrait because of its developments. His obsessive need to frequently study the picture, to never be long away from it, and to figure it as alternately awful and wonderful, has often been analyzed in narcissistic terms, but it more interestingly seems to serve as testimony to the theory that the desire to see representation *in process* is what keeps Dorian's *gaze* fixated, a figuration that reverses the typical pre-cinema dynamics between

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[54] Dellamora specifically discusses Winckelmann's writings in interesting contrast to Pater's less coded style in his own on Winckelmann. Elsewhere, he points out that as "Diaphaneitè" was based on a paper delivered several years before that had caused much gossip and scandal, the printed version is "even more elliptical and allusive than one might anticipate" (59).

gaze and image. Just as critics have noted that in aesthetic works and *Dorian Gray* in particular object-desire—because it is often same-sex directed—is substituted with the representation of desire, figured particularly in artistic acts both visual and verbal, the typical charge and animation of the gaze is here substituted with those of not even art, exactly, although the portrait does evolve (or rather devolve), but of the inter-related processes of interpretation and representation. It is this desire to observe change—a narrative desire for progress over time made visible and interpretable—that causes the proliferation of images in *Dorian Gray*. *Mise-en-abyme* here becomes not just a trope that testifies to the generative quality of the homoerotic gaze made expressible in artistic production, but a project that attempts to resolve the aesthetic and supernatural puzzle of Dorian's seeming agelessness and undo the atemporality it unnaturally engenders. This reading of the novel's aims easily dovetails with other analyses that dwell on the significance of Dorian's phobia about time's effects. As Kevin Kopelson writes, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* "is the last word in what reads as a cautionary tale about the inherently destructive overvaluation of masculine youth and beauty—about subjecting oneself to a certain kind of iconography" (42). Frozen aesthetic images are neither evocative nor appealing, as iconicity is a state that resists animate beauty and narrative pleasure. On the brink of the age of cinema, attempts to stultify images are unnatural and render grotesque even the most exalted forms of beauty. Everything about *Dorian Gray* is against stagnation, to the point that what does change—the titular portrait—does so dramatically and in negative response. Change is manifested as a festering process rather than a flourishing one, quite unlike what Dorian's natural aging process, tempered by moderation and morality, would have looked like.

While Dorian is desperate to halt the progress of his own looks—what he looks like and how others look at him—he ironically enacts his own celebration of representation in process as he is determined to experience all sensuous pleasures without regard for the cost to others. He indulges in "a new Hedonism" whose "aim, indeed, was

to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be" (111). Later, Lord Henry will compliment him on making his "life" his "art," but this statement is a reflection of Henry's ignorance about the reality of Dorian's life rather than a valid observation. Dorian misreads the aesthetic motive just as he misreads Henry's aphorisms.[55] *His* celebration of process rather than outcome ruins the lives of others, and would ruin his own, were it not for the magic portrait accruing his debts on his behalf. The problem with Dorian's interpretation of this "aesthetic movement" is that it is not artistic; it is not aimed at a noble goal of creative representation but rather at mere epicurean excess. Another problem of Dorian's "art" is that he has forbidden his own body from being in process, so he is therefore detached from what he thinks he creates. Basil's nobility, in contrast, comes from his investment—in this case, over-investment—

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[55] Apart from the experiment of splitting Dorian's actions from the registration of their impact, the novel also tracks the relationships among the three main characters, with Basil and Dorian sharing a romantic friendship before the novel opens, and Lord Henry quickly seducing Dorian away from the moral and noble Basil by the second chapter. Henry and Basil—acquainted since their Oxford days—remain good friends on equal footing. Basil's strong moral fiber makes him immune to Henry's "influence" (16), particularly since it is clear to Basil that Henry "never say[s] a moral thing, and never [does] a wrong thing. Your cynicism," he tells Henry, "is just a pose" (8). The narrative seems to support this analysis of Henry's character. He enjoys being a spectator of life, feigning scientific detachment from all things. His "bad influence" on Dorian—at least the extent of it—seems unintentional, a result of Henry's privileging wit over truth combined with Dorian's poor interpretive skills (18). Dorian feels certain he understands Henry and sometimes blames him (and the infamous "yellow book" he lends him) for corrupting him, but his tragic misreading is obvious. Early on, he says to Henry, "If I ever did a crime, I would confess it to you. You would understand me" (46). But once he has killed Basil and is wracked with fear of retribution, he asks him, "What would you say, Harry, if I told you I had murdered Basil?" Henry is incredulous: "I would say, my dear fellow, you were posing for a character that doesn't suit you. All crime is vulgar, just as all vulgarity is crime. It is not in you, Dorian, to commit murder" (179). This is almost identical to what Henry answers in Dorian's initial reference to confessing a crime: "People like you—the willful sunbeams of life—don't commit crimes, Dorian" (46). In both instances, Lord Henry reveals the limits of his own perception, as he, like Basil, looks for the sins "written on" Dorian's face, and, seeing none, denies the possibility of hidden horrors. Dorian's long-standing misreading of Henry is further emphasized by Henry's unambiguous and entirely characteristic assessment of murder: "I should fancy . . . that murder is always a mistake. One should never do anything that one cannot talk about after dinner" (179). This combination of the blatant condemnation of murder and the assertion of the entertaining triviality that should characterize one's transgressions indicates how little Henry means to endorse the uninhibited, id-driven hedonism that Dorian adopts. Henry is as moral and sensitive as Basil accuses him of being in the opening scene. His fault lies in his false confidence in his ability to control the meaning and measure of his influence over Dorian.

in his art. He claims to have put too much of himself in Dorian's picture, after all, which is so libidinally injected as to have a life of its own.

While Basil's adoring gaze can be articulated in Paterian terms of artistic appreciation, Henry's scopophilic fixation requires a different alibi. Wilde interestingly creates this by invoking another visual medium, in what is the most fleeting instance of *mise-en-abyme* in the novel, but a highly intriguing one that lends new insight to Henry's character. Lady Wotton informs Dorian that she recognizes him owing to the ubiquity of his face in their home. "I know you quite well by your photographs. I think my husband has got seventeen of them," she says. Dorian retorts, "Not seventeen, Lady Henry?" "Well, eighteen then" (40-41). While we never hear of these photos again, their sheer number is cause for reflection. (Curious as well is Dorian's having no knowledge of them; he is not "sitting" for Henry's photographic portraits any more than he will sit for another one painted by Basil.) In their ambiguity, these pictures can attest to Henry's homoerotic pleasure in gazing at Dorian,[56] to his scientific interest in looking on Dorian as "an interesting study," and to his own inclinations as a potential artist (50).

From his very first meeting with Dorian, Henry's gaze—in its scopophilic, psychological, and artistic registers—is fixed on the young man. As the diaphanous Gray sits for Basil and listens to the initiatory words of Lord Henry, he is awakened not only to his own vivid beauty but also to the imminence of its loss, causing "Life" to "suddenly [become] fiery-coloured to him" (20). As Dorian is thus thrust into technicolor, Henry's

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[56] Henry's attraction to Dorian is particularly clear in an early scene where they attend a fashionable luncheon together, at which Henry feels himself under Dorian's gaze and actively solicits his desire. While Henry is always regaling listeners with his clever observations, he is here roused to an exemplary performance: "It was an extraordinary improvisation. He felt the eyes of Dorian Gray were fixed on him, and the consciousness that amongst his audience there was one whose temperament he wished to fascinate, seemed to give his wit keenness, and to lend colour to his imagination. He was brilliant, fantastic, irresponsible. He charmed his listeners out of themselves, and they followed his pipe laughing. Dorian Gray never took his gaze off him, but sat like one under a spell, smiles chasing each other over his lips, and wonder growing grave in his darkening eyes" (38). Dorian's change of expression here indicates Henry's success.

thoughts, rendered in carefully coded terms, reveal the commingling of his homoerotic interest with his (mock-)disinterested curiosity: "With his subtle smile, Lord Henry watched him. He knew the precise psychological moment when to say nothing. He felt intensely interested. He was amazed at the sudden impression that his words had produced" (20). Dorian's aspect has altered radically—from colourlessness to emblazoned vitality, from "brainless" innocence to inundated consciousness—and will continue to change, but only visibly so from then on in the magic portrait that Basil is completing. The painter notes this new injection of life into his sitter: "I have caught the effect I wanted—the half-parted lips, and the bright look in the eyes. I don't know what Harry has been saying to you, but he has certainly made you have the most wonderful expression" (20). Henry must immediately begin his photographic record of the further "impressions" his charming witticisms, discharged in metaphorical "arrows," make on Dorian, as Lady Wotton's report is presented shortly after this scene.[57] Henry is therefore not only entranced by Dorian's extraordinary beauty, but also assiduously tracking evidence of his own effect on Dorian's "development."[58]

Jennifer Green-Lewis explains the frequent use of photography at the end of the nineteenth century for documentary purposes, and explains in particular the photo exhibits by Dr. Hugh Welch Diamond, who "was to become the best-known practitioner of psychiatric photography in nineteenth-century Britain," and whose pictures were thought to be as "'perfect as Hogarth's.'" [59] This equating of the technological medium

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[57] Impressed by the effectiveness of his seductive wit on Dorian, Henry thinks "He had merely shot an arrow into the air" (20).

[58] Stewart refers to Jane Gaines's brief comment on Dorian as a fixed photograph (while his painting lives) in her book on the ownership of images. Jane M. Gaines, *Contested Culture: The Image, the Voice, and the Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 43. See Stewart, 352 and 438n9.

[59] Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 146, 176.

with that of the painter demonstrates how Diamond's photographs serve scientific and aesthetic purposes, just as Henry's could. Furthermore, Diamond's photographs, like Henry's, aim to document a *process*, to record changes, particularly in the faces of the criminal and the mentally diseased (both categories applicable to Dorian). Green-Lewis quotes a reviewer from the *Athenaeum* on the merits of such a use of photography: "'Illustrations of Mental Disease' . . . have not merely a photographic, but a scientific value. . . . for they show all the diagnosis of different stages of mental disorder, and are of great value" (177). A series of photographs, as Eadward Muybridge and Étienne-Jules Marey had also demonstrated, can document the mysteries of movement, of change across time.[60] The volume of Henry's photographs suggests he is searching for the smallest increments of change on Dorian's face as the registration of his further "influence" on the young man who is egregiously impressionable, but only visibly so in his singular magic portrait (34).

Lord Henry is, no doubt, disappointed in his efforts, particularly as his persistence in compiling a photographic record could have resulted in a veritable film strip of Dorian's advancing looks. Like Muybridge's scientific studies of movement, Henry's photos of Dorian could in turn have been set in motion for cinematic visual pleasure; he could well have been gathering frames, one by one, for his own proto-type of a motion picture. Likewise, his photographs could have served as a flipbook, like Lee's narrator's images, or been manipulated by a device like the mutoscope, which mechanically advanced individual photographs at a rate that created the illusion of movement. But because Henry's pictures reflect no changes in Dorian—owing to the supernatural usurpation of Dorian's *durée* by the magic portrait rather than to some flaw in the theory that successive photographs should reveal new developments, so to speak—they amount

[60] Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) and Étienne-Jules Marey (1830-1904) were pioneers in photographic renderings of movement, producing such famous images as Muybridge's sequential study of a horse's gallop that shows that at predictable intervals, all four of a horse's hooves are suspended in air.

to nothing more than a series of images that reflect unnerving similitude and, while numerous, cannot be productive in a narrative sense. Henry's potential as a prototypical filmmaker is foreclosed, then, before we can even be sure to what he extent he imagined the images could be placed in succession to cinematically present Dorian's maturation. What his pictures all show instead is the paradoxical moment of maturation, a coming-to-be caught in a single expression while Basil's painting actually ages.

The *mise-en-abyme* of Henry's photographs may be briefly glimpsed, but there is a central, dual instance of "mirrors in the text" that is lingered over at length. It occurs, appropriately enough, at the mid-point of the narrative. The *Picture* by this point has recorded the effects of Dorian's innumerable—and often unnarratable—hedonistic acts. Dorian remains enticed by his license to indulge in all manner of pleasure and vice but is also haunted by the ever-hideous and condemnatory image of his conscience, as "His own soul was looking out at him from the canvas and calling him to judgment" (102). Seeking explanation for the strange riddle that has become his dichotomous life, Dorian examines the portraits of his ancestors and finds, to his surprise, that they, too, seem fantastically imbued with life, causing him to wonder if he represents just one link in a genetic chain of marvelously cursed beauty that has been continually overvalued. He first considers the portrait of Philip Herbert, who was said to have been, in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, "'caressed by the Court for his handsome face, which kept him not long company'" (121). Herbert's life, too, seems split, where his beauty is figured as a separate entity, capable of rejecting the subject it should instead mirror. Dorian wonders, "Was it Herbert's life that he sometimes led? Had some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body till it had reached his own? Was it some dim sense of that ruined grace that had made him so suddenly, and almost without cause, give utterance, in Basil Hallward's studio, to the mad prayer that had so changed his life?" (121). His subsequent ancestors have "oval heavy-lidded eyes" that "seemed to look curiously at

him" and "sensual lips" that "seemed to be twisted with disdain." They were "infamous" for "orgies" and other excesses of indulgence (122). And then there was

> his mother with her Lady Hamilton face, and her moist wine-dashed lips—he knew what he had got from her. He had got from her his beauty, and his passion for the beauty of others. She laughed at him in her loose Bacchante dress. There were vine leaves in her hair. The purple spilled from the cup she was holding. The carnations of the painting had withered, but the eyes were still wonderful in their depth and brilliancy of colour. They seemed to follow him wherever he went. (122)

The fantastical life in her portrait is a strange juxtaposition of internal mechanisms of ageing, evidenced by the flowers withering, and of active life that freezes her *beauty* but not her *movements* as she laughs through her moistened lips, spills wine from her cup, and maintains a brilliant and mobile gaze. Apart from the commentary inherent in this description as free-indirect discourse, Dorian and the narrator do not assess the significance of this important fantastical portrait further. What is most curious, perhaps, is that she, like her predecessors, is pictured salaciously, unequivocally aligned with Dionysian indulgences. Dorian's portrait depicts him, though—at least in its implicit "natural" state—as unblemished in his beauty, worthy of Pater's praise as a "diaphanous" type. His immoralism, rather than his androgynous evanescence, seems the genetic germ he inherits, along with a susceptibility to fantastical life inside a painting.

While the magic portrait of Dorian's mother is a *mise-en-abyme* of the "simple" kind in itself (similar to Gide's genealogical shield within a shield), its placement makes it also one half of an "infinite" *mise-en-abyme*, whereby two "mirrors in the text" are essentially facing one another.[61] Directly following Dorian's observation that his

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[61] In one section of his study, Dällenbach describes a tripartite division of types of *mise-en-abyme* via the work of C. E. Magny, of whom he is largely ruthlessly critical. Nonetheless he approves of her implicit categorizations: "1 '*simple*' *reflexion*, represented by the shield within the shield . . . ; 2 *infinite reflexion*, also symbolized . . . particularly [by] . . . infinite parallel mirrors (two mirrors would in fact suffice!), [and] the packet of Quaker Oats . . . ; and 3 *paradoxical reflexion*, represented by" sentences like "I am lying," which create "an endless spiral" (24). Magny's categories are obviously useful, even to Dällenbach, but I invoke them here in a sense that honors Escobar's important emphasis on difference

mother's gaze, emanating from within her wine-soaked portrait, tracks his movements, he considers sources of inheritance outside the medium of blood and the realm of portraiture: "Yet one had ancestors in literature, as well as in one's own race, nearer perhaps in type and temperament, many of them, and certainly with an influence of which one was more absolutely conscious" (122).[62] From ekphrastically visual *mise-en-abyme*, Dorian turns to a verbally narrated one in "the wonderful novel that had so influenced his life" (122). He is indeed a hybrid of these two mediums that Wilde places in significant juxtaposition. Having modeled himself on the protagonist of this infamous book which Lord Henry had given him (though not intended as the "To Do" list for which Dorian takes it), Dorian's contemplation of this character expressly mimics the act of looking in a textual mirror, and this mirror is one that contains still further abyssal strata. Bristow's note tells us that Dorian is likely looking in "chapter 3 of Huysmann's *A Rebours* where Des Esseintes explores the Latin works held in his library" (218). Dorian's figurative reading, then, mirrors his fictional counterpart's reading at a lower diegetic level in his *own* books that describe the lascivious Roman rulers like Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero Caesar that Dorian considers. As if this microcosm of *Dorian Gray* were not already calling attention to itself as a *mise-en-abyme*, Wilde gives us the still deeper layer in this book-within-the-book of a narrative conflated with ekphrasis: "Over and over again Dorian used to read this fantastic chapter, and the two chapters immediately following, in which, as in some curious tapestries or cunningly-wrought enamels, were pictured the awful and beautiful forms of those whom Vice and Blood and Weariness had made monstrous or mad . . . whose beauty was equalled [*sic*] only by [their] debauchery" (123).

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within each *mise-en-abyme*. Dorian's mother's portrait, for instance, is not a replica of his own. It is, formally speaking, though, a portrait within a "portrait."

[62] This turn to literary ancestors has a metafictional register as well. Lynda Nead notes that the scene of Dorian walking through his ancestral portrait gallery is one of the "passages in *Dorian Gray* that seem straight out of Walpole." Lynda Nead, *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography, Film c. 1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 56.

This is the deepest level of the abyss that structures Wilde's novel, and it is offered in terms that refuse to distinguish images from words, gazing from reading. Thus, this deepest and narrowest of reflective layers appropriately mirrors the widest and outermost of *The Picture* as narrative correlated to a single but developing ekphrastic image.

But there is more yet to glean from the higher stratum of Des Esseintes's narration. He also "tells how" he had fantastically enacted the parts of each of the doubly-embedded Roman figures, including, most significantly, how he, "as Domitian, had wandered through a corridor lined with marble mirrors, looking round with haggard eyes for the reflection of the dagger that was to end his days, and sick with that ennui, that terrible *taedium vitae*, that comes on those to whom life denies nothing" (123). This rich passage reflects Dorian's narrative in multiple ways. First, it fairly accurately reports how Dorian's life will end: by the wound from a dagger that is fantastically inflicted by the mirror that is his magic portrait. And just as Domitian looks in several mirrors for the "reflection of the dagger," the dagger that ends Dorian's life appears in several metaphorical mirrors prior to the novel's final scene.

Most significantly, the dagger with which Dorian accidentally kills himself is the same one he uses to kill Basil after showing him what has become of his "exquisite portrait." Basil's descriptions upon first seeing the grotesque, living image provide detailed evidence of the extent of Dorian's sins and of the picture's active transformation. "This is the face of a satyr," Basil moans; "It has the eyes of a devil" (132). Importantly, he notes that the portrait bears no trace of new paint or other substance on its surface. "It was from within, apparently that the foulness and horror had come. Through some slow quickening of inner life the leprosies of sin were eating the thing away" (133). Not only does the portrait's horrific life erupt from an abyssal depth, but its surface seems to serve as a visible transmitter of what is no longer merely responsive in it but now actually initiatory: while the "accursed thing" is "leering" at Basil *and* Dorian, it seems to "[whisper] into [Dorian's] ear" through "those grinning lips" a murderous hatred for the

painter (133). The painting has an agency all its own, making Dorian a victim himself of the portrait's evil, and one who will eventually suffer the same fate as Basil in being stabbed more or less by the portrait itself, though, technically, Dorian will wield the blade each time.

The accidental suicide that ends the narrative may resolve the marvelous split between the signs of Dorian's debauchery and his materiality, but it leaves other matters unsettled, which, again, is a characteristic of both Aesthetic and queer texts.[63] After Henry's role—both intentional and inadvertent—in Dorian's tragedy, his reaction to Dorian's dramatic and grotesque transformation is conspicuously absent. The novel keeps us from this revelation as it would expose Henry's real feelings for Dorian, which, as Basil notes, run as deep as Basil's own. When Henry feigns a purely detached interest in Dorian as "a wonderful study," a term that straddles both portrait sitter and laboratory subject, Basil chides him: "You don't mean a single word of all that, Harry; you know you don't. If Dorian Gray's life were spoiled, no one would be sorrier than yourself" (65). The revelation of how literally Dorian had taken Henry's witticisms and how grotesquely Dorian was thereby transformed, aesthetically and morally, would be almost unimaginable to suffer with the veneer of disinterest that Henry tries to maintain. His own "picture" of Dorian Gray would have to be radically revised and the pain of his double loss emotionally expressed. One wonders, likewise, what becomes of Henry's photographs. If Dorian and the portrait have returned to their proper aspects, free of supernatural tampering, have Henry's photographs also changed to reflect the differences

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[63] Bizzotto points this out regarding the works of Pater and his followers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Later twentieth century queer cinema is also characterized by a kind of open-endedness, but one that is less severe. In his introduction, Nicholas Mirzoeff presents Waugh's explanation of this: "'the same-sex imaginary preserves and even heightens the structures of sexual difference inherent in Western (hetero) patriarchal culture but usually stops short of those structures' customary dissolution in narrative closure'. Rather than binary difference, there is the *différance* that leaves us without a wedding at the end" (qtg Waugh 434). Nicholas Mirzoeff, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 394.

that would have been observable in Dorian's features had he been aging naturally all along? It seems likelier that they, bearing the empirical value of the mechanical, would not morph, particularly since they would have accurately recorded what Dorian looked like. Cinema's "magic" is all mechanical illusion, after all. If Henry has continued collecting such images, though, their scientific documentation of Dorian's *unchanging* youth would provide the necessary contrast to make undeniable the supernaturalism of his agelessness and its link with Basil's portrait. This would also suggest to Henry that Dorian had indeed killed Basil, as he had once tried to confess to him.

But even if Wilde kept a stunningly disillusioned Henry out of the novel for the sake of preserving him as the witty aesthete for literary history, an amusing display (*en-abyme*, again) of his own rhetorical flair, he leaves yet another matter—the central knotting of form and content in the novel—a mystery. What happens to Dorian's portrait after the novel's close? Is its magic completely dispelled? We are merely told that when the servants entered the room, "they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty" (188). This is the final look at the portrait that the novel offers—but only if we have not learned to take cues from the other ekphrastic magic portraits inside Wilde's titular one. Dorian's mother's portrait, after all, possesses the same "beauty" and "wonder." Will Dorian's portrait maintain an unearthly, age-defying life like those of his ancestors? And will it bear some trace of his manner of living, his own uninhibited hedonism, as each of his ancestors' portraits does? The questions are unanswerable, particularly as there is no Gray heir through whose eyes we may now view Dorian's portrait. The servants' account is cursory, indeed, as there is a corpse present, "loathsome of visage," that surely claims more of their gawking attention. Their interpretation of the portrait, such as it is, is not so much a punctuation mark indicating the end of the narrative's ekphrastic spell, but rather an invitation to revisit with Wildean amusement, perhaps, the expression of paradox itself in the hybrid form of the narrative

contained in fantastically animate ekphrasis. Were Lord Henry to appear, perhaps he would flippantly tell us with the amusement of irony and understatement, that "that is all" of the real *Picture*.

## Cinema as a Queer Invention

While there were many factors conspiring toward the invention of cinema at the end of the nineteenth century, such as the proliferation of optical gadgets, photography's ubiquity, modernism's mechanizations, and new theories and experiences of perception, the elements particular to visually informed Aesthetic literature seem especially linked with those of cinema. While other Victorian authors' use of the magic picture genre lent distinctly cinematic elements to their texts, mainly in the psycho-sexual dynamics between animated images and their diegetic viewers, these moments of image spectation were contained within particular scenes. The fantastical movements in the pictures had narrative power in increasing degrees as well in those texts, but it is not until the magic picture tale is taken up by Aesthetic writers that the movements in the ekphrastically evoked images become synchronous with narrative itself, become, as it were, *formally* cinematic in their visual tracking of narrative development. The codes established early on by Pater for treating homoerotic desire and homosexual identity via aesthetic analyses make this tracking toward the cinematic seem inevitable. There are the protagonists of these stories: evanescent, present-but-absent figures of ambiguous origin, ghostly but vastly attractive and engaging, powerful magnets for the camera and the aesthetic eye alike, and like film's own material nature, diaphanous. Film theorist André Bazin writes of how visual models of the nineteenth century troubled the notion of a solid material presence, which would become a defining issue in cinematic representation and debate. He writes that since the emergence of the "aesthetic problems" brought about by nineteenth-century visual reproduction, "it is no longer as certain as it was that there is no

middle stage between presence and absence. It is likewise at the ontological level that the effectiveness of the cinema has its source."[64] He notes that cinema makes filmed bodies present to us "in the same way as a mirror—one must agree that the mirror relays the presence of the person reflected in it—but it is a mirror with a delayed reflection, the tin foil of which retains the image" (97).

Bazin's description of the ontological ambiguity of the filmed body is powerfully reminiscent of Pater's definition of the queer, diaphanous subject for which the world has no place. These evanescent figures, as embodied by Sebastian, Alice, and Dorian, are indeed present and absent in the diegeses they inhabit, existing with an "otherworldliness" that can be translucent, elusive, or flickering. And Bazin's invocation of the mirroring effects inherent in cinematic representations of figures caught in a "middle stage between absence and presence" only deepens the parallels between narrativized ekphrasis in tales of the Aesthetic movement and the formal presentation of the ontological ambiguities of film's ghostly bodies which the viewer can observe and desire but never access. Just as nineteenth-century Aesthetic texts channel the scopic drive into an artistically procreative one that results in successive mirrorings of the narratives' main objects—sometimes as they change through time, as in the models of the flipbook and the sequence of photographs that stress difference of content, sometimes through insistent attempts to grasp the figures in particular moments—so, too, does cinema. These mirrorings, though embedded in the narratives, are also part and parcel of the film strip itself, where each frame depicts a minute shift, an ever-so-slight but simultaneous advancement of both narrative and image.

Aestheticism's motivations for foregrounding evanescent figures and the numerous animated portraits that result from attempts to capture them should not be

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[64] André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 1*, 1967, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 97.

tragically subsumed into the expansive history of cinema's development. Rather, owing to these tropes, Aestheticism should be seen as a seldom-acknowledged precursor to film that helped define the narrative and aesthetic applications of motion picture technology. The quantity of images produced by artists who follow Pater's model—the 130+ pictures Lee's narrator effortlessly creates to convey Alice Oke's unique existence, for instance—demonstrates the readiness of the artist with access to a queer gaze to create a new mode of art. This is *not* to say that an artist need experience same-sex desire to effectively adopt these creative tenets, but rather that any author, painter, or photographer invested in the *fin-de-siècle* notion of art begetting more art—"art for art's sake" in a very particular sense—would be participating in this milieu teeming with combinations of the visual, the psychical, and the material. Inventors like Muybridge, Marey, Edison, and the Lumières were required to provide the technological means for actualizing the motion pictures imagined in Aesthetic texts like Pater's, Lee's, and Wilde's, but the artistic and theoretical innovations that resulted from Aestheticism's exultation in the noble products of homoerotic energy create a profound link between literary motion pictures and cinema's formal principles. In this juxtaposition of the medium of film with queer Aesthetics, form and content fortuitously align. Celluloid is, after all, of the same diaphanous nature as these evanescent protagonists, coruscating between presence and effacement in correlation with a half-life that intensifies a film's aura as it diminishes its material stability.

# EPILOGUE

In my last section on *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, distinguishing between Lord Henry's documentary photographs and Basil's magical painting became an issue of empiricism and materiality vs. essence and aura. While the photographic does in one sense become the cinematic via the advancing film strip at the *fin-de-siècle*, I wish to emphasize that the ekphrastic photograph does not lose its fantastic potential because of this. It is true that even in nineteenth-century fiction, paintings are much more common as literary magic pictures, as the experience of seeing paint swirl autonomously over a canvas seems permanently cast in the imaginary realm; but the photograph, mechanically and chemically produced as it may be, can still make a valid claim to magic picture-hood. What makes either medium "magical" is ultimately the gaze cast upon it. If the gaze itself is libidinally charged, as it has been in each text this dissertation has discussed, photographs as well as paintings can take on fantastic qualities. To elucidate the crucial role of the gaze in this trope, it is worth turning to a much more recent exploration of fantastical photography than this project has heretofore considered.

In *Camera Lucida* (1980), Roland Barthes articulates his emotional and cognitive reactions to various photographs, but particularly ones of his mother, who had recently died. All photographs, he explains, *suggest* if not present death, as they state simply and emphatically, "That-has-been."[1] Death inheres in these images even though in them, as with all visual media (including magic portraits), artists and technicians are always looking for more "lifelike" ways to capture the present human subjects. This artistic drive is actually primitive and epistemological in this way, as Freud discusses in his work on the uncanny. Barthes writes, relatedly, that "however 'lifelike' we strive to make it

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[1] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 77.

(and this frenzy to be lifelike can only be our mythic denial of an apprehension of death), Photography is a kind of primitive theater, a kind of *Tableau Vivant*, a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead" (31-32). It always places its subject in the past, presenting it as having *already* passed.

While all photographs are melancholy in this inevitable link with death, there are some photographs that present their referents in a forceful and fantastical way. This augmentation, however, is entirely dependent on the subjectivity of the viewer. In looking through numerous photos of his mother, all of which unsatisfyingly arouse exclamations such as, "'That's *almost* the way she was!'" or "'That's not the way she was at all,'" Barthes does not "'find' her." He writes that of her image among other photographic subjects he can distinguish her *difference* but not her *essence*, which is what he craves to discover meeting his gaze. "Photography thereby compelled me to perform a painful labor; straining toward the essence of her identity, I was struggling among images partially true, and therefore totally false" (66). He continues studying each of these photos "alone in the apartment where she had died," and eventually, it appears: the picture that captures what he calls her "air" as well as her figure, conveying her truth to him. She is a five- year-old child in the photo, standing with her brother "in a glassed-in conservatory, what was called a Winter Garden in those days" (67). It is, to him, "a supererogatory photograph which contained more than what the technical being of photography can reasonably offer" (70). It makes him say, "'There she is!"—a present-tense revelation of life, her true "essence" for which he had been searching (109). He emphasizes that this quality in a portrait cannot be studied into it—it must be surprisingly, passively encountered and instinctively responded to as he describes here. He recounts the trajectory: "first of all a few unworthy pictures which gave me only her crudest identity, her legal status; then certain more numerous photographs in which I could read her 'individual expression' (analogous photographs, 'likenesses'); finally, the Winter Garden Photograph, in which I do much more than recognize her (clumsy word):

in which I discover her: a sudden awakening, outside of 'likeness,' a *satori* in which words fail, the rare, perhaps unique evidence of the 'So, yes, so much and no more'" (109).

What the ekphrastic fantastic offers is access to what is beyond this doleful resignation of "no more." The literary magic portrait can always achieve the "more" that must finally elude the actual photograph because it exists in the imaginary realm; no matter how "present" his mother's essence may seem in the instant of its deictic naming, the photograph ultimately shows "what can never be repeated existentially" (4). In this way, Barthes's privileged photographs are always encased in melancholy because of their allegiance with death, their sending to us a link—a lineage, even, in family photos—with a past "like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed" (81). The rays of the star—a metaphor borrowed from Susan Sontag—reach the gazer belatedly; but the second metaphor of the umbilical cord that links the photographed body of his mother, even at age five, with his present gaze sidesteps the temporal impossibility of this figuration, though it is intensely provocative. The material connection he imagines persisting beyond a mother's death to her child conveys the depth of his grief and the intensity of his scopic drive to "find" her; but it also describes the phenomenological connection that many diegetic portrait gazers experience in the Victorian texts I have discussed. The psychological is combined with the physical in this visual exchange that connects past with present, creating a narrative arc literalized as an umbilical cord that spans two lifetimes in one cohesive story.

A vital point Barthes makes about this heightened exchange with a picture is that it depends on *his* gaze. Since it is *his* mother in the Winter Garden Photograph, only he can see her essence in it. This privileged subjectivity is also a curse: he laments the knowledge that after his own death, no one will be able to read and, more importantly, *feel* the emotional narrative that inheres in this photograph for him. Of a different

picture, he wonders, what will be lost in it when he dies, and, with him, his informed and emotionally invested gaze: "Not only 'life' (this was alive, this posed live in front of the lens), but also, sometimes—how to put it?—love. In front of the only photograph in which I find my father and mother together, this couple who I know loved each other, I realize: it is love-as-treasure which is going to disappear forever; for once I am gone, no one will any longer be able to testify to this: nothing will remain but an indifferent Nature" (94).

In these augmented photographic portraits that Barthes identifies, a fantastical essence is perceptible but also unreachable to the desiring spectator. Access to this "life" and even "*love*" from the realm of "*flat Death*" is only achieved via the properly invested gaze (92). In this way, his figuration stresses what my dissertation has been trying to convey: the magic portrait cannot exist without a magic portrait gazer, and the right one—one with a libidinal investment in the image, which each of the Victorian texts I've discussed provides. The gazing subject, in effect, is as much a part of the trope as the portrait is. Barthes's raw discussion of his experience as an intensely desiring subject-as-spectator makes painfully clear the profundity of the stakes of engaging with a life-imbued picture. His ruminations are psychoanalytically revelatory and narratologically productive. He resists the very idea of these exchanges—his exchanges—being theorized, even as he himself struggles for an effective articulation of their elements and effects. As he refers critically to the "frenzy" to make imagistic renderings of others "lifelike," he tries to convey his *inability to convey* sufficiently the essence of what only he can see in his mother's image.

*Camera Lucida* is filled with actual photographs—ranging from Mapplethorpe to Queen Victoria to a street scene in 1979 Nicaragua—but one that is provocatively absent is the Winter Garden Photograph. He discusses the other images as well, but the one that his gaze fantastically *activates* is kept from our nullifying view, since, to us, it would be just one among these other indifferent pictures; it would bear cultural significance but not

direct personal or emotional effect, and knowing this forces him to hide her, to save himself this "laceration" while he lives (94).

All this is to say that the way to make this "true" portrait evocative for us is to *make it and his gaze upon it* visible *only* via ekphrasis. The hallucinatory, emotional, time-traversing experience of "photographic *ecstasy*" that can be achieved via the subjectively charged gaze cannot be presented visually to anyone outside of the exchange except in words (119; italics his). Even the cinema—that medium I have frequently invoked to analyze Victorian magic portraits but into which I do not intend for them to be subsumed—is an image system that, Barthes writes, cannot provide this intense, personal, "mad" response; cinema participates aggressively in what he laments as the "taming of Photography." "[F]ictional cinema . . . can present the cultural signs of madness," but "it is always the very opposite of an hallucination; it is simply an illusion" (117). Narrative cinema presents what was never real (and with actors instead of subjects), and does so in a culturally controlled manner. The personal photograph is purely subjective in the temporality, the desire, and the (historical) narrative it invokes. What is madness but the subjective experience of the fantastic? Barthes's Winter Garden Photograph can stir him in this way, but he can impart that sensation to us only by describing at length the character of his mother within the photo and his "diegetic" gaze upon it. He produces his own magic portrait narrative—in the process of mourning put painfully on display—that attests to the endurance of the magic portrait trope regardless of the birth, growth, and even dominance of cinema.

The magic painting is still an impossible illusion, unlike the animated photograph, and is hopefully, then, not in need of an explication of its contemporary relevance. But the photograph was in danger at the end of the last chapter of slipping into cinema's too-readily consuming history. Hopefully, Barthes's raw presentation of his own "madness" in gazing upon an image that is fantastic *for us* only because it is ekphrastically evoked *and* put in dialogue with his personally charged gaze has spared ekphrastic photographs

from this reductive fate. In short: as a trope psychically distinct from cinema and requiring an invested spectator, the magic portrait need not be painted. The particularities of its visibility on an imaginary screen intensify its relation to the viewer's conscious and unconscious mind and establish it as much more than a mere analogue to any one visual medium. As a unique visual narrative form, its animated images, tantalizingly on display in a gallery accessed only through literature's language, richly reward the critical eye attentive to its hybridity, its conjuring of fantastic projections from ekphrastic words.

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