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The Gothic Doubling of the Portrait in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Marshall Lewis Johnson

Abstract
In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* the exact role of the portrait in the novel has remained mysterious, particularly because the novel offers no explanation. However, substantial scholarship has explored that which remains unspoken in the text because it was then culturally taboo: homosexual desire. I would argue that this narrative does not merely talk around homosexuality, but represents it as different from the cultural contexts that make it taboo. Additionally, the monstrous image refuses to remain part of ideological notions of homosexuality as sinful or criminal, transforming in the final scene to an image of eternal beauty beyond the limitations of Dorian's own human form, bound as it is not only by mortality but also by social morality and law. In short, when Wilde quips in the preface that "All art is quite useless," this is not mere flippancy (17). Wilde highlights the ways in which art is not bound by these very morals and laws, "useful," so to speak, in their cultural contexts. Art, like the mysterious portrait, is "useless" when measured up against those same morals and laws. Far from a simple joke, Wilde issues the highest praise for art's ability to explore the socially taboo, and the importance of its uselessness empowers art to conduct such explorations, beautiful in such uselessness.

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Wilde, *Dorian Gray,* Gothic, The Double, Narrative Theory, Queer Studies

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In Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* the exact role of the portrait in the novel has remained mysterious, particularly because the novel offers no explanation. However, substantial scholarship has explored that which remains unspoken in the text because it was then culturally taboo: homosexual desire. The new term circumnarration, coined by Helen D. Davis, references an element in a narrative which is approached but never addressed directly (2013, 199). Furthermore, Antonio Sanna has extended the readings of queer theorists to suggest that the "picture later comes to embody all of Dorian's vices as if to represent the very conception of homosexual love that motivated its creation [by Basil] as it was, however, seen by the late nineteenth-century social and legal system that would punish its practice" (2012, 32-33). These theoretical approaches have interesting implications if read through the novel's most mysterious symbol, Dorian's shapeshifting portrait painted by his devoted artist friend, Basil Hallward. The portrait's metamorphosis throughout the text circumnarrates the development of Dorian's homosexuality while its appearance

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is clouded by social and legal constraints, making it appear "monstrous" (Wilde 1989, 114). In its final transformation however, the portrait also reveals an aesthetic portrayal of homosexuality in the novel which transforms his taboo desire into an image of "exquisite youth and beauty" (167). The Gothic doubling of Dorian's image with the portrait creates an aesthetic distance between art and the subject of narration, which allows the novel to explore homosexual development in a way that is detached, distant, and free of the constrictions of Dorian's own social circles and human limitations. In a way, this development plays out as two competing narratives of maturation, one where the painting's growing monstrousness reflects Victorian attitudes toward Dorian's sexuality, and another where this doubling turned out to be beautiful all along.

However, this narrative does not merely talk around homosexuality, but re-presents it as different from the cultural contexts that make it taboo. Additionally, the monstrous image refuses to remain part of ideological notions of homosexuality as sinful or criminal, transforming in the final scene to an image of eternal beauty beyond the limitations of Dorian's own human form, bound as it is not only by mortality but also by social morality and law. In short, when Wilde quips in the preface that "All art is quite useless," this is not mere flippancy (17). Wilde highlights the ways in which art is not bound by these very morals and laws, "useful," so to speak, in their cultural contexts. Art, like the mysterious portrait, is "useless" when measured up against those same morals and laws. Far from a simple joke, Wilde issues the highest praise for art's ability to explore the socially taboo, and the importance of its uselessness empowers art to conduct such explorations, beautiful in such uselessness.

The deteriorating and growingly "monstrous" appearance of the portrait stands in to chronicle the progressive changes in Dorian's homosexuality, which, due to socio-legal contexts and constraints, appears increasingly terrifying to Dorian and the only other person who views the portrait in this condition, Basil

Hallward. The cultural fears and paranoia of 1890s London were very real and have been noted by numerous queer theorists who have struggled with the work's clear ambivalence toward sexuality. Queer theorists have argued that the narrative contains a strong ambivalence toward homosexual desire, obsessed with yet never approaching it directly. Christopher Craft describes sexual desire in the novel as "homophilia and -phobia" (2005, 120), either an all-consuming obsession or a fear. In short, queer theory has shown a clear thread of homosexual tensions throughout the novel, not acknowledged directly because it could not be, legally or socially, at the time.

Therefore, a different form of narration would be required to track the evolution of Dorian's sexuality in the novel. Helen D. Davis has recently argued that "circumnarration" (2013, 199) is actually necessary to read texts such as *Dorian Gray*, where "homoerotic desire and intimacy are not directly narrated but are clearly part of the novel" (213). Davis specifically studies episodes of homoerotic desire in the novel, which are implied though untreated directly: this includes conversations between Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry; Dorian's weak affections for Sibyl Vane; and Dorian's blackmail of Allan Campbell (213-216). Furthermore, these scenes were toned down by Wilde to conceal the homoeroticism in between publishing the story in *Lippincott's* and the later novelization. In Basil's confession of his former feelings for Dorian, the original manuscript reads, "I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give to a friend" (Wilde 2011, 172), a passage which Wilde deleted for the 1891 book publication. Thus, the text from *Lippincott's* was edited into the novel readers know today, without a more direct admission of homosexual desire between characters. Wilde's changes make Basil's statement "more aesthetic [and] artistic" than "romantic"; Davis specifically mentions the scenes where Basil confesses that he "worshipped" Dorian and the brief précis the narrator provides about Dorian and Alan Campbell's affair, both excised for

publication (2013, 214-215).[1] [2] Davis ultimately grants the brevity of her account, suggesting that a "full analysis of the circumnarratable [in *Dorian Gray*] would be quite fruitful" (216). My intention here is to extend Davis's account and consider the portrait itself as a means of narrating struggling homosexual development while also acting as an aesthetic symbol that allows homosexuality to exist on its own terms outside of any human limitations. Furthermore, the role of the portrait is made apparent to the reader in ways not apprehended diegetically. In other words, the novel is extradiegetically about the portrait representing sexual beauty in art.

The Portrait as a Circumnarrating Double

In treating the portrait as a form of chronologically circumnarrating Dorian's growing ambivalence toward his own sexuality, the most useful lens in this respect may be Gothic interpretations of the double in the novel. The portrait as a specific double is Dorian's hidden "guilty secret," according to Linda Dryden, much like Hyde is Jekyll's hidden secret (2003, 133). It is not just a double, however, but a doubling of his own wishes to conceal his sexuality. David Punter's *The Literature of Pity* defines Kristevan abjection as the "process whereby we encounter parts of our selves - individually or culturally - to which we do not wish, or cannot dare, to own" (2014, 4). Aside from culturally and socially producing racism, sexism, and other prejudices, on the individual level this is Punter's "construction of the monstrous" (4). Punter's text exhaustively treats pity across much of the literary canon, but it is this particular characterization of "monstrous" that I wish to examine in relation to *Dorian*

[1] "It is quite true that I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give a friend" (2011, 172).
[2] "In fact, it was music that had first brought him and Dorian Gray together, music and that indefinable attraction that Dorian seemed to be able to exercise whenever he wished, and indeed exercised often without being conscious of it…For eighteen months their intimacy lasted" (2011, 233).

Gray.[3] The doubling throughout the narrative is extensive. Furthermore, the doubling of the central character through the painting is John Paul Riquelme's "dark version" of Dorian that he does "not wish, or cannot dare, to own," ultimately an aspect of himself he views as "monstrous" (2000, 619). Additionally, the "monstrous" is not its only visage, and the portrait may be a "version," but "dark" only to Dorian. On an extradiegetic level, the novel is about Dorian's monstrousness but the portrait's beauty. Victorian England may make Dorian a monster, but sexuality itself is never monstrous. In adding to Punter's theory of an abject double, only Dorian does not want to "own" the portrait. The novel embraces the portrait, making it the centerpiece.

The portrait therefore constitutes the most substantial aestheticization of the taboo in ways that transform the taboo. Dorian may be immortal, but a painting that ages is at least, if not more, impressive, with this aestheticization outliving its human subject. Dorian's desires, which we know as non-heteronormative, were socially misunderstood, and therefore personally misunderstood by Dorian, even treated as "monstrous" or sinful. Thus, the novel shows a social and legal discourse as it inhibits a human being's understanding of his own desires; Dorian aestheticizes his homosexuality so he can view it from a socially safe distance. The reader, however, can read it as Dorian cannot and will not allow others to. Therefore, Dorian struggles to hide his desires even from himself as he hides the portrait from others' eyes as well. Additionally, he often finds that he cannot take his eyes off the likeness, because his sexuality remains a "part of" him (Wilde 1989, 35). Its terrifying appearance still influences how the portrait is viewed by one other character in the novel, making it beautiful

[3] Pity in the works of Dickens, according to Punter, often takes on two broader aspects, as can be seen in texts like *Oliver Twist*. On one hand, pity "recalls maternal care" and "suggests embedding this principle of care in the wider society" (2014, 79). On the other hand, pity can be an "excuse," or a "way of distributing social action away from the center which in turn reinforces the gap between the haves and the have nots" (79). In short, pity is either a sincere emotion regarding concern for the wellbeing of the socially and economically downcast, or it "reinforces" one's higher position over another.

extradiegetically. Circumnarration, in other words, operates on a level perceptible extradiegetically. Just before his death, Basil has seen the portrait, which appears by turns "hideous" and criminal in its appearance to Basil as well as Dorian (120). This desire appears "hideous" because this particular kind of sexuality is "unnameable" in *fin de siècle* Victorian England.[4] Victorian culture worked strenuously to conceal or contain homosexuality, along with any other desires that were not heteronormative, treating these divergences with the condemnatory label of "gross indecency." The term is mentioned under Statute II of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, vaguely and broadly as "any sexual activities between men, regardless of age or consent" (2011, 8). This criminal "gross indecency" is transferred to the portrait, while Dorian "sees himself absolved by the portrait from the effects of a life of self-indulgence," as Dryden posits (2003, 122). The body of his desires remains hidden and aestheticized, hidden so that no one can view it and aestheticized so that Dorian can relish in his desires without legal consequence.

The novel therefore traces two forms of development that run parallel. One story is about Dorian becoming monstrous while appearing young; the other circumnarrrated story is about the portrait becoming beautiful while appearing hideous. While Dorian views the portrait with the language of sin, "soul," and "judgment" (Wilde 1989, 97), one might more simply call the portrait a space for reflection. The portrait reflects back to Dorian the part of himself he views as abject, but the same part of himself Dorian hates to see is the part at which the reader marvels. The very transformation Dorian will not "inquire" (88) into is the portrait's most amazing feature. Furthermore, the portrait remains "useless" in spurning much significant development in Dorian. Dorian himself remains aesthetically beautiful while doing terrible things; the portrait becomes

[4] Ed Cohen believes the text "problematizes representation per se" of "male homosexuality as 'unnameable'" and thus creates "one of the most lasting icons" of homosexual desire (Cohen 1987, 811).

increasingly apparently ugly while doing nothing. Dorian can see what he wishes to in the portrait of the part of himself he tries to repress; the portrait itself is still "useless" in reflecting this beyond showing Dorian what he subconsciously expects to see.

Dorian does not remain hidden and aestheticized from the reader, however. On the level of diegesis, the portrait appears to age while Dorian appears to stay young. On the level of extradiegesis, however, the portrait remains a portrait while Dorian develops into a sociopathic monster. After Sibyl's suicide, Dorian's decision to hide the portrait is motivated by how he reads the portrait. "His own soul," he sees, "was looking out at him from the canvas and calling him to judgment" (97). The portrait's changes in appearance are only half of the evidence of Dorian's own changes, however. While Dorian sees the image as "calling him to judgment" and therefore revealing some sense of his wrongdoing, his own actions as narrated are ample evidence of the same. Dorian's culture forces him to aestheticize his desires, but this aesthetic distance only serves to allow him to pretend to ignore his own actions. Even though he can ignore the changes in the portrait, Dorian is still responsible for four deaths before his own demise.

In elaborating on Jed Esty's claim about *Dorian Gray* as an "anti-novel," it is noteworthy not only that the portrait changes and develops throughout, but also that it bookends the novel (2012, 105). The narrative does not even open with Dorian himself as the focus. Instead of meeting Dorian, we are shown a "full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty" whom Basil "had so skillfully mirrored in his art" (Wilde 1989, 18). In short, the Dorian we first meet is his "mirrored" image in a work of art and not the human being himself. If the portrait is indeed a "part of" Dorian, then it is the part that undergoes the changes one expects a human being to undergo as they age. When Lord Henry exclaims late in the novel to Dorian, "Life has been your art" (163),

he clearly indicates that Dorian has not changed. Only the reader is aware that the "part of" Dorian that has changed has remained unseen by (almost) anyone besides Dorian himself.

The timing of the portrait's first noted change indicates how much more active the painting is than Dorian. While the artwork is dynamic, Dorian views himself, art, and those around him in a static fashion. Art, as a source of reflection, truly is "useless" to Dorian. In fact, Dorian's supposed attraction to Sibyl is based off his ability to aesthetically distance himself from the actress who is "[n]ever" herself and "knows nothing of life" (53). Therefore, when Dorian sees the "touch of cruelty in the mouth" on his portrait, he is suddenly moved to false feelings of remorse that he nearly forgets when he awakens the next day (77). The "touch of cruelty" both represents his growing understanding that he would never be attracted to anyone without the filter of their being aestheticized, along with the "feeling of infinite regret" (78) that comes with this understanding, since he has been conditioned to view his own desires as "dreadful" (77). The portrait as art reflects the tragedy of Dorian's inability to feel capable of unburdening himself with another human being. Dorian himself is startlingly calloused when deserting Sibyl, as "[h]er tears and sobs annoyed him" (76). This callousness, however, comes from his inability to feel desire without it being distanced or hidden. He could love Sibyl, but only as a Shakespearean heroine, much as his aestheticization of his own desires must be shoved away in an attic.

Dorian fears the possibility of art's dynamism causing any self-reflection. He embraces art only as décor that allows him to celebrate his privilege. His social status as handsome and wealthy, after all, allow him to live a life of collecting various aesthetic objects not every Londoner could afford.[5] His instinct when he wakes up the day after he first notices the change urges him to hide the

[5] When Lord Henry first inquires of his uncle, Lord Fermor, about Dorian, the older man asserts that Dorian "should have a pot of money" inherited from his grandfather and his mother (Wilde 1989, 39). This "pot" would easily explain how Dorian is able to afford his lavish lifestyle.

image, as "some fate or deadlier chance" would allow others' eyes to see the "mask of his shame" (80). He is fearful that others will know about his true desires, for which he feels "shame." Yet his embarrassment becomes an "almost scientific interest" as well, as though he is drawn to the portrait which he also fears (81). His paranoia wins out, however, motivated by his own cultural mores. He hides the portrait away in his attic, so that "[n]o eye but his would ever see his shame" (100). Dorian conceals his homosexuality so he can enjoy it privately in the attic, literally closeting his desires by moving the portrait into a space noted for its disuse. The portrait therefore both closets and aestheticizes homoerotic desire outside of any other "unrepresentability," save the representation achieved through the narrative act of tracing the portrait's development (Cohen 1987, 806). His obsession with the portrait then vacillates between a love for the depiction of his own desires and an abhorrence for this same image, feelings that strengthen over the years. "After a few years [Dorian] could not endure to be long out of England," away from the portrait, as it is "such a part of his life" and desires, while he is also "afraid that during his absence some one might gain access to" the portrait and learn his secrets (Wilde 1989, 111). As the years pass, Dorian is therefore aware that he cannot hide from the truth the portrait shows him, since it "still preserved, under all the foulness and ugliness of the face, its marked likeness to himself" (111). Dorian still tries to view himself as the heteronormative young man that the rest of his acquaintances see, yet the portrait acts as a palimpsest that lays his homosexuality over the surface of this other image. The development of his sexuality is traced not in his emotions or mental states throughout the narrative, but circumnarrated on the canvas. The novel chronicles the development of a desire viewed as monstrous by society but individually beautiful in its survival outside of both social and human constraints.

The portrait is not always "useless" to Dorian; he simply does not see what it shows him. He loves yet fears it, without considering why he is drawn to it in

the first place. Wilde uses a painting on which to "record" or circumnarrate Dorian's sexual history, the "narrative of his life," appearing monstrous even in Dorian's eyes, according to Ed Cohen (1987, 810). The portrait therefore acts as an alternative narrator for the novel, divulging to the reader Dorian's developing monstrousness as his culture corrupts his understanding of his own sexuality. At first, Dorian's peculiar devotion to the portrait is colored by the "pleasure" of his own sexuality (Wilde 1989, 88). After Lord Henry has informed Dorian that Sibyl has committed suicide and that he is too late to make amends to her, Dorian grieves briefly but then dismisses any thoughts about why the portrait has changed with the question, "Why inquire too closely into it?" (88). He instead believes that, whether the changes be spiritual or scientific in nature, "there would be a real pleasure in watching" the portrait morph into the "most magical of mirrors" which would "reveal to him his own soul" (88). Without considering why the changes are taking place in the portrait, Dorian views the portrait as a "mirror" that will show him the "pleasure" of his life, a pleasure that he cannot pursue openly in public yet can allow the portrait to show vicariously to him. Unable to enjoy fully the pleasures he seeks, Dorian's partial gratification comes from viewing the Gothic double of the terror he sees in his own heart in a way that occasionally brings him pleasure. The tragedy is that Victorian culture has raised Dorian to not pry too far into this pleasure.

None of this changes the way Victorian society does not acknowledge anything ugly; only the visually pleasing is a guarantee of goodness and quality, and thus acceptance into society. Most people do not believe the "rumors" (Wilde 1989, 117) about Dorian because of his "marvellous beauty" (121); the whispered secrets about his sexual orientation are rebuffed not with a word, but with his mere appearance. According to Ellen Scheible, the novel "overdramatically imitates British aesthetics, exposes the excess at the heart of it, and emphasizes its dependence on a gothic, colonial, and Irish Other" (2014, 138). In other words,

Dorian's physical appearance, along with his excess of wealth and aesthetic possessions, mark him as an upstanding citizen because these simplistic markers differentiate him from his social "Other." Dorian's own beauty allows him to continue to hide his homosexual lust in public, where polite society believes a man so beautiful must be heterosexual and has "escaped the stain of an age that was at once sordid and sensual" (Wilde 1989, 102). Furthermore, the classification of homosexuality as a criminal offense is also shown indirectly through the portrait. In fact, "art and criminality" are both, according to Paul Sheehan, "anti-normative" in the novel (2005, 336). Crime is associated with ugliness, a trait that Dorian physically does not show while his view of this criminality is transferred to the portrait.

As interesting as Dorian's attempts at avoiding the truth may be, it is more interesting to consider the ways in which the portrait slowly takes over the narrative, becoming much more central to Dorian's consciousness than his own actions are. As a form of circumnarration, the portrait not only reflects Dorian's development but acts as the primary way the reader is made aware of chronological time. The portrait does all the changing throughout the novel; Dorian's life remains so repetitive that even his own mental states begin to reflect his willful forgetfulness. Driven to the outskirts of society to seek sexual pleasure, Dorian's own desires begin to seem like his cravings for opium (Wilde 1989, 140-41). Dorian "had mad hungers that grew more ravenous as he fed them" (103). He only lives from one pleasure to the next, having "almost entirely lost control" of his "nature" (102). His own actions become less plotted by conscious thought, as the text becomes littered with mentions of his aimless wanderings: "Where he went he hardly knew" (76). Yet these barely-conscious pursuits indicate that Dorian is trying to remain unaware of his own desires, and that a paranoia of the law motivates his concealment.

One chapter suspends much of a sense of chronology. In Chapter 11,

chronological time ceases to act as a means of recounting the events of Dorian's life, as numerous years pass, and the narrative only lists his collection of various aesthetic objects. This chapter also constitutes the most detailed overview of Dorian's relationship to the portrait. As Dorian's paranoia regarding the portrait's discovery grows, he can bear less and less to be away from it. Upon viewing it, he is variably filled with "loathing" for both "it and himself, but filled, at other times, with that pride of individualism that is half the fascination of sin and smiling with secret pleasure" at the portrait's "burden" (111). Dorian's ambivalence toward the portrait is an ambivalence toward his own sexuality. Dorian cannot pull himself away from the portrait because, even as he knows its relationship to the various scandals circulating about his private life, the image also confirms what he knows in his inmost heart. His own desirability and hints at sexual scandal are reflected upon as he considers the portrait. The unnamed scandals result in "not a few who distrusted him," yet "his charming boyish smile" and his "infinite youth" are "sufficient answer" (111-12).

His private life has become a subject of considerable scandal, yet his public image refutes these rumors. If all "[a]rt is at once surface and symbol," and going "beneath the surface" is done at one's "peril," as the novel's preface suggests, then Dorian's surface shows this peril of which his milieu is unaware (17). After all, his social circles fall "silent" when he arrives (102). "His mere presence" forces some men to "recall…the memory of the innocence that they had tarnished" (102). While his appearance causes some men to reflect on their lost youth and their aging, which they read as a sign of being "tarnished," Dorian's "surface" belies what lies "beneath." Even at a dinner party the evening after he has murdered Basil and blackmailed another man into disposing of the body, Dorian's dinner companion, Lady Narborough, tries to cheer Dorian by reminding him, "you are made to be good – you look so good" (137). While the irony is obvious to the reader, Narborough and Lord Henry simply write Dorian's mood

off as his being "in love" (135).

Indeed, the aging of the portrait and the chronology present in art but not for Dorian is "pre-figured" in the novel with which Dorian becomes obsessed, as well. Dorian finds the novel's protagonist to be a "pre-figuring type of himself" (102). This "pre-figuring," however, involves a "latter part" of the novel with the "sudden decay of a beauty that had once, apparently, been so remarkable", as with Dorian (102). In fact, the protagonist of this novel develops a "grotesque dread of mirrors" as he ages, much as Dorian has a dread of anyone ever seeing his portrait, itself a "mirror" of his own development (102). The novel, like the portrait, show the development to the reader of what should be happening to Dorian. Instead, it is left to art to suggest this development to the reader, as the novel *Dorian Gray* itself progresses with very few markers of chronology. This development also marks the portrait, in the eyes of the reader, as not itself evil. The portrait's sudden transformation at the end of the novel reveals that art is always beautiful and never sinful, while Dorian's actions themselves are obviously evil throughout.

In a way, the portrait lives life for Dorian. During his first encounter with Sibyl's brother James, who has sworn to kill Dorian for causing his sister's death, Dorian is saved by appearing "little older than a lad of twenty summers" (Wilde 1989, 145). The portrait's image of an aging Dorian is what James expected to see. While James later figures out his mistake, the portrait does more than temporarily help Dorian avoid trouble. Dorian often conflates "sin" with "age" when viewing the portrait, as though to him, ever leaving his boyish youth is in itself a form of evil (103). The reader, however, is left to question whether or not the two are actually the same. Dorian believes that the portrait bears signs both of his aging and his sinning, yet the reader can tell that Dorian is far more the sinner than any inanimate object could be. Dorian's surface appearance saves him, and James's dive under that "surface" ultimately comes not only at great "peril," but

costs him his life.

Returning to Davis's concept of circumnarration more directly, it is remarkable how little is said in two key scenes: the murder of Basil Hallward and the ending. Not only does Basil's reaction confirm the portrait's link to homosexual acts, but Dorian's murderous rage is spurred by the lack of understanding shown by one of the only two men in London Dorian hoped would understand. Basil is unable to see only the "marvellous beauty" (121) through the "horror" (120), just as Dorian pleads for the artist's understanding. When this understanding is not granted and the one other man to whom he shared his secret rejects it as grotesque, Dorian murders Basil, both enraged by his friend's rejection and his insistence that Dorian could become cleansed of his misdeeds if only he will "pray" (122). While not stated outright, Basil's earlier confession of love for Dorian has led the younger man to believe that the painter might understand. When denied this understanding, Dorian kills him both out of frustration and fear. It is in fact noteworthy that this is the last scene in which Dorian and the portrait feature specifically before the final confrontation. After learning that his sexuality is monstrous to others regardless of his pleas for sympathy, Dorian pursues a life of secrecy where he tries to ignore his double, as though he can amputate his sexuality from himself.

Frustrated with his inability to find social or even personal acceptance, Dorian finally decides to destroy the portrait, and in so doing inadvertently kills himself (Wilde 1989, 166-67). Even before his death, Dorian's forced secrecy leads him to heterosexual pursuits that are only attempts to mask his true desires. His last sexual act before this climactic scene is his desertion of Hetty Merton, whom Dorian believes he has left "flower-like" (158) and unspoiled, but who only constitutes a halfhearted attempt at masking his desire as heteronormative. His portrait verifies that this renunciation did nothing to change the image of his homosexuality (166). Dorian's own vacillation on the topic of Hetty reveals that

his true desires hardly allow him this charade when he says to Lord Henry, "I am quite sure that I loved her" (158), as though he himself needs convincing. The portrait records Dorian's socially unacceptable desires which appear repulsive to him because they are punishable transgressions if ever acknowledged publicly. Dorian's masking of his true self with a heterosexual relationship that he abandons represents his final and frustrated attempt to conceal and then destroy his homosexuality. Furthermore, the portrait acts as a centerpiece that circumnarrates Dorian's slow loss of control and a sense of self. As the preceding analysis has shown, Dorian is rarely if ever directly conscious of his homosexuality, even though this same sexuality represented on the canvas is the center of his entire existence. The Gothic doubling is thus a splitting of the self, only tenable so long as Dorian can stand to even infrequently view the monstrous image. Once he can no longer face the monster with which he is fascinated and to which he feels connected, he commits suicide. As an act of circumnarration, the portrait acts as the doubling of what the text could not discuss directly regarding Dorian's nature. Thus, the narrative shows the evolution of Dorian's various attempts to consciously resist or ignore his sexual impulses and failing to do so. When he can no longer psychologically stand to reject himself in this way, he kills himself.

All Art is Quite Useless

Wilde's novel necessarily doubles homosexuality due to a very real fear regarding one's private sexual acts at the time. Not only can homosexuality not be read directly in the novel for cultural reasons, but for legal reasons as well. A textual history of the novel shows how far the final text went in concealing homosexual desire. Nicholas Frankel's recent publication of an edited text removes deletions in favor of Wilde's more overtly erotic original which demonstrates the novel's own history as a text that was heavily censored. Not only were initial reviews of

the novel coded in language concerning "unhealthiness, insanity, [and] uncleanliness" (2011, 7), but this maniacal obsession with "gross indecency" resulted in first an editorial (not authorial) excision of around 500 words from the original typescript before printing the novel in *Lippincott's* (2011, 40). Finally, an authorially "toned down" text was published as a novel, in deference to Wilde's critics and "at the insistence of his publisher" (2011, 11). Wilde had every reason to fear legal reprisals for publishing an unexpurgated text in 1891 when he prepared the work for novelization (2011, 43). The passage of Basil's confession claiming he "worshipped [Dorian] with far more romance of feeling than a man should ever give to a friend" (2011, 172) is completely deleted from the final novelization, showing that Wilde and his publishers expended energy in downplaying the sexual nature of the relationships between the novel's male characters (Wilde 1989, 93). The monstrous double is Gothic not to "colonize the plot," as Richard Haslam suggests, but to allow Wilde to continue to show what he knew he would not be able to reveal directly, both his culture's view of it and its aesthetic ability to transcend this in the final scene (Haslam 2004, 307). In other words, the double acts as a significant indication of the limitations of Victorian social mores along with the far more lasting power of art.

Hence the preface to the novelization of *Dorian Gray.* Having excised direct references to homoerotic desire, the preface acts as a defense for the aestheticization of this same desire. This aestheticization allows the narrative to represent homosexuality in a way beyond Wilde's historical and cultural constraints. The monstrous, in other words, is simply beyond the human. After all, the preface suggests that a casual reader could interpret the novel as a thrilling tale about a Faustian bargain with an enchanted portrait, while anyone who interprets the portrait on a deeper level does so "at their peril" (1989, 17). Wilde wrote the preface after engaging in a long and heated battle in print with numerous hostile reviewers of the original text as it appeared in *Lippincott's*, running the preface

separately in March 1891 before appending it to the novelization a month later (Ellmann 1987, 320-22). The language of the preface insists that the novel's portrayal of desire exists beyond any human moral codes that inform interpretations of the novel as immoral. Literature does not produce the criminal or unethical, since "[t]here is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all" (Wilde 1989, 17). Additionally, literature reveals far more about the reader than about the work itself. The characterization of the "dislike of Realism" as the "rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass" means that purportedly "real" depictions of the lives of Victorian socioeconomic and gendered or sexual others upset the common reader, or book reviewer, because he/she would rather not acknowledge the ugly truths that English society wishes to ignore, namely their own sexual desires, the others within themselves (17). A great deal of language in the preface explains the novel or any novel's existence outside of human moral, social, and legal codes. Artists do not possess "ethical sympathies"; an author never "desires to prove anything"; "[v]ice and virtue" are nothing more than "materials" in fashioning the work; and even the "moral life of man," such as Dorian's, only exists as "subject-matter" for a writer (17).

Finally, Wilde defends the "useless thing," like a work of art, as an object that its maker "admires...intensely," referring to homosexuality's "useless" status throughout *Dorian Gray* (17). Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry all have homosexual desires treated through circumnarration. As a result, nothing about these desires is criminal or any more than "well written" (17). In fact, the novel only "mirrors" these desires back to the same "spectator" who rages against seeing him- or herself in the "glass" that shows one's true nature, much like Dorian's rage at the image in the portrait he and his culture made hideous. Wilde has only written an amoral novel with amoral characters and an amoral monster, while its readers see themselves in the work.

If art cannot be considered in any moral dimension, and if this amorality leaves the burden of interpretation on the shoulders of the reader, then the novel itself also acts out this conundrum through Dorian's relationship with the portrait. As a "spectator," Dorian views a work of art that in his eyes appears as a confirmation of his own desires, which he perceives as sins. Thus, the various narrative disruptions, where Dorian appears ambivalent, evasive, or downright amnesiac regarding both the portrait and his own actions, all serve to illustrate the social constraints that keep him from accepting himself as he is. Whether he quickly dismisses Sibyl's death, locks the portrait in the attic yet cannot stop visiting it, or seeks out opium dens in hopes of forgetting his own actions, Dorian does not want to confront the truth he believes the painting shows him. The portrait constructs a narrative that runs parallel to Dorian's own denials.

Even his murder of Basil serves as evasion. Not wanting to hear his homosexuality spoken of aloud as criminal or sinful, Dorian silences the only witness to his crimes, evidenced by the painting alone. In fact, it is remarkable how quickly Dorian and Basil seem to understand the grave sincerity of the image, instead of dismissing it as a freak of nature. Basil does not hesitate to consider the image a confirmation of his worst suspicions, with the "eyes of a devil" (Wilde 1989, 122). Given the absence of any explanation regarding the portrait's transformation while Dorian remains youthful, it is amazing that both Dorian and Basil jump to such terrible conclusions about its changes, with Dorian's cry, "Each of us has Heaven and Hell in him" (122), clearly being a plea for understanding and sympathy as though the image convicts Dorian of some heinous crime that neither man dares to speak aloud. Without the very real cultural fear they both carry regarding discovery and prosecution, a similar reaction would seem outlandish. While the novel draws numerous parallels between Dorian's homosexuality and the painting's transformation, nothing about the canvas itself could or would serve as a direct confirmation of Dorian's sexual

history. The portrait therefore remains "useless" to most viewers except Dorian and Basil, as the novel's conclusion shows the painting's miraculous transformation as nothing other than "splendid" and "exquisite" (167).

Thus, in the final scene Dorian is "monstrous," sadly all-too-human in his limitations. Since "[a]ll art is quite useless," this thread of homosexuality that runs throughout the novel is both disguised or "circumnarrated" and contained in the final scene. Even if one could surmise that Dorian is a homosexual, the text does not provide any direct confirmation of this fact, save through a series of masks, the final mask being his new hideous appearance. The portrait contradicts the social and legal limitations of Dorian's humanity in Victorian England. By aestheticizing his homosexuality, the narrative traces the development of these desires as they would be perceived within their cultural context yet also represents this development in a way that could not be considered criminal in any legal discourses of the time, allowing the portrait to exist beyond these human discourses as what Elizabeth Grosz elaborates would be "for what can be magnified, intensified, for what is more" (Grosz 2004, 63). In fact, Wilde's own biography bears this out: passages of *Dorian Gray* were read out during his trials, but they failed to provide the prosecution with any real evidence of Wilde's own criminal "gross indecency" (Ellmann 1988, 448-449). Ultimately, Wilde was convicted through his own admission of guilt; by publicly acknowledging the "Love that dare not speak its name," he refused to conceal what his work had attempted to aestheticize and thereby weave into public literary discourse free of any authorial culpability (1988, 463).

In short, while he publicly became viewed as a monster, Wilde refused to view or discuss his homosexuality as monstrous any longer. Wilde was legally convicted and sentenced, yet *Dorian Gray* was legally "useless"; the novel represents a form of literature that presses human limitations into new forms, where both Dorian and perhaps Wilde's own homosexual desires could flourish.

In the final scene of the novel, we are not left with Dorian's corpse and a destroyed portrait, but rather a "splendid portrait of their master...in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty" (Wilde 1989, 167). The portrait, reflecting Dorian's "monstrous" sexuality throughout the novel, transforms into an image of a man that appears just as desirable and pure as Dorian himself had, yet also portrays the very homosexual who lies on the floor before the painting in a way he would never be seen by his peers as a flesh and blood homosexual, but only as oil and canvas.

As an aesthetic object of eternal "youth and beauty," homosexual desire concludes the novel as a beautiful portrait that survives beyond its cultural and legal limitations. While the canvas seems to trace a devolution of Dorian's private life throughout the novel, its sudden shift to its original state disrupts the linear chronology of a narrative of human development. The portrait of Dorian's sexuality as "monstrous" becomes suddenly beautiful. Additionally, Dorian's status as "body" moves through tremendous "transformation" in the novel. His subjectivity is clearly split between himself and the portrait, giving him two bodied forms of his desire: one human yet aesthetic body, the other aesthetic yet human (through aging) canvas. In splitting a sense of subjectivity for Dorian, the novel provides two alternative ways of viewing his developing desires. One is clouded by Dorian's view of cultural and legal contexts as outlined above, while the other presentation of his desires lives, changes, and suddenly returns to youth outside of these realms, all while existing separate from Dorian's own subjectivity. Dorian perceives the portrait as "hideous," but the conclusion of the novel shows that the portrait and thus an aesthetic image of homosexuality are not limited to Dorian's perceptions.

Given the portrait's "useless" qualities, it may sound strange to reference Rita Felski's *Uses of Literature.* However, in her chapter on "Enchantment" as a "use" of literature, Felski makes the following argument:

> [W]e hear ever more frequently that ideology critique has triumphed at the expense of aesthetics, that pleasing surfaces have been entirely subsumed by programmatic political judgments, that critics have lost sight of the distinctive visual qualities and verbal textures of works of art. The much heralded return to beauty is one attempt to reorient the critical conversation; beauty bespeaks a positive value, a presence, an enrichment, even if the precise nature of that enrichment often eludes our analytical grasp. (2008, 65)

Ultimately, this lies at the heart of *Dorian Gray*: the portrait, a work of art, can appear to be hideous while actually being beautiful all along. Numerous scholars have been quite right in their ideology critiques of closeted homosexuality throughout the novel and the cultural contexts that make this closeting legally necessary. The positive value of beauty in the novel, however, is not the surface beauty of Dorian himself. Rather, the portrait's beauty at the novel's end is the enchantment at the heart of the novel: that non-heteronormative sexuality can appear beautiful somewhere that can really only be seen by the reader. After all, no one else in the novel can see and understand the significance of the portrait. Dorian and Basil are both dead, and none of Dorian's servants had ever seen the hideous, aging form the portrait had previously donned.

In this way, the portrait's "uselessness" in Victorian England is also its "use" of enchantment à la Felski. The portrait is certainly "useless" to Dorian. Right before he destroys it, he considers for the last time that the portrait is his "conscience" and "monstrous soul-life" (Wilde 1989, 166-67). While Dorian correctly considers his own soul as monstrous, it is difficult to consider the portrait as actually his soul or conscience. After all, his attempt to destroy the portrait both kills himself and cleanses the work of art. The portrait's "use," then, is its ability to enchant, its ability to show to a person a magical, shifting image that can make sexuality by itself appear beautiful in the end.

As a defiance of social limitations, the transformation of the portrait in the novel narrates the development of the beauty in homosexuality in ways that both the contexts which produced the novel and the social sphere in which Dorian

travels would not allow. The portrait shows Dorian his homosexuality as he perceives it within his own limitations. The novel's conclusion however shows this desire in a light that goes beyond views of homosexuality as criminal or "monstrous." The portrait acts as a narrative of the development of homosexual desire that Wilde could not have written directly, yet the symbol still allows the text to confirm desire's enduring beauty.

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