"Culture and corruption": Paterian self-development versus Gothic degeneration in Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray
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Papers on Language & Literature. 39.4 (Fall 2003): p339.

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"Culture and corruption," murmured Dorian, "I have known something of both."

--Oscar Wilde, The Picture of Dorian Gray

I hold that no work of art can be tried otherwise than by laws deduced from itself: whether or not it be consistent with itself is the question.

--Thomas Wainewright, quoted by Wilde in "Pen, Pencil, and Poison"

Recent genre theory reminds us of just how often our disagreements about the meaning or interpretation of a text are actually debates about how the text should be read, or, more precisely, what kind of text it should be read as. If we are persuaded that a text is indeed an urban eclogue, a Bildungsroman, a Horatian ode, a parody of pastoral, or an example of postmodern female Gothic, we are more likely also to be persuaded of the critic's interpretation of that text's meaning. Thus a critic who interprets Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? as a modern secular morality play is not so much claiming to have found the meaning of the text as he or she is trying to persuade us to read the text as a particular kind of play. What a text means is inseparable from how it is read, and since we must always read a text as something, genre often asserts itself as a set of instructions, implicit or explicit, on how to read a text. The debate over the genre, and thereby the meaning, of Oscar Wilde's novel The Picture of Dorian Gray exemplifies this protocol of reading.

Dorian Gray (1) has always provoked contradictory interpretations, but underlying the disagreements about the work's meaning there has persisted a more fundamental debate about what kind of novel it should be read as. This debate is discernible in the early reviews, though somewhat obscured by the hysteria over the novel's alleged immorality. Reading the novel as an English imitation of a decadent French text, for example, the reviewer for the Daily Chronicle denounced it as "a tale spawned from the leprous literature of the French Decadents, a poisonous book, the atmosphere of which is heavy with mephitic odours of moral and spiritual putrefaction" (NCE 342-43). The St. James Gazette repeated this attack: "The writer airs his cheap research among the garbage of the French Decadents like any drivelling pedant" (NCE 333). But while the popular secular press was denouncing Wilde's novel for its "spiritual putrefaction," Christian publications, such as the Christian Leader, the Christian World, and Light, which interpreted it as an ethical parable or moral fable, praised it as "a work of high moral import" (qtd. in Pearce 169). In America, Julian Hawthorne (son of Nathaniel Hawthorne) was undecided whether Dorian Gray was "a novel or romance (it partakes of both)." But he finally settled on "parable" and pronounced the novel "a salutary departure from the ordinary English novel" (NCE 348-349). Clearly, the judgment of early reviewers depended, at least to some extent, on the genre in which they placed the novel.

Modern critics are as divided about the novel's meaning as the original reviewers were

obsessed with its morality. But what has not changed is the role the perceived genre of the novel plays in interpretation. (2) While some critics read the novel as belonging to a single genre and assume that the conventions of that genre provide the key to unlock the text's meaning, others see it as a kind of heteroglossia combining two or more genres. In "The Picture of Dorian Gray: Wilde's Parable of the Fall," for example, Joyce Carol Oates finds the novel to be "a curious hybrid. Certainly it possesses a 'supernatural' dimension, and its central image is Gothic; yet in other respects it is Restoration comedy" (427). For her, the novel's generic anomalies make its message at once transparently clear and enigmatically opaque:

While in one sense The Picture of Dorian Gray is as transparent as a medieval allegory, and its structure as workman-like as Marlowe's Dr. Faustus, to which it bears an obvious family resemblance, in another sense it remains a puzzle: knotted, convoluted, brilliantly enigmatic. (Oates 422-23)

But, as her title indicates, Oates ultimately sees the primary, governing genre as parable. Even those critics who find multiple genres in Dorian Gray tend to privilege one. The two most favored candidates for the novel's controlling genre have remained fable and parable. Joseph Pearce has recently joined this chorus: "The plot of the novel," he says, "unfurls like a parable, illuminating the grave spiritual dangers involved in a life of immoral action and experiment" (164), language that echoes that of the Christian reviewers in 1890. In a dissenting voice, Shelton Waldrep argues for Dorian Gray as a realist novel: "Wilde had to work within the confines of some specific variation on the theme of realism" (103). Kerry Powell has uncovered Wilde's indebtedness to a popular, late-Victorian sub-genre that he designates as "'magic' picture fiction" (148). In "Fiction and Allegory," Edouard Roditi classifies Dorian Gray as an "Erziehungsroman of dandyism" (NCE 371) in the tradition of Robert Plumer Ward's Tremaine (1825), Disraeli's Vivian Gray (1826), and Bulwer Lytton's Pelham (1828). Confronted with the novel's generic diversity, Rachel Bowlby concludes that "Dorian Gray does not in fact fall straightforwardly into any generic category" and finds it to be an amalgam of "innumerable different forms and styles ... alternating and overlapping in no particular order and with no ... appearance of either a conventional linear narrative in the mode of realism, or a consistent symbolic line in the mode of allegory" (190). As if parodically anticipating later critics, Wilde, in a letter to the editor of the Daily Chronicle, called Dorian Gray "an essay on decorative art" (qtd. in Ellmann 321).

Mindful of Jerusha McCormack's warning that "it is hard to say anything original about The Picture of Dorian Gray, largely because there is so little that is original in it" (110), I have no desire to referee this debate or to offer my own candidate for the true genre of Dorian Gray. Nevertheless, I hope to shed some new light on the conflicting readings of the novel's generic affiliations, as well as on its meaning and artistic success, by arguing that The Picture of Dorian Gray is neither governed by a single unifying genre nor dispersed intertextually (and unoriginally) among multiple heterogeneous ones, but rather is disjunctively situated between two conflicting genres, each of which is related to one of the two antithetical literary and cultural discourses that the novel engages but cannot successfully integrate: namely, self-development (including what we would today call "sexual liberation") and Gothic degeneration. The degeneration theme links the novel generically to such other fin-de-siecle Gothic stories as Robert Louis Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) and Arthur Machen's The Great God Pan (1894), while the self-development theme relates it to the novel of self-development, of which Walter Pater's Marius the Epicurian (1885) and the unfinished Gaston de Latour (1888) are perhaps the most obvious generic models, given Pater's

acknowledged influence on Wilde.

The novel's indebtedness to Pater's Marius the Epicurian and to the Gothic tradition is well established. In her introduction to the Oxford English Novels edition of Dorian Gray (1974), Isobel Murray argues that Wilde is "combining two fairly well known traditions, the 'Gothick' one of, for example, Maturin's Melmoth the Wanderer and Poe's 'The Oval Portrait', and the 'decadent' one of Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin, Huysmans' A Rebours and Pater's Marius the Epicurian" (xx). I agree that the intertexts Murray identifies are present in Dorian Gray, but, in my view, the Gothic texts most relevant to Wilde's novel are not the earlier ones of Maturin (to whom Wilde was distantly related) and Poe, but the contemporary fin-de-siecle Gothic tales of Stevenson, Machen, Wells, and Stoker, among which David Punter places it in his study The Literature of Terror (1980). "One thing can be said at the outset which underlies the meaning of decadence in connexion with these texts," says Punter about the Gothic revival, "and that is that they are all concerned in one way or another with the problem of degeneration" (239). Decadence and degeneration in Dorian Gray are thus related primarily to fin-de-siecle Gothic rather than to the Paterian novel of self-development. As I hope to show, however, the Gothic plot of Dorian Gray is ultimately inconsistent with the Paterian plot of self-development, for the twin themes of self-development and degeneration are antithetical, if not contradictory, suggesting as they do positive and negative movements, respectively. These double genres--the literary and the popular--create generic dissonances as the Gothic plot of degeneration takes over and eventually supersedes the incompatible Paterian plot of self-development and individual liberation. The "Gothic" Wilde thus finds himself committed to the implications of a narrative of degeneration that undercuts the Paterian ideal of self-development posited by Lord Henry in the early chapters. In particular, the goal of (homo)sexual liberation promised by the self-development plot is subverted by the necessity, within the conventions of the fin-de-siecle Gothic tale of degeneration, of seeing Dorian's emerging homosexuality, along with his other crimes and sins, as further evidence of his degeneration. Jeremy Reed, in his introduction to a recent edition of Dorian Gray, places the novel in a tradition of subversive fiction: "One could justifiably argue for Oscar Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray comprising a blueprint for the subversive genre of fiction which in the 20th century has counted amongst its numbers the works of Jean Genet, William Burroughs, and J. G. Ballard" (5). But much as I would like to see Wilde as fathering such a tradition--and there can be little doubt that Dorian Gray is a subversive work--I believe that the potentially subversive homosexual plot of the novel is itself seriously, even fatally, subverted by the association between homosexuality and degeneration required by the Gothic plot.

The early chapters of Dorian Gray are dominated by the Paterian self-development plot, so much so that Isobel Murray classifies the novel as the story of "the growth, education and development of an exceptional youth, who through personalities, a book, a picture, is moulded or moulds himself, discovering himself what he believes in" (viii). The first half of the novel is certainly indebted to the Bildungsroman. Wilde's preoccupation with the idea of self-development is clearly evident from the works he published as he wrote and then revised Dorian Gray. Four months before the novel appeared in Lippincott's Monthly Magazine, Wilde reviewed a translation of the writings of the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tsu. In "A Chinese Sage" (published in The Speaker, February 8, 1890), Wilde wrote,

It may be true that the ideal of self-culture and self-development, which is the aim of his scheme of life, and the basis of his scheme of philosophy, is an ideal somewhat needed by an age like ours, in which most people are so anxious to educate their neighbours that they have actually

no time left in which to educate themselves. (Soul of Man 294-95)

But it is in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," his most important and ambitious essay on culture and politics, that Wilde most fully explores the issue of self-development, or what he calls "Individualism." In that essay, which appeared in The Fortnightly Review in February 1891 while he was revising Dorian Gray, Wilde explores the political conditions of self-development. As Jonathan Dollimore points out, individualism for Wilde "is both desire for a radical personal freedom and a desire for society itself to be radically different, the first being inseparable from the second" (41). Sounding like a socialist Lord Henry, Wilde expresses his regret "that society should be constructed on such a basis that man has been forced into a groove in which he cannot freely develop what is wonderful, and fascinating, and delightful in him--in which, in fact, he misses the true pleasure and joy of living" (Soul of Man 255).

In keeping with Wilde's project of self-development, the opening chapters of Dorian Gray focus on the innocent Dorian's awakening, under the twin influences of Basil's homoerotic painting and Lord Henry's subversive philosophy, into "the true pleasure and joy of living":

He [Dorian] was dimly conscious that entirely fresh impulses were at work within him, and they seemed to him to have come really from himself. The few words that Basil's friend had said to him--words spoken by chance, no doubt, and with willful paradox in them--had yet touched some secret chord, that had never been touched before, but that he felt was now vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses. (DG 90:186)

Moreover, as words such as "vibrating," "throbbing," "secret chord," "curious pulses" (the last phrase changed to influences in DG 91) all suggest that, as recent critics have argued, a central element of that development is Dorian's discovery of his own homosexuality. (3) "By projecting the revelation, growth, and demise of Dorian's 'personality' onto an aesthetic consideration of artistic creation," says Ed Cohen, "Wilde demonstrates how the psychosexual development of an individual gives rise to the 'double consciousness' of a marginalized group" (166-67). It was precisely the explicitness of the homosexual theme, we must not forget, that outraged many early reviewers.

Just how explicitly homoerotic the 1890 version is became readily evident in 1988, when the Norton Critical Edition printed both the 1890 Lippincott's version and the revised (expanded and expurgated) 1891 edition. It is clear, for example, that the reason Hallward does not want to exhibit Dorian's painting is that it discloses Hallward's obvious homosexual attraction to Dorian (just as Wilde's novel revealed the sexual inclination of its author). Basil's final declaration of his true feelings for Dorian is unmistakably homoerotic:

"It is quite true that I have worshipped you with far more romance of feeling than a man usually gives to a friend. Somehow, I had never loved a woman.... Well, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I quite admit that I adored you madly, extravagantly, absurdly. I was jealous of every one to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. I was only happy when I was with you. When I was away from you, you were still present in my art. It was all wrong and foolish. It is all wrong and foolish still. Of course I never let you know anything about this. It would have been impossible. You would not have understood it; I did not understand it myself." (DG 90: 232-33)

In contrast to Hallward's repression of his sexual attraction to Dorian (sublimated through art), Lord Henry's philosophy of unfettered self-development can be read as an implicit

recommendation to homosexuals to realize their true being, despite the misguided restraints of society and religion. "The aim of life is self-development," he tells Dorian:

"To realize one's nature perfectly,--that is what each of us is here for. People are afraid of themselves nowadays. They have forgotten the highest of all duties, the duty that one owes to one's self.... The terror of society, which is the basis of morals, the terror of God, which is the secret of religion--these are the two things that govern us." (DG 90: 185)

Furthermore, Lord Henry explicitly links the quest for self-development, "the duty that one owes to one's self," to an attack on restrictive laws; and, in the homosexual context of the scene, it would be hard not to see his words--especially "monstrous laws"--as alluding to the Labouchere Amendment to The Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885), which criminalized private consensual sexual acts between adult males:

"I believe that if one man were to live his life out fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream,--I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse of joy that we would forget all the maladies of mediaevalism, and return to the Hellenic ideal,--to something finer, richer, than the Hellenic ideal, it may be. But the bravest man among us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle broods in the mind, and poisons us.... The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it. Resist it, and your soul grows sick with longing for the things it has forbidden to itself, with desire for what its monstrous laws have made monstrous and unlawful." (DG 90: 185-6)

It is hard to imagine that a sophisticated homosexual man reading Lord Henry's subversive words in 1890 would not see their immediate and obvious relevance to his own life, regardless of what other meanings could legitimately be attributed to them. Society's "monstrous laws" have made male-to-male sex "monstrous and unlawful," and the "self-denial that mars our lives" includes the denial of those sexual impulses that are not monstrous in themselves, but made monstrous only by monstrous laws. Moreover, Lord Henry's opposition between mediaevalism and "the Hellenic ideal" echoes the terms in which contemporary apologies for homosexuality were argued. (4) Even more importantly, Lord Henry articulates here an early theory of the evils of repression. For it is the repression of same-sex sexuality, and not the sexual acts themselves, that poisons and mutilates the mind and the soul. Consequently, liberation from that repression is seen as necessary for the full development of the individual personality. John Addington Symonds expressed a similar view in A Problem in Modern Ethics, his apologia for homosexuality published in 1891: "It is this forcible suppression of an instinct so deeply rooted in our nature," he argued, "which first originates the morbid symptoms, that may often be observed in Urnings [sexual inverts]" (70).

Lord Henry's liberationist project, when applied to Dorian's sexual development, however, encounters a major obstacle: in Victorian society, especially after the Labouchere Amendment, it could be carried out only in secrecy. As Symonds points out,

[T]he comrades [in a homosexual relationship] are continually forced to hide their liaison; their anxiety on this point is incessant; anything like an excessive intimacy, which could arouse suspicion (especially when they are not of the same age, or do not belong to the same class in society), has to be concealed from the external world. In this way, the very commencement of the relation sets a whole chain of exciting incidents in motion; and the dread lest the secret

should be betrayed or divined, prevents the unfortunate lover[s] from ever arriving at a simple happiness.(Problem 72)

Now the self-development novel does not generically require that its protagonist lead a double life: Pater's heroes--Marius and Gaston--do not. But the homosexual theme of Wilde's novel does require that Dorian live a double life. The theme of the double had, of course, long been associated with the Gothic novel, and just four years before Dorian Gray was published there appeared the classic novel of the double life, Robert Louis Stevenson's Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886). Early reviewers of Dorian Gray noted the obvious parallels with Jekyll and Hyde, and later critics have pointed to Stevenson's Gothic "shilling shocker" as a likely source. (5) Stevenson's sensational tale of the double self would certainly have resonated particularly strongly with Wilde and other members of the homosexual subculture that was emerging in London at the end of the nineteenth century. Lord Alfred Douglas's infatuation with the novel--he read it, on different estimates, nine or fourteen times before he met Wilde--certainly attests to its immediate appeal to homosexuals (D. Murray 32). By the 1880s, as such scholars as Jeffrey Weeks, Richard Dellamora, and Elaine Showalter have documented,

the Victorian homosexual world had evolved into a secret but active subculture, with its own language, styles, practices, and meeting places. For most middle-class inhabitants of this world, homosexuality represented a double life, in which a respectable daytime world often involving marriage and family, existed alongside a night world of homoeroticism. (Showalter 10)

Dr. Jekyll's account of his youth, in particular, is described in a way that must have struck a responsive chord in contemporary homosexual readers struggling against what conventional morality--and more recently the law--regarded as "irregularities" and "degradation," and who were forced, as a result of their dual nature, to "conceal" their "pleasures":

And indeed the worst of my faults was a certain impatient gaiety of disposition, such as ... I found it hard to reconcile with my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public. Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures; and that when I reached years of reflection ... I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life.

He goes on to refer to "such irregularities as [he] was guilty of," adding that he

regarded and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame.... I was driven to reflect deeply and inveterately on that hard law of life, which lies at the root of religion and is one of the most plentiful springs of distress. Though so profound a double-dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were in dead earnest; I was no more myself when I laid aside the restraint and plunged in shame, than when I laboured, in the eye of day, at the furtherance of knowledge or the relief of sorrow and suffering. (Stevenson 75-76)

Jekyll's language here--"concealed my pleasures," "profound duplicity of life," "so profound a double-dealer," "laid aside the restraint and plunged in shame"--would certainly not be out of place in Dorian Gray, and a "profound duplicity of life" combined with a "morbid sense of shame" perfectly describes the lives of many gay men at the time. Later in his "statement of the case," Jekyll describes the feeling of liberation that accompanies his transformation:

Men have before hired bravos to transact their crimes, while their own person and reputation sat under shelter. I was the first that ever did so for his pleasures. I was the first that could plod in

the public eye with a load of genial respectability, and in a moment, like a schoolboy, strip off these lendings, and spring headlong into the sea of liberty. (80-81)

What Jekyll has accomplished through science is what many contemporary homosexual men desired: the ability to safely lead a double life. They, too, longed to "plod in the public eye with a load of genial respectability" and then be able to "strip off" their conventional respectability and "spring headlong into the sea of liberty." Indeed, that is precisely what Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas did--with ever increasing recklessness.

As Elaine Showalter has pointed out, the homosexual nature of Hyde's pleasures is even more strongly hinted at in the manuscript of the novel:

In his original draft of the manuscript, Stevenson was more explicit about the sexual practices that had driven Jekyll to a double life. Jekyll has become "from an early age ... the slave of certain appetites," vices which are "at once criminal in the sight of the law and abhorrent in themselves. They cut me off from the sympathy of those whom I otherwise respected." (112)

Whatever Stevenson's own sexuality, (6) Showalter is surely right when she says "Stevenson was the fin-de-siecle laureate of the double life" (106). The description of Jekyll's appetites as "criminal in the sight of the law" is especially revealing when we realize that the novel was published in the same month as The Criminal Law Amendment Act went into effect. Many homosexual readers of the novel in early 1886 must have linked it to the public debate on criminalizing private male-to-male sexual acts and to their own double lives. Even if a modern "gay" sexual identity was still embryonic, it is hard to believe that members of this subculture could have read Jekyll and Hyde without seeing the relevance of Jekyll's double life to their own lives. So when Wilde came to write Dorian Gray--the story of a man who "felt keenly the terrible pleasure of a double life" (DG 91: 135)--he would have found in Jekyll and Hyde a recent model for using Gothic fiction to explore the double lives of closeted homosexuals in late-Victorian England.

In addition to the obvious Gothic theme of the double, Wilde adapts--and modifies--several other conventions of earlier Gothic fiction. In Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic, Anne Williams identifies several conventions "familiar in gothic narratives from Walpole to the present: a vulnerable and curious heroine; a wealthy, arbitrary, and enigmatic hero/villain; and a grand, mysterious dwelling concealing the violent, implicitly sexual secrets of this homme fatal" (38). Wilde transforms the innocent heroine into the (initially) innocent Dorian; the wealthy and enigmatic hero/villain into the wealthy, aesthetic, and epigrammatic Lord Henry (who, Satan-like, tempts Dorian in Basil's garden); and the mysterious dwelling concealing violent, implicitly sexual secrets into Dorian's townhouse with the locked attic that hides his not so implicitly sexual secret. (The word secret occurs 37 times in the novel.) Wilde also appropriates a convention common to Frankenstein, Jekyll and Hyde, and The Great God Pan: the scientific experiment with unexpectedly horrific consequences. In Jekyll and Hyde an experiment transforms Jekyll's personality. Wilde's novel is also the story of an experiment: Dorian's development is explicitly characterized as the result of an experiment that Lord Henry, the Gothic scientist in the role of decadent aesthete, performs on the young Dorian. Lord Henry had always been enthralled by the methods of science, but the ordinary subject-matter of science had seemed to him trivial and of no import. And so he had begun by vivisecting himself, as he had ended by vivisecting others. Human life,--that appeared to him the one thing worth investigating. (DG 90: 203-04)

And so Dorian becomes the subject of his unusual experiment:

To a large extent the lad was his [Wotton's] own creation. He had made him premature. That was something.... Yes, the lad was premature. He was gathering harvest while it was yet spring. The pulse and passion of youth were in him, but he was becoming self-conscious. It was delightful to watch him. (DG 90: 204)

The last line in particular suggests the empirical pose of the disinterested scientist. A few lines later, the narrator adds, "It was clear to him [Lord Henry] that the experimental method was the only method by which one could arrive at any scientific analysis of the passions; and certainly Dorian Gray was a subject made to hand, and seemed to promise rich and fruitful results" (DG 90: 205; italics added). Later Lord Henry says that "[Dorian] would be a wonderful study" (DG 90: 207). Lord Henry's effort "to project [his] soul into" Dorian's "gracious form" is described (in the 1891 edition) through a metaphor of chemical infusion: "to convey one's temperament into another as though it were a subtle fluid" (DG 91: 33)--just like the draught that changes Jekyll into Hyde. In Jekyll and Hyde, of course, the experimenter and the subject of the experiment are the same person; Wilde separates them into two characters. He also changes the mode of the transformation from science to art, and the location from the laboratory to the artist's studio. Art replaces science, hence the dominant role that works of art and books play in Wilde's novel, especially the "poisonous" book that acts like Jekyll's mysterious chemical agent.

Even more important than either these borrowings or the theme of the double is yet another convention of Gothic fiction that Wilde would have found particularly suitable to his project in Dorian Gray: the perennial Gothic theme of transgression. Since Lord Henry's theory of liberation from repression leading to self-realization requires transgression of existing social, moral, religious, and especially legal codes, Wilde needed a plot that could combine self-development with transgression, the later being a necessary precondition of the former. Since its beginnings in Walpole, Gothic fiction has always been a transgressive genre; as Kelly Hurley reminds us, "Gothic provided a space wherein to explore phenomena at the borders of human identity and culture--insanity, criminality, barbarity, sexual perversion" (6). This transgressiveness coincides with Wilde's own anti-authoritarian ideas expressed in his essays at this time. "Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history," he says in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," "is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion" (Soul of Man 231). In "The Critic as Artist," the first part of which appeared in The Nineteenth Century in the same month that Dorian Gray appeared in Lippincott's, Gilbert, Wilde's spokesman, says,

What is termed Sin is an essential element of progress. Without it the world would stagnate, or grow old, or become colourless. By its curiosity Sin increases the experience of the race. Through its intensified assertion of individualism it saves us from monotony of type. In its rejection of the current notions about morality, it is one with the higher ethics.... Self-denial is simply a method by which man arrests his progress, and self-sacrifice a survival of the mutilation of the savage, part of that old worship of pain which is so terrible a factor in the history of the world. (Soul of Man 125-126)

The first half of this passage could easily be Lord Henry's project for Dorian's self-realization, and the last lines actually echo Lord Henry's own words: "The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives" (DG 90: 186). In Wilde's view, says Richard Ellmann, "Sin is more useful to society than martyrdom, since it is self-expressive not

self-repressive. The goal is the liberation of the personality" (310). "One can fancy an intense personality being created out of sin," Wilde wrote in "Pen, Pencil, and Poison" (Soul of Man 103). Since "Wilde's notion of individualism," as Jonathan Dollimore explains, "is inseparable from transgressive desire and a transgressive aesthetic" (40), and since the Gothic portrays sin as self-expressive, not self-repressive, it is hardly surprising that Wilde would have found the Gothic aesthetically appealing. The problem is that fin-de-siecle Gothic texts like Jekyll and Hyde and The Great God Pan include not just the traditional Gothic theme of transgression but also the fin-de-siecle theme of degeneration, and the discourse of degeneration on which these texts draw is, quite simply, incompatible with the Paterian goal of self-development.

"Degenerationism," says Kelly Hurley in The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin de Siecle, "is a 'gothic' discourse, and as such is a crucial imaginative and narrative source for the fin-de-siecle Gothic" (65). When viewed from the perspective of such fin-de-siecle Gothic texts as Jekyll and Hyde and Arthur Machen's The Great God Pan, the corruption mirrored in Dorian's picture is not so much "a visible symbol of the degradation of sin" (DG 90: 220) as it is a sign of his degeneration. (7) The Great God Pan was published as a novella in 1894 by John Lane, who also published Wilde's Salome, but an extract from it had appeared in December 1890 in a short-lived magazine called Whirlwind. In Machen's Gothic tale of degeneration, a doctor performs an experiment designed to open a young girl's "inner eye" to the continuing presence of the Great God Pan. Although the girl dies, the experiment succeeds and she gives birth to a child, Helen, the result of her mother's coupling with the primordial Pan. Helen, who then becomes the focus of the story, reveals to a series of admiring men the horror that lies beneath the surface of their conventional lives, driving them to madness and death. When Helen dies, she degenerates, passing through all the stages of evolution as she reverts to the primordial slime. "The paradox of The Great God Pan," says Punter, "is that the visitation which liberates the human being from the repression of false assumptions also destroys the barriers which retain human individuation: the liberation of desire returns man to his primal associations with the beast and destroys the soul" (264).

A similar paradox of sexual liberation leading to destruction and degeneration takes place in Dorian Gray. Like Dorian, Helen--that both have Greek names cannot be accidental--seduces her male victims and then reveals to them something so horrible that they go mad and commit suicide. (Helen Vaughan's victims commit suicide when they learn her unspeakable secret; Dr. Lanyon dies of shock when he learns Dr. Jekyll's secret; and Alan Campbell commits suicide after he disposes of Basil Hallward's body by decomposing it in acid.) Dorian exercises a fatal sexual power over young men, especially young aristocrats. In his final, fatal confrontation with Dorian, Hallward asks,

"Why is your friendship so fateful to young men? There was that wretched boy in the Guards who committed suicide. You were his great friend. There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had to leave England, with a tarnished name. You and he were inseparable. What about Adrian Singleton, and his dreadful end? What about Lord Kent's only son, and his career? ... What about the young Duke of Perth? What sort of life has he got now? What gentleman would associate with him? Dorian, Dorian, your reputation is infamous.... They say that you corrupt everyone whom you become intimate with. " (DG 90: 257-58)

Although Helen's power is unspecified in the text, it is, like Dorian's, obviously sexual. "I knew I had looked into the eyes of a lost soul," says a witness to Helen's power; "the man's outward form remained, but all hell was within it. Furious lust, and hate that was like fire, and the loss of

all hope and horror that seemed to shriek aloud in the night, though his teeth were shut; and the utter blackness of despair" (Machen 97). Dorian's "outward form" (his youthful beauty) also remains, but his "lost soul," mirrored in the picture, shrieks its black despair to Hallward, who recoils in horror:

An exclamation of horror broke from Hallward's lips as he saw in the dim light the hideous thing on the canvas leering at him. There was something in its expression that filled him with disgust and loathing. Good heavens! It was Dorian Gray's own face that he was looking at! The horror, whatever it was, had not yet entirely marred that marvellous beauty. (DG 90: 261)

The paradox of beauty and repulsiveness in Dorian is also present in Helen Vaughan: "Every one who saw her at the police court said she was at once the most beautiful woman and the most repulsive they had ever set eyes on. I have spoken to a man who saw her, and I assure you he positively shuddered as he tried to describe the woman, but he couldn't tell why" (Machen 64; italics added).

The Gothic plot in Dorian Gray, then, is the typical plot of fin-de-siecle Gothic--degeneration from a higher to a lower state, from the well-formed, respectable, upper-class Dr. Jekyll to the bestial, murderous, lower-class Hyde. As Stephen Arata has observed, "Jekyll and Hyde articulates in Gothic fiction's exaggerated tones late-Victorian anxieties concerning degeneration, devolution, and 'criminal man'" (233). When Dr. Jekyll metamorphoses into Mr. Hyde, he degenerates to a lower, more primitive form of existence, a degeneration signaled in the novel by the repeated comparisons of him to an ape. Dorian similarly degenerates to a lower, bestial level of existence. He hides the portrait in the attic, where "the face painted on the canvas could grow bestial, sodden, and unclean" (DG 90: 238; italics added). Dorian's descent into the Victorian underworld of criminality, drugs, and sexual depravity is portrayed in language similar to that describing Hyde's parallel excursions into the same nether regions:

He [Dorian] remembered wandering through dimly-lit streets with gaunt black-shadowed archways and evil-looking houses. Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter had called after him. Drunkards had reeled by cursing, and chattering to themselves like monstrous apes. He had seen grotesque children huddled upon doorsteps, and had heard shrieks and oaths from gloomy courts. (DG 90: 215; italics added)

The lower classes are described as ape-like, and by his increasing association with them, Dorian becomes bestial and ape-like, too. (Not insignificantly, the word monstrous occurs over twenty times in the novel.) As Joseph Bristow has perceptively remarked, Dorian's personality, like that of Jekyll/Hyde, is divided between upper and lower classes as much as between good and evil: "Dorian wears a fine aristocratic face but possesses what may be referred to as a working-class (debased, gross, indecent) body, as he moves across and between different echelons of society" (60). (Wilde's own sexual encounters, it is worth recalling, were primarily with lower-class youths.)

In addition to its affinities with the degenerationist themes of contemporary Gothic fiction, Dorian Gray also shows unmistakable traces of contemporary non-fictional degenerationist writings, especially Richard von Krafft-Ebing's theory of the etiology of sexual perversion, specifically homosexuality. Krafft-Ebing's Psychopathia Sexualis, with Especial Reference to Contrary Sexual Instinct: A Clinical Forensic Study, first published in German in 1886 and translated into English in 1892, offered an exhaustive catalogue--238 cases by the twelfth edition--of sexual

variations. It established the new discipline of Sexualwissenschaft and created the paradigm, namely the case study, for sexological research for the rest of the century. As Sam Binkley points out, Krafft-Ebing's theory of sexual deviancy was part of the larger cultural discourse of degeneration:

Krafft-Ebing's thesis on degeneracy attributed the nebulous causes of [cultural] decline to the sexual behavior and condition of a morbid type, an invert, whose moral character was depleted by the same corrosive social forces and technological changes that had eroded and shaken the moral authority of the West. (88)

Krafft-Ebing believed that most homosexuals--a term he popularized--had a mental disease caused by hereditary degeneration, although environmental factors could influence this inborn neuropathic disposition, or "taint" as he repeatedly called it:

Since, in nearly all such cases, the individual tainted with antipathic sexual instinct displays a neuropathic predisposition in several directions, and the neuropathic predisposition may be related to hereditary degenerate conditions, this anomaly of psychosexual feeling may be clinically called a functional sign of degeneration. This inverted sexuality appears spontaneously, without external cause, with the development of sexual life as an individual manifestation of an abnormal form of sexual life, and has the force of a congenital phenomenon; or it develops upon a sexuality which in the beginning was normal, as a result of definite injurious influences, and thus appears as an acquired anomaly. Upon what conditions this enigmatic phenomenon of acquired homosexual instinct depends still remains unexplained, and is a mere hypothetical matter. Careful examination of the so-called acquired cases make it probable that predisposition--also present here--consists of a latent homosexuality, or, at least, bisexuality, which, for it to become manifest, requires the influence of accidental stimulating causes to rouse it from its dormant state. (Krafft-Ebing 239)

This model of a hereditary degenerative predisposition combined with "injurious influences" is certainly consistent with Wilde's representation of Dorian and his degeneration, which appears to be the result both of malign influence (Lord Henry's theories, the "poisonous book") and of "tainted" heredity. Read in the context of Krafft-Ebing's theories of a congenital neuropatic predisposition to degeneracy, Dorian's speculation that "his very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead" (DG 90: 253; italics added) is not only a fin-de-siecle version of what Richard Davenport-Hines calls "[G]othic's obsession with family secrets and hereditary doom" (11) but also evidence of the extent to which degenerationist discourse has penetrated Wilde's text. Significantly, the words "taint" and "tainted" are Krafft-Ebing's favorite ones for attributing hereditary causes to all types of sexual deviancy: "heavily tainted by heredity" (363); "hereditary taint" (571); "mother deeply tainted" (472); "heavily tainted by heredity" (468); "tainted by heredity" (465); "from a tainted family" (387); "probably from a tainted family" (273); "from a badly tainted family" (618); "hereditarily tainted" (60). In The Pathology of Mind (1895), Henry Maudsley claimed that "beneath every face are the latent faces of ancestors, beneath every character their characters" (48). When viewed from these perspectives, Dorian's speculations about his ancestors' influences on him are further evidence of degenerationist discourse in the novel:

He loved to ... look at the various portraits of those whose blood flowed in his veins. Here was Philip Herbert, described by Francis Osborne, in his "Memoires of the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James," as one who was "caressed by the court for his handsome face,

which kept him not long company." Was it young Herbert's life that he sometimes led? Had some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body till it had reached his own? (DG 90: 253; italics added)

(Osborne's original text, revealingly, reads "caressed by KING JAMES for his handsome face" [I. Murray 246], clearly an allusion to James's homosexuality.) Of his ancestor Sir Anthony Sherard, Dorian wonders, "What had this man's legacy been? Had the lover of Giovanna of Naples bequeathed him some inheritance of sin and shame? Were his [Dorian's] own actions merely the dreams that the dead man had not dared to realize?" (DG 90: 253). And what of Lady Elizabeth Devereux? "He knew her life, and the strange stories that were told about her lovers. Had he something of her temperament in him?" (DG 90: 253). In particular, the use of poisonous here, paralleling Dorian's later application of it to the book Lord Henry gives him, implies that his degeneration is both intrinsic and acquired.

But it was not just degenerationists who attributed sexual deviation to hereditary "taint" or predisposition. Even John Addington Symonds, who in A Problem in Modern Ethics explicitly challenged Krafft-Ebing's theories, held that some forms of sexual inversion are inheritable:

That sexual inversion may be and actually is transmitted, like any other quality, appears to be proved by the history of well-known families both in England and in Germany. That it is not unfrequently exhibited by persons who have a bad ancestral record, may be taken for demonstrated. (49)

Clearly, this degenerationist discourse has seeped into Dorian Gray.

The problem with representing Dorian's career through the language of contemporary degenerationist discourse is that doing so undermines the liberationist programme articulated by Lord Henry early in the novel. In Chapter 2, Lord Henry sees degeneration as the consequence of repressing our desires: "The pulse of joy that beats in us at twenty," he tells Dorian, "becomes sluggish. Our limbs fail, our senses rot. We degenerate into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid, and the exquisite temptations we did not dare to yield to" (DG 90: 189; italics added). For Lord Henry, the price of not rebelling against repression is degeneration, and so he recommends the Paterian ideal of self-realization. As his other writings show, Wilde certainly believed in this ideal. But he also believed that transgression and disobedience are necessary to achieve it. Wilde's theory of self-development (individualism) requires the transgressiveness of crime: "Like Jean Genet after him," says Richard Ellmann, "[Wilde] proposed an analogy between the criminal and the artist.... Rebelliousness and extravagance are needed if society's moulds are to be broken, as broken they must be. Art is by nature dissident" (330). "It is well for our vanity that we slay the criminal," Wilde writes in "The Critic as Artist," "for if we suffered him to live he might show us what we had gained by his crime" (Soul of Man 126). But the plot in which Wilde finds it necessary to embody that rebellion, a plot common to the novels of the recent Gothic revival, is one that could represent Hyde-like degeneration as the only alternative to a Jekyll-like life of conformity and repression. And so all forms of transgression, including homosexuality, become, within the conventions of that plot, signs of degeneration. "In the loosening of moral, aesthetic and sexual codes associated with fin de siecle decadence," writes Fred Botting, "the spectre of homosexuality as narcissistic, sensually indulgent and unnaturally perverse, constituted a form of deviance that signalled the irruption of regressive patterns of behaviour" (138). Transgression, what Wilde calls sin and disobedience, is first posited as necessary for

self-development to take place, but is then, in compliance with the Gothic plot, shown to lead inevitably to degeneration. And while the Paterian plot of Dorian Gray condemns the laws that criminalize transgressive sexual acts, the Gothic degenerationist plot requires that homosexual acts be a sin and a crime from which nothing can be gained. Thus Dorian Gray, like most fin-de-siecle Gothic fictions, is pessimistic that crime can lead to gain. According to Punter, the "underlying pessimism" of Jekyll and Hyde "results from Stevenson's difficulty in seeing any alternative structure for the psyche: once the beast is loose, it can resolve itself only in death" (244). Similarly, in Dorian Gray Wilde cannot imagine any alternative to repression other than degeneration--and finally death. "Gothic," pronounces Richard Davenport-Hines, "is nothing if not hostile to progressive hopes" (4). The Gothic plot in Dorian Gray is ultimately hostile to the progressive hopes held out by the Paterian plot of self-actualization.

"Any attempt to extend the subject matter of art," wrote Wilde in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," "is extremely distasteful to the public, and yet the vitality and progress of art depend in large measure on the continual extension of subject matter" (Soul of Man 249). The Picture of Dorian Gray is a provocative and important work, and in it Wilde indisputably extended the subject matter of the English novel. After June 20, 1890, the date the July issue of Lippincott's Monthly Magazine appeared, "Victorian literature had a different look" (Ellmann 314). But Dorian Gray is also a flawed work, riven by generic dissonances. The incompatibility of the novel's double genre undermines Wilde's attempt to tell a subsversive story of dissidence and transgression leading to self-development and liberation.

(1) The Picture of Dorian Gray was first published in the July 1890 issue of Lippincott's Monthly Magazine. That edition has been reprinted in the Norton Critical Edition of Dorian Gray, edited by Donald L. Lawler and also in an edition introduced by Jeremy Reed. In response to the hostile reviews of the Lippincott's edition, Wilde revised and expanded the novel. The revised edition, published in 1891, is the one that is usually reprinted and on which most critical discussions of the novel are based. Although Lawler acknowledges that the 1890 edition "has its own character and integrity" (NCE xii), I disagree with his judgment that the revised edition is artistically superior: the six chapters that Wilde added weaken the novel's artistic unity, and the cuts he made to remove the explicitly homosexual language of the first version seriously compromise the meaning of the original. Quotations in this essay are from the 1890 Lippincott's edition in the Norton Critical Edition and will be abbreviated as DG 90; the Norton Critical Edition of the revised and expanded novel will be abbreviated as DG 91. Quotations from contemporary reviews are also taken from the Norton Critical Edition and will be abbreviated as NCE.

(2) For a thorough survey of the last two decades of criticism of the novel, see Valentina Di Pietro's "An Annotated Secondary Bibliography on The Picture of Dorian Gray (1980-1999)" (The Victorian Newsletter 98 [Autumn 2000]: 5-10).

(3) I am, of course, aware of the ongoing debate about the social constructionist theory of gay identity and that some recent Wilde scholars have argued, provocatively if not always convincingly, that modern, post-Stonewall conceptions of gay identity are anachronistic when applied to Wilde and to other homosexuals of the 1890s. For a survey of this important debate, see "Gay, Queer, and Gender Criticism," Chapter 3 of Melissa Knox's Oscar Wilde in the 1990s (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2001), as well as "New Paradigms in Literary & Cultural History," Chapter 3 of Ian Small's Oscar Wilde: Recent Research (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2000). Two important books are Ed Cohen's Talk on the Wilde Side: Toward a Genealogy of a Discourse on Male Sexualities (New York: Routledge, 1993) and Alan Sinfield's The Wilde

Century: Effeminacy, Oscar Wilde, and the Queer Moment (New York: Columbia UP, 1994). See also Joseph Bristow's "'A Complex Multiform Creature': Wilde's Sexual Identities" (The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde. Ed. Peter Raby. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. 195-218).

(4) In Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford, Linda Dowling argues that modern male homosexual identity is partly an unintended consequence of the efforts of such Oxford Hellenists as Benjamin Jowett to establish a new Hellenism as "a ground of transcendent value alternative to Christianity." These reformers enabled Pater, Wilde, and others to formulate "a homosexual counterdiscourse able to justify male love in ideal or transcendental terms: the 'spiritual procreancy' associated specifically with Plato's Symposium and more generally with ancient Greece itself" (xii). In Cultures of Darkness, Bryan D. Palmer says "A textual, often artistic, sensibility--an enlightening idealization of masculine desire--wrote and sculpted itself across the standards of beauty in ways that legitimated homoeroticism by equating it with classicalism" (286). In "The Critic as Artist," Wilde wrote, "Whatever, in fact, is modern in our life, we owe to the Greeks. Whatever is an anachronism is due to mediaevalism"(Soul of Man 118).

(5) Early filmmakers also saw a link between Jekyll and Hyde and Dorian Gray. In 1920 Famous Players-Lasky brought out a version starring John Barrymore and directed by John S. Robertson from a screenplay by Clara S. Beranger. Beranger borrowed the Sybil Vane sub-plot from Wilde's novel and grafted it seamlessly into Stevenson's story. As Mr. Hyde, Dr. Jekyll seduces and kills a young actress. The fatal seduction of a dance-hall girl became a standard convention of nearly all later Jekyll and Hyde movies. When Dorian Gray was finally filmed by MGM in 1945, the character of Sybil Vane was reduced from a Shakespearean actress to a music-hall Cockney, as if to bring the story more in line with the conventions established by the film adaptations of Jekyll and Hyde.

(6) Wayne Koestenbaum says that "Stevenson served as a lightning rod for the fantasies of other male writers, some of whom were self-identified homosexuals"(33). John Addington Symonds placed Stevenson among those men whom he believed "have been, all of them, more or less sealed of the tribe of W[alt] W[hitman]" (Letter from Symonds to Herbert Harlakenden Gilchrist, 14 September 1885. Letters 77).

(7) For alternative readings of the Gothic in Dorian Gray, see Donald Lawler's "The Gothic Wilde" (Rediscovering Oscar Wilde. Ed. C. George Sandulescu. Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1994. 249-68), and Kenneth Womack's "'Withered, Wrinkled, and Loathsome of Visage': Reading the Ethics of the Soul and the Late-Victorian Gothic in The Picture of Dorian Gray" (Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century. Ed. Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys. New York: Palgrave, 2000. 168-81).

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