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MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 46, Number 3, Fall 2000, pp. 609-631 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2000.0056

OSCAR WILDE'S AESTHETIC GOTHIC: WALTER PATER, DARK ENLIGHTENMENT, AND *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

John Paul Riquelme

"J'ai soif de ta beauté."

—Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*[1]

It was from within, apparently, that the foulness and horror had come.

—Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Gothic Chiaroscuro and Realism

The Picture of Dorian Gray proceeds against the background of Walter Pater's aesthetic writings, but also against Pater in a stronger sense.[2] It provides in narrative form a dark, revealing double for Pater's aestheticism that emerges from a potential for dark doubling and reversal within aestheticism itself. The duplication produces not a repetition of Pater but a new version of his views that says what he cannot or will not articulate, including a recognition of the dark dynamics of doubling and reversal that inhabit those views. That recognition includes the possibility that

MFS Modern Fiction Studies, Volume 46, number 3, Fall 2000.

the process of doubling and reversal will continue. In the novel, Wilde responds to Pater by projecting the dark implications of Pater's attitudes and formulations in a mythic Gothic narrative of destruction and self-destruction. Wilde simultaneously aestheticizes the Gothic and gothicizes the aesthetic. The merger is possible, and inevitable, because of the tendency of Gothic writing to present a fantastic world of indulgence and boundary-crossing and the tendency of the aesthetic, in Pater, to press beyond conventional boundaries and to recognize terror within beauty. As an avatar of Narcissus, Dorian Gray embodies both tendencies in a poisonous, self-negating confluence signifying madness. But the madness is not his alone. He shares it with others in the narrative and with the fantastic quality of his story. No one is immune from the madness and its effects. In this allegory about art, Wilde's book and its producer are themselves implicated. They cannot stand apart in a realm of clarity that is somehow insulated from the darkness they portray and embody. Despite the mannered elegance of the book's characters and its style, it sheds only partial light on its subject, which includes itself.

The novel's narrative concerns a dark and darkening recognition that transforms Dorian's life by actualizing a potential that was already there in his family, a potential that is one truth about British society.[3] This dark enlightenment is rendered in a narrative that provides the equivalent of chiaroscuro, understood with reference to painting as a combination of light and clarity with enigmatic darkness and obscurity in a space that undermines the coherence and implied sanity of a representational geometry. By combining clarity and obscurity, often in a shallowly rendered space, chiaroscuro provides an alternative and a challenge to visual representations that rely on general illumination, the appearance of a coherent Cartesian geometry, and a vanishing point. The impression can be enigmatic or frightening for the person whose vision is impeded, because terror tends to arise when insufficient or uneven light creates a sense of disorientation and confusion. Edmund Burke makes this point in his treatise on the sublime and the beautiful.[4] Things that go bump in the night scare us, especially if we cannot see them clearly and understand them by means of familiar categories.

The alternative and the challenge to realism in Wilde's literary chiaroscuro concern realism's reliance on positive knowledge and on believable representations that create for the reader an impression of sanity,

intelligibility, and control. The narrative provides in the painting and the book a look at the dark as well as the light, at something disturbing that exceeds, as Gothic writing regularly does, the boundaries of realistic representation and the limits of bourgeois values. As a Gothic revisionary interpretation of Pater's late Romanticism, this particular instance of excess marks a turning point in literary history toward literary modernism. The reliance on doubling as a symptom of a darkness within both culture and the mind follows Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and anticipates Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Joseph Conrad's writings, especially *Heart of Darkness* (1902) and *The Secret Sharer* (1910). The conjoining of light and dark occurs as the narrative of a doubling that becomes visible through acts of aesthetic making and aesthetic response. The collaborative act of creating the painting brings into being something apparently new, original, and masterful that turns out to be not only beautiful but also atavistic and terrifyingly at odds with the public values of the society that applauds its beautiful appearance. That collaborative act parallels and engages with our own act of reading. It comes to an end at the same time as our engagement with the book reaches closure, once Dorian and his painting are finished.

Pater against Wilde: Poe, the French Connection, and Doubling

In *Oscar Wilde*, an award-winning biography, Richard Ellmann claims that in his review of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Pater objects only to the portrayal of "Lord Henry Wotton, who speaks so many of Pater's sentences." "But otherwise he was delighted with the book" (323). This is one of Ellmann's least convincing readings, since it is deaf to the irony of Pater's response, which is defensive, prejudicial, and patronizing. Like many other critics, Ellmann reads Pater's review as positive.[5] In fact, Wilde and Pater had exchanged compliments about some of their earlier writings. Pater wrote admiringly to Wilde about *The Happy Prince* in June 1888 (Wilde, *Letters* 219). And Wilde's anonymous review of Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* a year earlier refers to the prose as "wonderful," though he comments that it is ascetic and in danger of becoming "somewhat laborious" (qtd. in Ellmann 289). But in his later review of Pater's *Appreciations* in March 1890, Wilde's criticisms are blunter and more frequent.

He says that "Style," though the "most interesting" of the essays, is also "the least successful, because the subject is too abstract" (*Artist* 230); that Charles Lamb "perhaps [. . .] himself would have had some difficulty in recognising the portrait given of him"; that the essay on Samuel Taylor Coleridge "is in style and substance a very blameless work" (232); and that the essay on William Wordsworth "requires re-reading" (234), though he does not say why. Most damning are his comments on Pater's style: "Occasionally one may be inclined to think that there is, here and there, a sentence which is somewhat long, and possibly, if one may venture to say so, a little heavy and cumbersome in movement" (231). Wilde ends with apparently high praise by saying that Pater's work is "inimitable," but also that "he has escaped disciples" (234), presumably including Wilde himself.

Critics who emphasize the positive character of Walter Pater's review of the novel may do primarily because many of the other reviews were more pointedly negative, even censoriously so.[6] Only by contrast with the hostile reviews can Pater's be called favorable. On the one hand, Pater was generously siding with Wilde against his troglodytic detractors. But considering Wilde's review of *Appreciations* and his echoing of Pater's views in the words of Lord Henry Wotton, Pater had reasons to be displeased and to pay Wilde back. Ellmann does trace Wilde's shift from an enthusiastic, admiring response to Pater's writings and to aestheticism at Oxford toward his later, more critical stance, but he does not suggest that Pater would have sensed the rift and responded in kind.[7] The details of the review indicate that he did.

In his review, Pater writes as though he were immune from the book's implications, or as though he wishes he were. Taking into account Lord Henry's repetition of Pater's language, which Ellmann mentions without detailing, it becomes clear that Pater could not have missed the novel's challenge to his own attitudes. Unlike Lamb, he recognized his own portrait. Pater attempts to turn aside the book's force in various ways. Like Lord Henry Wotton and Basil Hallward in their responses to Dorian and his portrait, Pater does not want to admit the bearing that Wilde's Gothic rendering has on his own ideals. He takes exception to Wilde's portrayal of an aesthetic hedonism but not by strategies that effectively answer the challenge, for Wilde's resistance approaches the absolute in its ironic probing of Paterian views and the British society into which they fit all too comfortably. Wilde anticipates Pater's re-

sponse to seeing his own portrait in *Picture*. In chapter 13, Dorian murders the artist who has painted him, in effect murdering the man who, like a father or mentor, has contributed in a significant way to making him what he is. Just before he dies, Basil Hallward sees the painting late at night by the light of a "half-burned candle" (314) in the former schoolroom of Dorian's house, in a scene that would require for visual rendering a candlelit chiaroscuro like that of paintings by Georges de La Tour (1593–1652). By the "dim light," Hallward sees "a hideous face on the canvas grinning at him" that combines "horror" with "marvellous beauty" in a portrayal of its subject that includes "his own brush-work" and a frame of "his own design" (314–15). When he holds the lighted candle to the picture, he finds "his own name" as signature. Hallward's response anticipates Pater's review of the book, for the painter sees at first only "some foul parody" that he feels cannot be his work: "He had never done that. Still, it was his own picture" (315). As subjective and objective genitive, the phrase "his own picture" suggests both that the painting is one he has produced and that it portrays him.

Like Hallward in the schoolroom, Pater finds in Wilde's *Picture* "a satiric sketch," especially with regard to Lord Henry, in which the presentation of "Epicurean theory" "fails" because it abandons "the moral sense." While Pater finds Dorian "a beautiful creation," he calls him "a quite unsuccessful experiment in Epicureanism, in life as a fine art" ("Novel" 265). In his closing statement, having already mentioned the "Doppelgänger," or "double life," as central to Wilde's narrative, Pater is right to associate Wilde's work "with that of Edgar Poe, and with some good French work of the same kind, done, probably, in more or less conscious imitation of it" (266). His assertion implies that *Picture* is also an act of imitation, but of American and French sources, not a British original. Wilde, in fact, does not *imitate* a British writer; he *echoes* his writing. He does so for the same reason that the mythological figure Echo repeats already existing language: in order to say something quite different. Pater would rather not admit that his own writings are at least as important as Poe's in the texture of Wilde's novel and that they are the object of the satire. He also faces only indirectly how thoroughly Wilde's transformation of aesthetic theory is fused with anti-British attitudes. Pater makes the non-British character of the book and its author clear at the start and the end of the review. Besides closing by

drawing attention to foreign models rather than one that is much closer to home, Pater begins with comments that situate Wilde prejudicially as an Irish writer. The book putatively produced on non-British patterns by an Irish writer is, not surprisingly, filled with anti-British sentiments. Wilde has turned the critical direction of the Gothic inward, toward England and toward art as an English writer presents it.

At the start of the review, by means of irony and implication, Pater comes close to responding directly in kind to the book's national antagonism, closer than he ever comes to articulating openly his individual antagonism about the transforming of his own work. He may well have sensed that Wilde's skepticism about the British and about Pater's aestheticism were not separable. Misrepresenting or misunderstanding Wilde's emphatic differences from Matthew Arnold, which are as strong as his differences from Pater's aestheticism, Pater suggests that Wilde "carries on, more perhaps than any other writer, the brilliant critical work of Matthew Arnold" ("Novel" 263). Because Pater's own critical directions include significant disagreements with Arnold, by aligning Wilde with Arnold, he distances the younger writer from himself. He would have been intent on doing that in order to separate his own version of aestheticism from the dark version Wilde attributes to him by implication in the novel. Pater describes the ostensible carrying forward of Arnold as "startling" Wilde's "'countrymen.'" By putting "countrymen" in quotation marks, Pater implies ambiguously that, by following in the footsteps of an English critic who had written about the inevitable, necessary "fusion of all the inhabitants of these islands into one homogeneous, English-speaking whole" (Arnold, "On" 296), Wilde surprises his adoptive countrymen, the British, whose countryman he is not, and that he surprises his real countrymen, the Irish, from whom he must have estranged himself by his switching of allegiance.[8] Pater's antagonism toward his younger contemporary is clear in the review's first two sentences. He suggests that Wilde is "an excellent talker," presumably like all the other voluble Irish, whose work relies on the paradox that written dialogue presents itself as spoken. That paradox participates, according to Pater, in a "crudity" that is acceptable only because of what he terms, drawing on another cliché about the Irish, Wilde's "genial, laughter-loving sense of life and its enjoyable intercourse" ("Novel" 263). Under attack, Pater reacts prejudicially to a work by an Irish author who echoes negatively

Pater's own writing as part of its presentation of British society's hypocrisy. Although Pater might be willing to admit some of the ills of British society, he cannot do so in a way that implicates himself. Hallward recognizes when he holds "the light up again to the canvas" that "[i]t was from within, apparently, that the foulness and horror had come" (*Picture* 316). Although Wilde's character locates the source of the horror inside, the major British proponent of aestheticism turns away from the implication. Pater also writes about something within emerging to the surface when he describes the Mona Lisa in a passage that Wilde takes as his antithetical model: "It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh [. . .] " (*Renaissance* 80).

When Pater comments on the Doppelgänger in the novel as the experience "not of two *persons*, in this case, but of the man and his portrait" ("Novel" 266) he points toward but does not describe the novel's complex antirealistic structure of doublings.[9] Rather than presenting the book's alternative to realism in its combination of antirealistic and realistic detail, Pater praises and blames the realistic elements as an "intrusion of real life" that, because it is "managed, of course, cleverly enough," "should make his books popular" (264). Pater damns by faint praise when he suggests that Wilde's writing is cleverly crude enough to attract a crowd. In fact, the combination of realistic and antirealistic elements is a pervasive stylistic sign of the novel's dual quality. The doubling structure of the narrative and the narration implicates the reader of *Picture*, including the reviewer of the book, as the counterpart of the picture's viewer. Instead of bringing out the book's complexity, relying on the hierarchical presuppositions of evolutionary thinking about culture, Pater criticizes Wilde for moving away from a "true Epicureanism" toward something "less complex," and presumably less valuable (264). The narrative's intricate doublings, which derive not only from Poe but from Pater's comments on the Mona Lisa, include a multitude of parallels that anticipate a related complexity in *Dracula*. Because the parallels are so numerous and sometimes involve apparent reversals of position, as is often the case in the modern Gothic, the clear distinction between victim and perpetrator, innocent and guilty, blurs, especially when they change roles. As with the doublings of *Dracula*, the reader is invited to feel implicated.

Central to the novel's structure is the doubling not only of person and painting that Pater mentions but also of picture and book, both the

book within the narrative that Lord Henry gives Dorian, and the book we read that is also a *Picture*. The doublings include Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton as fraternal collaborators in the production of the painting and as doubles of different kinds for Dorian himself. Hallward and Wotton split up the dual role that Leonardo da Vinci fills as the quintessential artist-scientist. As a detached experimenter with human lives, Wotton is an avatar of Victor Frankenstein, who produces an ugly, destructive double of himself. There is, as well, the parallel between Dorian Gray and Sybil Vane, as attractive young people to whom unpleasant, destructive revelations are made. Complicating that parallel is the fact that Dorian stands in relation to Sybil as Lord Henry does to him as the revealer of something harsh and damaging. Dorian also stands eventually in the same relation to Basil, whom he destroys, as he has already destroyed Sybil. At the end, he stands in that same destructive relation to himself. Although Dorian prevents Basil from ripping up the painting with a knife near the end of chapter 2, he ultimately stabs the painter, who says he has revealed himself in the painting, and he pursues Hallward's intention from chapter 2 by trying to stab the painting in the book's final chapter and thereby stabbing its subject. This is ekphrasis with a vengeance and the revenge of the ekphrastic object, which strikes out at the artist and viewer, who wish also to strike it.[10] The roles in revolution become indistinguishable.

So many doublings and shifts of position undermine the possibility of reading the book as realistic, that is, as containing primarily intelligible patterns and answers rather than enigmas that cannot be readily resolved. There is no ultimately controlling perspective based on a geometry of narrative relations that allows us to find a stable, resolving point of vantage. In this narrative garden of forking paths, there appears to be a virus that replicates itself in double, antithetical forms within a maze that leads us not to an exit but to an impasse. The narrative oscillations and echoes arising from and as multiple parallels, reversals, and blurrings are modernist in character, but important details identify the writings of Pater as one of their origins. The brushstrokes and the frame are his. As Wilde says in his "Preface," "[I]t is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors" (*Picture* 139). And as he suggests in another epigram, the reader as Caliban who sees his face in the mirror of art is likely to be enraged or, like Dorian, driven mad. These epigrams pertain to Pater as an inevitable early reader of the novel and to us.

Wilde against Pater: Echo against Narcissus

As I have already suggested, Wilde neither imitates nor follows Pater in his aesthetic Gothic narrative. Instead, he echoes him as a way to evoke, refuse, and transform what he finds in the earlier writer. This is the work of Echo, whose story is bound up with that of Narcissus. In *Picture*, Wilde provides an early example of what T. S. Eliot called "the mythical method," a defining element of modernism that Eliot locates in James Joyce's *Ulysses* and earlier in some of William Butler Yeats's poems.[11] In fact, the first examples of the mythical method antedate considerably the examples that Eliot gives. As early as Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), we find a long narrative set in recent times that is constructed around extended mythic and literary parallels. Wilde also constructs his narrative around a myth, that of Echo and Narcissus. At first it might seem that Narcissus is the primary mythic figure in *Picture* and that the resulting narrative is not comparable in its mythic dimension to either *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* or *Ulysses*, because the myths surrounding Daedalus and Odysseus are more various and extended than that of Narcissus. But, in fact, Echo and Narcissus, however different from each other, are counterparts, whose stories constitute a single compound myth. Echo as well as Narcissus plays a continuing role in Wilde's novel because of the style's echoic character. By echoing Pater's writings frequently and strategically, Wilde projects the story of a contemporary Narcissus as one truth about Paterian aestheticism. He echoes Pater not in order to agree with the older British writer's views but to present them darkly, in shades of gray, as at base contradictory in destructive and self-destructive ways.

Wilde begins his novel by evoking Pater's aestheticism through a series of statements about beauty and through allusions to the best-known passages of Pater's writing: the "Conclusion" of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873)[12] and the description of Mona Lisa from the essay on Leonardo da Vinci in that volume. The first epigram in the "Preface," which asserts that "[t]he artist is the creator of beautiful things" (*Picture* 138), is followed in the remaining epigrams by numerous references to "beauty," "beautiful things," and "beautiful meanings." As the reader soon discovers, the narrative is permeated by the aesthetic, since it concerns throughout the desire to create, experience, possess or destroy beauty. Almost immediately, in the second paragraph of chapter 1, we

learn that Lord Henry Wotton sees, along with "the fantastic shadows of birds in flight," laburnum blossoms "whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs" (140). On the one hand, the branches are personified as undergoing an ecstatic experience in which they can hardly endure the deep impression that the blossoms, which they have yielded, or borne, make on them. But their experience is not unalloyed, for it is also the bearing, or carrying, not of a joy but of a heavy, awkward "burden" that can hardly be sustained. Further, the experience includes the play of light and dark in the "fantastic shadows" of something "in flight," either merely flying or trying to escape.

The passage is of particular note because it contains the first instances of personification (branches that feel; bees "shouldering their way" through grass) in a narrative that includes centrally the terrifying coming-to-life of something inanimate. The crossing of the boundaries between human, animal, and insect in the rhetorical figures of the book's second paragraph anticipates what eventually becomes a matter of animation involving creating and destroying life and a matter of the limits defining the human and civilization. Wilde has merged the aesthetic with issues that regularly arise in Gothic writing, issues that are anthropological, aesthetic, and scientific: the creation of the new and the character of the human. Later in chapter 1, when Hallward tells his friend Lord Henry Wotton about his first encounter with Dorian Gray, he indicates his agreement with something Wotton had told him about the difference between "savages" and "being civilized." The distinction is superficial, since everything depends on appearances: "With an evening coat and a white tie, as you told me once, anybody, even a stock-broker, can gain a reputation for being civilized" (145). Harry had gone out for the evening in public to help prove that "poor artists [. . .] are not savages." They may not be, but in Basil's case, which asks to be taken as representative, the artist contributes to an ostensibly civilized process of creating art that turns out to unleash a destructive, self-destructive savagery antithetical to the principles of civilization itself. In a typically modern transformation of Gothic narrative, the threat in Wilde's novel comes from within culture and within British society, not from foreigners who can be treated as savages. As an Irish writer, Wilde would have been particularly aware of the distinctions the British tended to draw between themselves and ostensibly less civilized racial and national groups who might in some way pose a crude threat, Calibanlike, to British aspirations and identity.

The passage about laburnum is also notable because it initiates three kinds of echoing within the style of the novel. One occurs as language that literally echoes: "blossoms [. . .] laburnum [. . .] branches [. . .] bear [. . .] burden [. . .] beauty [. . .] birds" and "flame-like [. . .] fantastic [. . .] flight flitted" (140). The echoic quality of the prose finds one origin in the stories of Poe, the most echoic stylist among earlier prominent figures in the Gothic tradition. In "The Fall of the House of Usher," for example, the opening sentence begins "*Du*ring the whole of a *du*ll, *da*rk, and soundless *da*y [. . .] (95). And the title of the story, "*Will*iam *Wil*son," about a man with a double, which provides one precursor for *Picture*, includes an echoic doubling. The second form of echo involves repetition of the passage's language or similar language later in the book. Burdens, flames, and shadows occur regularly, often in passages that are significant and significantly related. The phrase "fantastic shadows," with its evocation of the visual impression of chiaroscuro, returns in a way that punctuates at times the stages in Dorian's destructive attempt to hide and to experience who he is. In the opening of chapter 13, when Dorian and Hallward mount the stairs toward the schoolroom in which Dorian will murder the artist, the "lamp cast fantastic shadows" (313). Later, when Dorian visits opium dens in an attempt to forget, he sees mostly dark windows, "but now and then fantastic shadows were silhouetted against some lamp-lit blind": "They moved like monstrous marionettes, and made gestures like live things" (348–49). These shadows are cast neither by birds nor marionettes but by human beings. The implications of personification have been reversed from the book's opening, since now the human is marked by the loss of consciousness that is memory in Dorian's will to forget and by a monstrous loss of agency.

The word "burden" also occurs at important moments, sometimes in combination with the word "shadow," which becomes associated with the painting as Dorian's double. In chapter 2, when Dorian first looks carefully at the completed painting and appears "with cheeks flushed," "as if he had recognized himself for the first time," he is described as "gazing at the shadow of his own loveliness" (167). The portrait is a kind of mirror that contains not his image with inflamed cheeks but a dark version, a shadow. In chapter 7, Lord Henry sees something similar in Sybil when a "faint blush, like the shadow of a rose in a mirror of silver, came to her cheeks" (231). Toward the end of chapter 8, Dorian thinks

that the "portrait was to bear the burden of his shame" (258). After having "lost control" "almost entirely" (282) in chapter 9, Dorian oscillates in a darkly narcissistic way between looking at the portrait with "loathing" and gazing "with secret pleasure, at the misshapen shadow that had to bear the burden that should have been his own" (298).

"Burden" also reappears at very nearly the novel's end, when Dorian castigates Lord Henry for being willing to "sacrifice anybody [. . .] for the sake of an epigram" (370). When Lord Henry responds that "[t]he world goes to the altar of its own accord," his language suggests most obviously a sacrificial altar, but considering Dorian's immediate confession that he has forgotten how to love and wishes he could recover his passion, the word "altar" resonates with the notion of marriage in addition to and together with that of the pain of a sacrifice. In his brief confession, Dorian says that his "own personality has become a burden" and admits his own narcissism: "I am too much concentrated on myself" (370). Lord Henry's similar preoccupation with himself results, as we learn in the next chapter, in his "divorce-case" (377), because his wife has left him for another man. When Dorian meets Victoria, Lord Henry's wife, early in the novel, Lord Henry makes cynical fun of marriage and women as he commands Dorian: "Never marry at all." Dorian readily agrees because he is "putting into practice" "one of your aphorisms," "as I do everything that you say" (191). That latter statement means both that he puts all of Lord Henry's aphorisms into practice and that he obeys Lord Henry's commands, like a slave. The phrasing echoes the marriage ceremony's vow, "I do," but not to signify the union of partners in a marriage. Shortly before this exchange, Victoria Wotton has commented that Dorian has just repeated "'one of Harry's views'" and that she always hears "'Harry's views from his friends'" (190). The details of these various scenes involving marriage and self-concern bear on the relation of Wilde's narrative to the story of Echo and Narcissus and to the Gothic tradition.

Gothic narratives regularly include attitudes and situations that challenge the institution of marriage. In this regard, they provide a dark reflection of the concern with domesticity in the history of the realistic novel. Wilde's Gothic narrative is no exception in its presentation of attitudes that make meaningful marriage impossible. Among Wilde's modern innovations is the fusing of a Gothic emphasis on impediments to marriage with the myth of Narcissus, which includes centrally the

refusal of Echo's advances. Narcissus would rather not be distracted from gazing at himself. Wilde merges aesthetic narcissism with the Gothic tradition's representation of marriage's difficulty or even impossibility. Further, Victoria Wotton's comment about Dorian's parroting of Lord Henry's views reveals Dorian to be an empty echo, one without a mind of its own. Instead of repeating in order to transform or even counter meaningfully someone else's words, Dorian is the slave of another's attitudes. Echo as a mythological figure represents the possibility of choice under difficult circumstances. Dorian's behavior and his thinking are, by contrast, chosen for him, just as he chooses and manipulates the actions and thoughts of others.

The third type of echo initiated by the laburnum passage is the repeating of words from Pater's aesthetic writings. Throughout his career, Wilde had a reputation for using other writers' language in ways that drew comments amounting to the charge of plagiarism.[13] In that respect, his writing anticipates Eliot's later sometimes unacknowledged borrowings, which challenge Romantic views of the artist's originality. In the case of both writers, their modernist, anti-Romantic borrowings are intentional, motivated, and, because of the new implications of the repeated language, creative. In the laburnum passage, the compound "flame-like" in association with la*burn*um and with birds who are escaping or departing creates a clear echoic link to the "Conclusion" of *The Renaissance*. There Pater closes his first paragraph with the oddly phrased, memorable statement that "[t]his at least of flame-like our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment of forces parting sooner or later on their ways" (150). Fire, so prominent in Pater's "Conclusion" in both "flame-like" and "to burn always with this hard, gem-like flame" (152), appears in Dorian's retrospective insight about his boyhood: "Life suddenly became fiery-coloured to him. It seemed to him that he had been walking in fire. Why had he not known it?" (*Picture* 160). Later, Lord Henry thinks in an apparently positive way about "his friend's young fiery-coloured life" (206). But Dorian's flame-like experiences as a child and later are painful or even infernal, not ecstatic in the way that Pater's "Conclusion" suggests. Wilde's references to flame evoke Pater, but the implications have been reversed. In *Picture*, it is not the flame of art and passion that we choose as our future. Instead, flames of an unpleasant kind have already made us what we are. The flame and its

passionate intensity are destructive in Wilde, rather than being the salvation from destruction or a consolation for it.

Dorian's fiery experience also connects him to Narcissus. Lord Henry has already identified Dorian with Narcissus in chapter 1, when he contrasts Basil with Dorian and intellect with beauty: "'Why my dear Basil, he is a Narcissus, and you—well, of course you have an intellectual expression, and all that. But beauty, real beauty, ends where an intellectual expression begins. Intellect is in itself a mode of exaggeration, and destroys the harmony of any face"' (142). Like separating creativity from criticism, which Wilde addresses in "The Critic as Artist" (*Artist* 340–408), severing the tie between beauty and thinking is a mistake that Wilde does not let stand. In Ovid, Narcissus is *inflamed* by his own beauty, which leads him to self-destruction.[14] In Wilde, as later in part III of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the modern Narcissus is grotesque: a young man with a physically and morally ugly double in Wilde; a young man with an inflamed, carbuncular face who inhabits an infernal contemporary city in Eliot. When Wilde's Narcissus looks into the mirror of his painting, coproduced by his older friends, Basil and Henry, he becomes fascinated first with his own beauty but then with a growing ugliness that he recognizes as also himself.

Mona Lisa as Dark Narcissus/Narcissus as Medusa

The details of Wilde's narration imply that the intense experience central to Paterian aestheticism evoked in the "Conclusion" of *The Renaissance* is narcissistic in character. Wilde established the connection to Pater primarily, as Ellmann points out, by having Lord Henry speak "many of Pater's sentences," or, at least, many sentences that echo Pater. But Lord Henry speaks many of Wilde's sentences as well, and some of those Wildean sentences mimic Pater in their phrasing. Since at Oxford Wilde "adopted 'flamelike' as one of his favorite adjectives" (Ellmann 48), the sentence about the laburnum echoes ambiguously both Pater and Wilde. Although we may be inclined to judge Lord Henry more harshly than the novelist because of his evident misogyny and his general moral blindness, Lord Henry's wit is often in the mode of Oscar Wilde. There is a critical portrait of the artist in progress, as well as a critical portrayal of someone else. In one of his letters, Wilde himself points to his suffused

identification with all the major characters in the novel: "I am so glad you like that strange coloured book of mine: it contains much of me in it. Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps" (*Letters* 352). Though Wilde holds Pater's views up for inspection, even mockingly, he does not do so in a self-congratulatory, distanced, or morally superior way. By blurring the distinction between the observer and the subject being observed, Wilde participates in the book's logic of doubling and reversal. If he did not, he would risk adopting a morally superior stance that occupies a position outside the process he presents. The dynamics of his literary chiaroscuro prevent his becoming merely a spectator of the sort that Lord Henry seems to think he is. The critical observer's uncertainty extends to the observer's perspective. Otherwise, that perspective can be narcissistic and blind to its own tendencies, in the way that Lord Henry's self-delusion is, even late in the novel. In the penultimate chapter, despite abundant evidence of Dorian's crimes, Lord Henry refuses to see his dark side, calling him "the young Apollo" (383).

Wilde constructs his narrative around an experience that resembles not only the one Narcissus undergoes but the one that Pater mentions in the final paragraph of the "Conclusion" (153) when he turns to the "awakening" in Jean Jacques Rousseau of "the literary sense" that is described in Rousseau's *Confessions*. Pater devotes part of the paragraph to relating how fear of death inspired Rousseau to "make as much as possible of the interval that remained." He concludes that "our one chance lies in expanding the interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time." Wilde models Dorian Gray's recognition, as he is sitting for his portrait, and the direction that his life takes on Pater's rendition of Rousseau's life story, but Wilde's version is unremittingly dark by comparison with Pater's. Even the name "Dorian Gray" captures the darkening of what should be a bright beauty, since "Dorian" obviously suggests a Greek form, while "Gray" as a color stands in contrast to Apollonian brightness. In writing about the Renaissance, which involves centrally a revival of classical art and thinking, Pater aligns himself with a cultural heritage that includes the "Dorian," but not with tones of gray, understood as either neutral or dark. As Linda Dowling argues, because of the work of Karl Otfried Müller as transmitted by Benjamin Jowett at Oxford, in the latter part of the nineteenth century,

the surname "Dorian" also carried suggestions of pederasty deriving from Greek culture.[15] "Dorian Gray" is oxymoronic in a Paterian context. "Gray" blunts the force and implications of "Dorian," and it does so without suggesting vividly a fruitful merger of opposites of the sort that we find in Joyce's revisionary evocation and extension of Pater at the conclusion of part four of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In that climactic portion of Joyce's narrative, whose title echoes the title and the tale of Wilde's book as "a portrait of the artist" (*Picture* 144), Stephen Dedalus, who like Dorian has a Greek name, sees a rim of the moon on the horizon as if stuck into the earth in a union of heaven and earth that is compared to a "silver hoop embedded in grey sand" (Joyce 173). The grayness of Dorian's story yields no such positive, generative mergers. Joyce's modernist mergings in *A Portrait* combine elements of a Paterian prose style with a myth about a creator and with realistic writing. Wilde's antecedent mergings in *The Picture* combine similar elements, though the myth concerns self-absorption, with the Gothic in a darkly modernist move away from aestheticism and late Romanticism, a move that echoes Pater but also exorcises him.

The echoing as exorcism proceeds through the combining of the light and the dark from Pater in a narrative of recognition and delusion structured around the myth of Narcissus. Rousseau's awakening through literature brings into the narrative an optimistic element from Pater's "Conclusion" that for Dorian is dark. The book that Harry gives him is poisonous. But the narrative is more the story of a painting than a book, though the book is important, as it is in both of Pater's long narratives, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) and *Gaston de Latour* (1896).[16] When Lord Henry calls the portrait "the finest portrait of modern times" (166), the comparison to the Mona Lisa is inevitable. The work is a new Mona Lisa. The story of the picture's creation, however, fuses details from Pater's description of the Mona Lisa with Rousseau's moment of recognition that has become the experience of Narcissus recognizing his own beauty. Pater suggests that Mona Lisa's sitting for her portrait was possible only through an accompaniment: "by artificial means, the presence of mimes and flute-players, that subtle expression was protracted on the face" (*Renaissance* 79). As Lord Henry talks to Dorian, Hallward realizes that "a look had come into the lad's face that he had never seen there before" (159). Dorian compares the effect to that of music but realizes that it

was created by words (160), as if a literary text were being performed. The recognition that this male version of Mona Lisa experiences is clearly that of Narcissus: "A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time. [. . .] The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation" (167). But the recognition is equally of something dark: "There was a look of fear in his eyes, such as people have when they are suddenly awakened" (162). Although that fear comes from Dorian's recognition of his mortality, for which Rousseau found compensation in words, it comes as well from recognizing something monstrously threatening. When Pater looks at the Mona Lisa, he sees not unalloyed beauty but "the unfathomable smile, always with a touch of something sinister in it, which plays over all Leonardo's work" (*Renaissance* 79). This is a beauty that the Greeks would "be troubled by," a "beauty into which the soul with all its maladies has passed." Finally, this is a beauty inseparable from monstrosity: "like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave" (80).

Late in the novel, Wilde reiterates the connection to the Mona Lisa as Pater presents the painting. Just after calling Dorian "Apollo," Lord Henry says to him that "it has all been to you no more than the sound of music"; he goes on that "[l]ife is a question of nerves, and fibres and slowly built-up cells" (383). As Pater says of Mona Lisa, her vampiric experience "has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes." In the same passage, he claims that "it is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions" (*Renaissance* 80). The darkness is already there, within the painting, waiting for the sitter, Narcissus-like, to behold, to fear, and to desire. Like Patrick Bateman, who videotapes some of his crimes in *American Psycho*, Dorian imagines that "there would be real pleasure in watching it" (259). Later, we hear more about Dorian's desires in passages that echo Pater on the Mona Lisa but with reversed valences. The vocabulary of "cell" and "thought" is still there, but ugliness has displaced beauty. We learn that a single "thought" "crept" from "cell to cell of his brain": "Ugliness that had once been hateful to him because it made things real, became dear to him now for that very reason. Ugliness was the one reality" (349). But Dorian is wrong. There are always two realities, and they are perpetually turning into each other.

The novel is replete with evocations of Narcissus, from Lord Henry's early statement to Basil (142) to Dorian's gazing in the final chapter into

the "curiously carved mirror" (387), given to him by Lord Henry, just before he breaks it. In that last chapter, however, the mythic references undergo a metamorphosis when Dorian thinks of the mirror as a "polished shield" immediately prior to discarding it. He has earlier thought of the picture itself as a mirror or has compared himself in a mirror to his deformed image in the undead portrait. At the end of chapter 8, it is "the most magical of mirrors" (259) for observing secrets. Two chapters later, the double image of his laughing face in the mirror and "the evil and aging face" of the portrait pleases him: "The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken his sense of pleasure" (282). In the ultimate chapter, Dorian is not pleased with the mirror or the painting. The myth of Echo and Narcissus has now merged with that of Medusa and Perseus, whose protection includes a polished shield. Dorian as Narcissus-become-Perseus is about to look at himself-as-Medusa without benefit of his shield and with a knife rather than a sword in hand. The introduction of Medusa here again takes up a prominent detail from Pater's writing and puts it to new use. In the Leonardo essay, Pater devotes an entire vivid paragraph to Leonardo's painting of *Medusa* rendered "as the head of a corpse" (*Renaissance* 68). The paragraph culminates the part of the essay in which Pater evokes the "interfusion of the extremes of beauty and terror" in "grotesques" (67). He says of the painting that "the fascination of corruption penetrates in every touch its exquisitely finished beauty" (68). In *Marius the Epicurean*, Pater uses the image again prominently three times. In the last, most memorable instance, in the closing of chapter 21, he merges Medusa implicitly with Narcissus: "Might this new vision, like the malignant beauty of pagan Medusa, be exclusive of any admiring gaze upon anything but itself?" (*Marius* 202).

Dorian is about to experience the effect of Medusa, which is himself, but, in fact, he has already had this experience. The morning after he murders Basil, while he waits impatiently for Alan Campbell to arrive, Dorian turns his eyes inward, where his "imagination, made grotesque by terror" has become merely a "puppet," the inanimate but dancing image of a person. Time dies and drags "a hideous future from its grave," which it shows to him: "He stared at it. Its very horror made him stone" (327). Like Pater's vampiric Mona Lisa, he has "learned the secrets of the grave" (*Renaissance* 80). Like Medusa, the terrifyingly attractive recognition of his mortality turns him to stone; it dehumanizes him by robbing

him of his ordinary human passion. Long before the book's final chapter, Dorian has become undead, still living but not alive as a human being. When Dorian looks at the painting a final time after breaking the mirror, he understands that the Medusa-like truth about the painting is the truth about him. The enraged self-destruction that follows is the demise of Medusa were she able to look at her own poisonous self or, Perseus-like, to use a sharp weapon against herself. On the one hand, the ending restores order and sanity to the narrative by apparently re-establishing the difference between art and life, between the inanimate and the living, between the beautiful and the ugly. But within the seemingly restored realism, a myth darker than the story of Narcissus that involves a mirror has fused with the tale of Narcissus and taken up residence within the ostensible realism, from which it cannot be separated.

If the vampire can live within Mona Lisa, the death of Dorian Gray can be the death of Medusa. In addition to this odd ultimate brushstroke in the novel's mythic surface, which resists explanation, other details of the ending remain enigmatic. We still do not know where we stand in relation to the darkness and the light. There is no vanishing point and no orienting perspective. The beautiful creature became a destroyer who eventually destroyed himself. But how are we to understand and name the avenger's act of revenge against himself, a dark Narcissus's divorce from himself, a suicidal Medusa's look at herself that is also a suicidal Perseus's gazing at Medusa without a shield: as a fit of madness? as a mistake? as an action consciously intended? All we know is that art and life, the beautiful and the ugly, the light and the dark, those counterparts whose relations have been unstable throughout the narrative, have changed places once again. For readers, there is no more consolation, resolution, or explanation in the ending than Basil Hallward experiences when he gazes at "his own picture" and realizes that "It was from within, apparently, that the foulness and the horror had come" (316).

Notes

I wish to thank Dora Goss of the Boston University Department of English for her detailed response to a late version of this essay.

1. "I am thirsty for thy beauty" (80; my translation). Salomé speaks these words to the severed head of John the Baptist near the end of the play

just before Herod orders her to be killed. I cite from the French version of the play, originally published in Paris in 1893, as the only published version indisputably of Wilde's sole authorship. In *The Writings of Oscar Wilde*, Isobel Murray describes briefly the publication history of the play in her statement concerning the text that accompanies her reprinting of the English translation published in Wilde's lifetime (614).

2. Many critics who write about Wilde or Pater touch on the relation their works bear to each other. Critics who deal at some length with Wilde and Pater include Julia Prewitt Brown, Denis Donoghue, Richard Ellmann, and Christopher S. Nassaar. Nassaar maintains that Pater's "*The Renaissance* casts a long, sinister shadow across *Picture*, and the entire novel seems to be structured with Pater's book as its focal point" (39). The conclusion that Nassaar draws, however, that Wilde saw art's exploration of evil as somehow separable from life needs more defense than he provides. Brown and Donoghue focus on Wilde's significant swerves from Pater concerning art (Brown) or on the less-than-amicable turn in their relations (Donoghue). Brown cites *Oscar Wilde's Oxford Notebooks* (14–17) as providing "a succinct summary of the major differences between Wilde and Pater" (115n4). In the preface to her study of Wilde, Brown gives the following overview: "Walter Pater's place in the particular intellectual history already alluded to here is relatively minor, and […] far less is said in the following pages about Pater's influence on Wilde than about Wilde's divergence from Pater. With attention to the philosophical significance of Wilde's career, this loosening of the long-established tie between Pater and Wilde constitutes the main revisionary thrust of this book" (xvii). See also Brown 3–4, 49, 59–60. In his main discussion of Wilde's relations with Pater in his biography of Pater, Donoghue maintains that "Pater never really liked Wilde" (81) and that "[t]he friendship […] virtually came to an end in the winter of 1891" (83). I find the argument for significant, defining differences between Wilde and Pater convincing. I pursue some of the differences as they emerge in specific texts in the present essay and in my essay on *Salomé*.

3. Lord Henry investigates Dorian's family background in chapter 3 (175–77), where we learn that it includes passion and violence, as well as class antagonism and a disregard of conventional behavior. Dorian's mother married a subaltern without financial resources, obviously against her father's will. As a consequence, her father, Lord Kelso, arranged to have the subaltern killed in a duel. Dorian's decision to store the portrait in the room set up for him by his grandfather to keep him out of the way after his mother's death suggests that the portrait's meaning emerges in part from the family's history.

4. In section 3 of *A Philosophical Inquiry,* "Obscurity," Burke states: "To make any thing very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread [. . .]" (54).

5. In the midst of reprinting Wilde's letters to editors responding to the antagonistic reviews of his novel, Rupert Hart-Davis includes a footnote that quotes the opening sentence of Pater's review as an example of "some of the most welcome praise," which "came later" (Wilde, *Letters* 270n1). Donald H. Eriksen refers to "Walter Pater's favorable review in the *Bookman*" (99). By contrast, Donoghue sees the praise in later portions of the review as Pater's being "generous" (85) after he had taken "the occasion to repudiate not only Lord Henry but his creator" (84).

6. Rupert Hart-Davis identifies and describes some of the negative reviews when he publishes Wilde's lengthy letters to the editors of the journals in *Letters* (257-72).

7. Ellmann points out that Wilde sent Pater a presentation copy of *Salomé* when it was published in French (374). But Denis Donoghue mentions that "[t]here is no evidence that Pater acknowledged the gift" (85).

8. Arnold expresses these sentiments in "On the Study of Celtic Literature" (291–386). In his use of the word "countrymen," Pater may well have been echoing Arnold's use of that word ("my own countrymen"; "Introduction" 391) to refer unambiguously to the English in his introduction to his study of Celtic literature (387–95).

9. See Chris Baldick's *In Frankenstein's Shadow* for a sketch of some of the book's significant doublings related to the one I provide but emphasizing monstrosity and the multiform character of identity rather than anti-realism and the implicating of the reader (148–152).

10. For studies of the ekphrastic tradition, see Krieger and Hollander.

11. Eliot uses the term in his review of Joyce's *Ulysses*, "Ulysses, Order, and Myth," originally published in *The Dial* (November, 1923).

12. The title of Pater's *Studies* later became *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. As is well known, Pater withdrew his "Conclusion" after the first edition but restored it in revised form for the third edition (1888) and subsequent editions. Donoghue describes the uproar over the "Conclusion" and the steps Pater took in response (48–67).

13. In the introduction to his study of Wilde, Peter Raby describes Wilde's habitual borrowings and the charge leveled against them (9).

14. In Book III of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, we find: "uror amore mei: flammas moveoque feroque" ("I am inflamed with love for myself: the flames I both fan and bear"; 463) and "sic attenuatus amore / liquitur et tecto paulatim carpitur igni" ("thus ravaged by his love, he melts away, and gradually he is devoured by that buried fire"; 489–90). I am grateful to Melanie Benson of the Boston University Department of English for drawing my attention to the flame imagery in Ovid's presentation of Narcissus and for her translation of the relevant phrases.

15. See especially Dowling 124–125, but also 74 and 79, where she comments on the influence of Müller's *Die Dorier: Geschicten hellnischer Stämme und Städte*.

16. Isobel Murray points out the importance of books to Pater's protagonists in her introduction to Wilde's novel (ix).

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