A SECRET HISTORY OF AESTHETICISM:

MAGIC-PORTRAIT FICTION, 1829-1929

By

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For
Carolyn

Female Aesthetes informed and strengthened my drive to revise a male-dominated canon. Deborah Manion encouraged me through her own research on ekphrastic portraits in Victorian and modernist fiction, and colleagues both near and far helped me identify new texts in a growing archive: R. J. Boutelle, Brittain Bright, Jessica DeCoux, Stephanie Higgs, Simon Morley, Dahlia Porter, Derrick Spires, and Rob Watson.

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INTRODUCTION: Resurrection of a Secret History

I. What is a Magic-Portrait Story?

In a classic late Victorian story, a male artist paints a masterful portrait of a beautiful young muse who inspires him. The process corrupts both the sitter and the artist, empowering only the spectators. At first, the sitter indulges in the seductions of beauty, sin, and artistic mastery. But by story's end, the model commits suicide, having served only the hedonism of a master and the production of a masterpiece. This story may seem familiar enough not to need summary: it reads like a synopsis of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). But, this tale was published two years earlier: it is a short story titled "The Adder" by the female aesthete known as Ouida (Marie Louise de la Ramée), who heavily influenced Wilde's fiction. "The Adder" is not an isolated source, but one of more than 160 stories I am identifying as part of the forgotten genre of magic-portrait fiction. My dissertation charts the history of this genre, which stretches from its seeds in Horace Walpole's gothic romance *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) to Virginia Woolf's reinvention of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in *Orlando: A Biography* (1928).

A magic-portrait story articulates aesthetic philosophy in a narrative about the social influence of a painted portrait, especially as that portrait fosters a male artist's self-development, or guarantees the death of the female muse who sits for her likeness. The genre is a hybrid form that depends on ekphrasis, or the verbal depiction of visual art objects, and is defined by the practices of translating images through words and of narrating aesthetic philosophy through the formal body of prose fiction. The magic-portrait story originates in late-eighteenth-century English and German fiction as a variant of the *Künstlerroman*, or artist's *Bildungsroman*, and most often takes the form of

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a short story or novella, rather than a novel.[1] Over the course of its long-nineteenth-century development, the genre coheres in its focus on the social life of a portrait, as it were, and this premise engenders dramas of self-development, degeneration, artistic mastery, sexual jealousy, and cultural critique. The trope of ekphrasis facilitates both narrative development and art criticism, conveyed in moments when characters—especially male painters—judge an image, when they speculate, pontificate, rationalize, eroticize, fear, or do and think any number of things in the act of making or viewing a painted portrait. The diverse plots made possible by the magic-portrait premise share a defining idea—that aesthetic influence *is* social influence, that art and the aesthetic wield a profound power to dictate the lives of individual human subjects.

In a typical magic-portrait story, a male artist paints the portrait of a beautiful woman whose life is endangered or sacrificed in service to his art and his personal development. In turn, the male artist gives voice to critical appraisals of his own or someone else's art. In Ouida's story "The Adder" an aristocratic and hedonistic painter named Claude Dorat romances a peasant girl named Veronica Venier. Dorat paints Veronica's portrait after she saves his life by killing a deadly snake about to bite him. Dorat immediately interprets his savior through the language and history of art: when he first lays eyes on her, he cries, "'Santa Barbara!'…for the woman who stood above him

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[1] This pattern holds true for magic-portrait fiction by Victorian aesthetes, making it a striking fact, given the short story's long history of didacticism and the tendency among aesthetes to expressly fight against didacticism. Wendell Harris makes the following observation in his study of English short fiction: "'Nearly all ancient tales, whether from Israel, India, Egypt, or the Middle East, were fundamentally didactic', writes A. J. Hansen, and T. O. Beachcroft reminds us that 'the idea that short stories ought to be nuggets of moral teaching, that they ought to have a moral motive, and that this is their true *raison d'être* is very deeply rooted'" (Wendell Harris, *British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: A Literary and Bibliographic Guide*, Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979, 31).

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resembled that picture which he loved, and which he had gazed on that morning for the hundredth time" (246). Later, having discoursed on Giorgione, Titian, and other Italian Renaissance masters, Dorat conceives Veronica as "His Barbara, his Europa," his "Desdemona," and his "Medea." He does so, however, only to cast her away, provoking her suicide. Ouida's story represents one of many late-Victorian critiques of the magic-portrait premise, whereby writers use the genre itself to challenge the misogynistic aesthetic ideology established throughout its early history. The practices Ouida critiques are those associated with the Aesthetic Movement in late-Victorian England, particularly the practice of aestheticizing human beings. The story of Veronica Venier's deadly portrait exemplifies the central themes of the genre: self-development or degeneration through aesthetic experience, and the troublesome role of sexual politics in the production and interpretation of art. These concerns shape all magic-portrait stories, whether they sanction or undermine the aestheticizing gaze.

I trace the turning points in the genre's development from its origins in German and English Romanticism, examined in Chapter One, to Oscar Wilde's explosive manipulation of the form in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The magic-portrait genre originates in late-eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy and fiction, a body of thought and art that shaped the prototypical *Künstlerromane* of E. T. A. Hoffmann, whose influential tales about master artists inspired the first wave of magic-portrait fiction. These early works include the first magic-portrait story, "Colonna the Painter: A Tale of Italy and the Arts" (1829), by forgotten English author Joseph Hardman and tales published between 1830 and 1847 by Honoré de Balzac, Nikolai Gogol, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Gérard de Nerval, Novalis, and J. Sheridan Le Fanu.

Influenced by this magic-portrait strain of European Romanticism, Dante Gabriel Rossetti used the genre to articulate the aesthetic philosophy of the newly founded Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in his magic-portrait story, "Hand and Soul" (1850). Rossetti's story helped usher the genre into the nascent realm of Victorian aesthetic culture, a maneuver followed shortly thereafter by Ouida, who published her first magic-portrait stories in the early 1860s. In the late 1870s and 1880s, Walter Pater adapted the genre into what he called the "Imaginary Portrait" and his protégés Vernon Lee and Oscar Wilde performed their own innovative, countercultural magic-portrait adaptations in Lee's feminist *Hauntings* (1890) and Wilde's homoerotically charged "The Portrait of Mr W H" (1889) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The dozens of other magic-portrait tales and novels published in England during the 1880s and 1890s explore the relationship between art and life and the gendered power dynamics underpinning the privileged or embattled artistic subject. The *fin-de-siècle* flood of magic-portrait fiction encompasses satirical critiques of aestheticism, feminist revisions of the magic-portrait premise, and dramatic plots nearly absent the genre's art-critical component, yet immersed in contemporary concerns about sexual politics and gender identity understood through the social universe of art.

In naming this genre, I am revising the term Kerry Powell uses to refer to the preponderance of a certain kind of literary portrait in England at the *fin de siècle*: the "magic picture," which he variously calls a "motif," a "tradition," or merely part of the "paraphernalia" of the Gothic. While insightfully identifying the phenomenon of "magic-picture mania" at the turn of the twentieth century, Powell does not consider the form's

existence as a distinct genre, or its significance outside of the gothic tradition.[2] The

history of the genre as such suggests that the painted "portrait" (as opposed to "picture")

constitutes a defining feature of the form, and that the word "magic" most accurately

signifies the alternately empowering or perilous indefinability of art, conveyed through

the incalculable power of a painted portrait to determine characters' social and sexual

lives. The portrait's magic influence can take many different forms: it can be mesmeric,

prophetic, psychosexual, aesthetic, commercial, and so on. Strikingly, however, given the

rise of new visual technology during the late nineteenth century, the portrait's power is

rarely of a technological kind. Very few stories revolve around photographic or otherwise

mechanically reproducible images.[3] The genre's heavy favoritism for painting over

photography is symptomatic of its intellectual and formal ties to European Romanticism

and Victorian neo-Romanticism: whereas photography was associated with Realism,

painting was associated with Romanticism. The former enabled information-gathering

and naturalistic detail, while the latter enabled lyricism, literary experimentation, and the

authoritative imagination of characters who could double as art critics.

If cobbled together, existing scholarship about magic-portrait fiction by Kerry

Powell and Theodore Ziolkowski names approximately 60 novels and short stories.[4]

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[2] Powell argues that late-Victorian magic-portrait stories "rely on the ritual incantations of Gothic tradition for much of their effect" (Powell, "Hawthorne, Arlo Bates, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" in *Papers on Language and Literature* No. 16, 1980, 406).

[3] A few writers strategically deploy photographs, a significant instance of which is Amy Levy's *The Romance of A Shop* (1888), a New Woman magic-portrait novel reviewed by Wilde.

[4] The canon of magic-portrait fiction presented in this dissertation expands on the titles named in Ziolkowski's *Disenchanted Images: A Literary Iconology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977) and in Powell's two articles, "Tom, Dick, and Dorian Gray: Magic-Picture Mania in Late Victorian Fiction" (*Philological Quarterly* 62:2, Spring 1983) and "Hawthorne, Arlo Bates, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (*Papers on Language and Literature* No. 16, 1980).

Using new archival research, this dissertation shows that the number of magic-portrait stories published between 1829 and 1929 amounts to over 160 novels and tales—and counting.[5] Listed chronologically in the Appendix, these works appeared across highbrow and middlebrow periodicals, including *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Chambers's Journal*, *Bentley's Miscellany*, *Sharpe's London*, *Reynolds's Miscellany*, *Once a Week*, *The London Reader*, *Belgravia*, *Temple Bar*, *Bow Bells*, *The Argosy*, *Harper's New Monthly*, *Lippincott's*, and *Macmillan's*, among others. About fifty percent of these novels and tales appeared during the 1880s and 1890s, and thus, during the heyday of the Aesthetic Movement in England. They were published by aesthetes and non-aesthetes alike, by both men and women, and by both well-known and obscure authors.

A principal barrier to identifying the genre's existence, despite the numerous canonical works that punctuate its genealogy, derives from the gendered categories of "masculine" philosophy and "feminine" fiction constructed during the turn of the twentieth century. Whereas philosophy represents a conventionally masculinized discipline, the English novel bears a late-Victorian history of degradation as an effeminate form. As Kirsten MacLeod, Talia Schaffer, and others have shown, self-consciously avant-garde artists of the 1880s and 1890s—aesthetes and Decadents among them—positioned themselves against the middle-class novelist, particularly the popular female novelist, who represented an increasingly formidable commercial threat.[6] In

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[5] Please note that this number is approximate, owing to the fact that in June 2011 I had to stop accounting for the stories I was finding so that I could start writing my dissertation! Also, my searches were limited to the British Library's resources and the British Periodicals database, meaning that there remains much research to be done in European and American periodicals.

[6] In *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the* Fin de Siècle (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Kirsten MacLeod enumerates the ways Decadent writers constructed "a social identity in opposition to the dominant middle-class ideology" (39) embodied in the

Sexing the Mind Evelyne Ender summarizes *fin-de-siècle* shifts in the gendered meaning

and authority of fiction when discussing Henry James's 1886 novel, *The Bostonians*:

"Ransom's voice is haunted by a ghostly presence that speaks a writer's anxiety in an age

when women are strong and men are feminized, and where the passivity associated with

writing and the large 'mob of scribbling women' makes of literature a feminized

profession."[7] That the newfound effeminacy of the novel and novel writing emerged in

contradistinction to the implicitly masculine art of philosophy is borne out by such

studies as Richard Stang's *The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850-1870*, which

challenges misconceptions about the existence of theory in and about mid-nineteenth-

century British fiction.[8] In the wake of the form's degradation during the 1880s and

1890s, a litany of twentieth-century critics, according to Stang, established a lasting

figure of the female novelist who catered to a mass-cultural audience: "To the Decadents and
others among the male-dominated élite, women writers' crimes against art were two-fold: they
degraded art by writing commercial fiction for money and by approaching literature with the
missionary zeal of the social reformer or moralist rather than as an aesthetic purist. The male élite
also generally felt that women writers and their populist forms of fiction dominated the literary
field" (44).

[7] Evelyne Ender, *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Hysteria* (Ithaca: Cornell
University Press, 1995), 126. Basil Ransom famously laments that "'the whole generation is
womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical,
chattering, canting age'" (Quoted in Ender 126). A 1907 article titled "The Fleshly School of
Fiction" by best-selling novelist (and author of the 1897 magic-portrait novel *Ziska*) Marie
Corelli, who is responding here to an article of the same name, gives a sense of the attention
focused on the "'degradation'" of fiction by women writers, as well as a sense of the epicentral
role novels and novel writing played in this era of anxiety about authorship (Correlli 77). See
Corelli, "The Fleshly School of Fiction" (*The Bookman* 33, Nov. 1907: 77-8). The title of the
original article (by "A Man of Letters") alludes to Robert Buchanan's notorious attack on D. G.
Rossetti in "The Fleshly School of Poetry" (1871).

[8] In *The Theory of the Novel in England, 1850-1870* (New York: Columbia UP, 1959), Stang
challenges "[o]ne of the most persistent clichés in the history of modern literature" according to
which the English novel functioned as a source of amusement or moral instruction until it was
finally taken seriously and properly theorized by Henry James in the 1880s (ix-xi). Stang's
research exposes a large body of critical theory about the novel in mid-Victorian essays and
reviews, while also revealing a misconception about the novel's theoretical rigor partially enacted
by the very critics who erroneously appoint James as the form's first Anglo-American theorist.

evaluation of the Victorian novel and its first interpreters as virtually antithetical to critical thought until Henry James came along. Together, the scholarship of MacLeod, Ender, Stang, and others illuminates the various critical and historical distortions that have resulted from *fin-de-siècle* debates about the novel. We can count magic-portrait fiction among the casualties of these distortions. Climaxing in popularity during the fever pitch of anxiety about authorship, the genre may be difficult to discern today because it defies persistent oppositions between popular fiction and philosophy, for it is defined by its integration of criticism and theory in and through the novel or short story.

Precisely because of its formal hybridity, the magic-portrait story functioned as a vehicle for Victorian writers to navigate the shifting terrain of cultural authority and to strategically alter the boundaries between high and low art, philosophy and fiction, social purpose and avant-garde experimentation. Recovering the genre thus exposes an unstudied archive of novels and tales, while also helping us better understand the fault lines between high-art writing and popular periodical prose, aestheticism and mainstream culture, theory and fiction. To understand the genre's long nineteenth-century history is to understand how aesthetic philosophy could thrive in and as a fictional tale about a painted portrait.

II. The Relationship between a Movement and a Genre

My dissertation argues that the magic-portrait genre's origins, rise, climax, and decline are constitutively intertwined with the origins, rise, climax, and decline of the Aesthetic Movement, conceived as part of a longer cultural history that includes Romanticism and Decadence. The history of magic-portrait fiction *is* the history of

British aestheticism to the extent that the Victorian movement was initiated, defined, represented, and challenged by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Walter Pater, Ouida, Vernon Lee, Oscar Wilde, and the now-obscure male and female aesthetes who published magic-portrait stories throughout the movement's heyday. Recovering the generic history shaped by the works of these writers requires rethinking our definition of the Aesthetic Movement and its history. Stefano Evangelista argues that "Aestheticism was not a programmatic or coherent movement: its exponents wrote independently and shared no clear sense of belonging to a school."[9] Yet, while aestheticism was undoubtedly anti-programmatic, its exponents shared definable drives, such as the following tendencies: rejecting didacticism and bourgeois morality; challenging nineteenth-century social and religious orthodoxies; experimenting with alternative gender and sexual identities; reviving Romanticism; and turning toward historical epochs, particularly ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy, to convey ideas about art. In what follows, I offer a revised definition that sketches the movement's historical trajectory as it was informed by magic-portrait fiction.

All critical studies of aestheticism grapple with the problem of definition.[10] Does the term "aestheticism" refer to a movement or a school of art? Was it a Shaftesburyian "politics of culture" or a motley group of sexual dissidents? A popular consumer fashion or an elite coterie of avant-garde artists? Or all of the above? Paradoxically, confusion

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[9] Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 3.

[10] See Talia Schaffer's and Jonathan Freedman's exemplary discussions of this problem in Schaffer's *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000, 1-16) and Freedman's *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, 3-14).

about the meaning of the key terms that retain resonance today—"aesthetic,"

"aestheticism," and "art for art's sake"—constitutes one of the defining characteristics of

the Aesthetic Movement.[11] Deliberate *resistance* to ready categorization was precisely

the point of pictures, poems, essays, and stories designed to explore what art could be, do,

and mean in late-Victorian society. As Jonathan Freedman has observed, the Aesthetic

Movement gave middle-class women and men a forum for asserting cultural authority. In

order to maintain that authority, self-professed aesthetes, both aspiring and seasoned,

upper-class and middle-class, had to keep the means of definition to themselves by

claiming special expertise in the production and interpretation of art. If, like the didactic

philistines condemned by aestheticism's slippery non-doctrine of anti-conformism, an

aesthete in Victorian England were to provide a straightforward definition of art, or select

an easily decipherable style to do so, she or he could not properly be called an "aesthete."

The tautological phrase "art for art's sake" has played a central role in this

ongoing debate about definition. Building on art historian Elizabeth Prettejohn's recent

Art for Art's Sake, I would like to use this phrase to clarify aestheticism's unifying

premise and how I interpret it in my dissertation.[12] The multifarious mantra announces a

shared response among Victorian artists and critics to the problem of theorizing art. "The

one definable premise of art for art's sake," Prettejohn writes,

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[11] The first study of British aestheticism, Walter Hamilton's *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1882) emblematizes the pattern of confusion and clarification that characterizes its critical history. Hamilton explains in his Preface that the purpose of his book is to resolve widespread ignorance about a movement that defies interpretation by the audiences of popular theatrical parodies: "[O]f all the thousands who have crowded to see *Patience* and *The Colonel*, how few there are who have carried away any distinct idea…as to whether the class of persons therein held up to ridicule were actually existing literary and artistic men" (Hamilton v).

[12] See Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

is the reverse of 'idealist' in the usual sense of the word: it is that the only adequate way to explore the problem of what art is (if it is not [for the sake of] anything else) is through *concrete* works of art. The problem may be an intractably abstract or 'ideal' one. But the only imaginable solutions to it (within a broadly Kantian tradition) are concrete and stubbornly non-identical to one another. (Prettejohn 5)

In other words, the men and women in England who answered the call of "art for art's sake" engaged the German tradition of philosophical aesthetics by theorizing art through *anti-theoretical* means: through art itself. Victorians were haunted by Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), which argues for the fundamental subjectivity of all aesthetic judgments. In Kant's theory, no objective property renders a thing beautiful; aspects of the psychological act of judgment itself may be delineated, but, to use Kant's words, "a universal formula" for "the determining basis of…aesthetic judgments" is impossible (Kant §34, 149). Those who identified with aestheticism's Kantian tradition decided that art, like beauty, could never sufficiently be defined through philosophical formulas. One could only examine art's powers and parameters through "concrete and stubbornly non-identical" experiments with aesthetic form.[13] Thus, the trademark phrase "art for art's sake" functioned not as a doctrine with stable principles, but as a controversial invitation to embody thought in art. The evasively circular slogan may be described as a Victorian twist on a Kantian form—a thing that is "purposive but without a

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[13] In *Professions of Taste* Freedman reaches a similar conclusion but via different means. He provides the following premise to enable the study of aestheticism as a coherent movement: Victorian aesthetes shared an "embrace of contraries." According to Freedman, "not only is an acceptance of the absolutely irreconcilable nature of human wishes built into British aestheticism, but so is the decision to explore the experience of irreconcilability" and of "cultural contradiction," which he describes as a "broad imaginative habit" characteristic of the literature of aestheticism (Freedman 8, 9). G. K. Chesterton may have said it best when in 1910 he remarked that Victorian aesthetes "'not only tried to be in all ages at once (which is a very reasonable ambition, though not often realised), but they wanted to be on all sides at once; which is nonsense'" (Qutd. in Freedman 8). Freedman's and Prettejohn's arguments are complementary in that aestheticism's "embrace of contraries" names the symptom of its paradigmatic theorization of art through art.

purpose."

In the Preface to *The Renaissance* (1873), commonly considered the "bible of aestheticism," Walter Pater rephrases Kant's paradox of form as the modern art critic's primary goal: "To define beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find, not its universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics" (Pater *Ren* xxix).[14] Pater's only acknowledged protégé, female aesthete Vernon Lee (b. Violet Paget), produced one of many clever reverberations of Pater's call for the fusion of theory in and as art in her Preface to *Ottilie: An Eighteenth Century Idyl* (1883), the first of Lee's several aesthetic novels. This Preface gives a sense of how theorizing through fiction and revalidating the novel were intertwined motives in the practice of "art for art's sake." In contrast to the novelist, Lee writes,

> The Essayist is an amphibious creature, neither fish, flesh, nor fowl: something of the nature of a centaur, possessing some of the instincts of a human creature and perhaps some of its good points, but obliged, on account of hoofs and tail, to wear saddle and blinkers, and be kept tied up in a stable…For an Essayist possesses, inasmuch as he is an Essayist, some of the instincts of the superior creature called a novelist: a certain half imaginative perception of the past, a certain love of character and incident and description, a certain tendency to weave fancies about realities; but as the centaur has hoofs, so the Essayist…[must] run along on the beaten roads of history, and be tied up in the narrow little stable of fact. (Lee *Ottilie* 9-10)

Lee's argument about the "narrow" existence of the centaur-like "amphibious creature" known as The Essayist suggests that practicing what she and Pater advised meant venturing out of the "stable of fact" and into the sweeping fields of the regrettably lower-

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[14] See Chapter One for my analysis of how Pater's stated objective in fact challenges Kant. Aestheticism cannot be neatly defined as a Kantian tradition in that the movement names a group of artists who engaged Kant's subjective formalism largely in order to revise his abstracting methods.

case novelist. As we will see in Chapters One and Five, Pater and Lee similarly attempted to elevate prose fiction for the purposes of disparate aesthetic projects.[15] Significantly, however, Victorian aesthetes found a diverse array of forms through which to experiment with art's possible meanings and effects. The extraordinary variety of aesthetic and critical, fictional and non-fictional, forms produced "for art's sake" likely constitutes the primary reason why nineteenth-century British "art writing," as Rachel Teukolsky terms it, has been excluded from the canon of Western aesthetics, despite its contributions to the same intellectual history.[16]

My dissertation defines aestheticism as a shared drive among a diverse group of artists to theorize the relations of influence between art and life through concrete verbal and visual forms. Aestheticism's characteristic focus on concrete, or sensual, forms reflects a simultaneous embrace of and challenge to German aesthetic philosophies. To recover the fraught origins of British aestheticism in the Kantian aesthetic tradition, I build on Linda Dowling's incisive intellectual history, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy*. Dowling locates the origins of Victorian arguments

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[15] One of Pater's strategies for elevating prose fiction was to use the terms "literary artist" and "imaginative prose literature" rather than "novelist" or "fiction"—moves which he makes in "Style" from *Appreciations with an Essay on Style* (1889). Wilde would follow suit in "The Critic as Artist" by insisting, via the character of Gilbert, that Robert Browning will be—and ought to be—remembered as a fiction writer, not as a poet (Wilde *Intentions* 104).

[16] In *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Teukolsky clarifies this absence and its sources in "antiquated stereotypes" and "master-narratives" that still inform modern scholarship: "Victorian Britain has not usually been seen as a significant source for aesthetic histories of the West by those who are not scholars of Victorianism, in part, perhaps, owing to antiquated stereotypes still attached to the period. The old master-narrative of Western aesthetic history, while now increasingly outdated, is worth rehearsing if only to note its relative silence on Victorian art. The rise of the aesthetic has typically been narrated as a leap from German Enlightenment philosophy to the Continental avant-gardes of the late nineteenth century" (Teukolsky 4). See also Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake*, 3, 5.

for a "democracy of aesthetics" in English and German moral, political, and aesthetic philosophy, which she identifies as a "Whig aesthetic tradition" stretching from Shaftesbury's *Characteristics* (1711) to Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), through the works of Ruskin, Arnold, Morris, and Pater, to Wilde's *Intentions* (1891).[17] Dowling argues that the theories of "self-culture" proposed by these Victorians originate in Shaftesbury's notion of the *sensus communis*, or the universal moral-aesthetic sense. The legacy of Shaftesbury's idea in philosophies that shaped the Aesthetic Movement is defined by the paradox that taste is universal—that the appreciation of art is basic to human nature itself. Ultimately, Dowling demonstrates, the Shaftesburyian crusade for aesthetic democracy taken up by a line of Victorian liberals revealed itself to be a failed project—a fantasy wrought out of the impossibility of an "aristocracy of everyone."

This intellectual history did not, however, as Dowling's selective archive suggests, transpire in a vacuum of highbrow non-fictional essays, the very notion of which would have been anathema to critics and aesthetes campaigning for a democratized role for art in Victorian society. My dissertation attempts to give the missing history, that of the actual "vulgarization" of art in Victorian culture, constituted by the body of novels and tales through which Romantic and Victorian writers sought to realize, challenge, and revise the ideals of the Whig aesthetic tradition. This missing cultural history calls for a clarification of terms to the extent that what I am identifying as a paradigmatic practice of theorizing art through art itself was not perceived by Victorian writers such as Pater and Wilde as a *vulgarizing* strategy, but rather as an advancement in the line of Goethe and Schiller of the redemption of the sensible. The aesthetic texts of Pater and Wilde

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[17] See Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1996).

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sensualize theory, rather than abstracting away the senses, and prose fiction was their form of choice for achieving this formalist feat.

Shaftesbury's notion of the universal aesthetic sense lived on in both Kantian philosophical treatises and the literary tradition that emerged from the same network of late-eighteenth-century German aesthetics: the *Bildungsroman*, or novel of formation. This literary tradition derives from the German idea of *Bildung*, or self-cultivation. It is in the *Künstlerroman*, or artist's *Bildungsroman*, where the universal aesthetic sense and the ideal of self-cultivation merge, and the magic-portrait genre is borne out of the *Künstlerromane* of Goethe, Hoffmann, and Hardman, examined in Chapter One. Nineteenth-century authors writing in the wake of these German and English forebears used the magic-portrait genre to test the implications of the Shaftesburyian subject. Harvey Goldman usefully summarizes the significance of *Bildung* for nineteenth-century culture thus:

> From Kant and Humboldt through Goethe and the German Romantics, to the later defenders of…the ideal, the language of *Bildung* is at the center of German reflection on self and action. One historian claims that the 'period between 1831 and 1933…can be called the century of *Bildung* (in the specific German meaning of the word) and of the *Bildungsbürgertum*.' Gadamer even argues that the 'idea of self-formation or cultivation…was perhaps the greatest idea of the eighteenth century' and that the intellectual change it induced 'still causes us to experience the century of Goethe as contemporary.'[18]

As we will see in Chapters One and Six, Pater and Wilde composed literary portraits that "'experience the century of Goethe as contemporary.'" Indeed, the Victorians responded more clearly and directly to the intellectual partnership of Goethe and Schiller than to Kant, who was somewhat notoriously associated with philosophical abstraction. It was

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[18] Harvey Goldman, *Politics, Death, and the Devil: Self and Power in Max Weber and Thomas Mann* (University of California Press, 1992), 26-7. The historian to which Goldman refers in this passage is Herbert Schädelbach (*Philosophie in Deutschland, 1831-1933*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1983, 35).

Schiller who theorized the relatively more "concrete" ideal of the *Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794) and Goethe who explored its possibilities and impossibilities in fiction. Properly contextualized within the "century of *Bildung*," the genealogy of magic-portrait fiction may best be understood as a history in fiction of the "aesthetic education of man."

German aesthetics entered British culture largely through the writings and translations of Samuel T. Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle, G. H. Lewes, and George Eliot, whose works, as Rosemary Ashton illustrates in *The German Idea*, fostered a variety of direct and indirect responses among Victorian writers.[19] In one memorable reaction to Schiller's ideas, John Ruskin discusses in the Third Part of *Modern Painters* a passage from the Twenty-first Letter of Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. In the offending passage Schiller writes, "Beauty gives no individual result whatever, either for the intellect or for the will; it realizes no individual purpose, either intellectual or moral; it discovers no individual truth, helps us to perform no individual duty" (Schiller *AE* 101). Ruskin describes these words as a "gross and inconceivable falsehood" for, in Ruskin's philosophy, especially as articulated in *The Stones of Venice* (1850-3), art can regenerate society (Ruskin *MP* Sec. I, Ch. 15, §9). Ruskin's reaction to Schiller represents a paradigmatic Victorian response to German aesthetic philosophies among liberal critics and aesthetes of seeking to transform aesthetic ideals into concrete, purposeful forms, and in Ruskin's case, into a large-scale project for sociopolitical reform. Yet, whereas Ruskin did not embrace the magic-portrait genre and eventually diverged from Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite enterprise, the genre facilitated the concrete, purposeful, albeit multifarious projects of aestheticism's leading voices.

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[19] See Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought, 1800-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

When Pater asserted that "the true student of aesthetics" must use "the most concrete terms possible" for critical inquiry, he provided practical instructions for doing so. He called for his readers to answer these questions: "What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me?...How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?" (Pater, "Preface" in *Ren* xxix). A magic-portrait story answers Pater's questions—and in the concrete terms he required—by narrating the influence of an art object on a social subject. In turn, the genre secures the livelihood of the critical perspective Pater advises by inviting readers, through art-critical passages, to reflect on the power of art and aesthetic experience. The genre emblematizes and enacts Pater's politically charged arguments for achieving "a more liberal and comely way of conceiving life" through an aesthetic self-education (Pater, "Two Early French Stories" in *Ren* 1).

Yet, as we've seen, the magic-portrait genre predates Pater's oeuvre by nearly a century. Its timeline thus alters our understanding of his formative role in the Aesthetic Movement. Critics generally agree that Pater functioned as a "founding father" figure who *defined* the Victorian aesthetic project.[20] Recovering magic-portrait fiction suggests rather that Pater *recognized* the dynamics of this project—this effort to philosophize the subjective relations of art and life through unphilosophical means—already at play in magic-portrait fiction published throughout the first half of the century. *The Renaissance* and *Imaginary Portraits* truly represent efforts toward a "renaissance" or reanimation of

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[20] See Chapter One for my discussion of the few critical studies that treat aestheticism as a late phase of Romanticism, including Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony* (New York: Oxford UP, 1933) and Graham Hough's *The Last Romantics* (London: George Duckworth, 1949). Of this small collection of works, Kenneth Daley's *The Rescue of Romanticism: Walter Pater and John Ruskin* (The Ohio University Press, 2001) is the only one to focus attention on the ways Pater borrowed and diverged from Romantic culture.

earlier arts, an art-historical category that includes not just the sculptures of classical

Greece and the paintings of Renaissance Italy, but also the magic portraits of Romantic

England and Germany. As I show in Chapters One and Five, when Pater produces his

adaptation of the magic-portrait genre in *Imaginary Portraits* he draws upon the body of

philosophy and fiction that constitutes its early history. Far from being mere regurgitators

of Romantic forms, however, Pater, Rossetti, their followers, and their detractors were

innovative leaders of a new movement, and they saw themselves as such. As we will see

in Chapters Five and Six, the generic experiments of Pater, Lee, and Wilde were original

in the very act of synthesis, just as their philosophies were deeply rooted in history in

their very attempt at modernity of theme and form. If the Romantics invented the magic-

portrait genre, the neo-Romantic Victorians popularized it and gave it new meanings—

including tragic and horrific ones.

As a genealogy of fictionalized aesthetic educations, magic-portrait stories

generally defy Pater's buoyant assertions in *The Renaissance* (1873) about how "art

comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments

as they pass" and of "burn[ing] always with this hard, gem-like flame" (Pater 153, 152).

Just as Dowling's study illuminates the sequence of Victorian campaigns for aesthetic

democracy as a record of disappointments, so too does the magic-portrait genre's rise

represent a century-long history of challenging the implicit reductions of Shaftesbury's

subject. These stories ask their readers to perceive the fatal problems with a theory that

understands the universal human subject as a white, male, heterosexual aristocrat. Balzac

produces a tragically effeminate castrato in "Sarrasine" (1830); Hawthorne constructs an

egomaniacal male god-artist in "The Prophetic Pictures" (1837); Ouida creates a poor

female protagonist needlessly sacrificed for the sake of a hedonistic painter's whims in "The Adder" (1888); and, in perhaps the most contrarian manipulation of heterosexist master narratives, Wilde depicts the beautiful, objectified sitter in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a man, not a woman. As the plot of Wilde's Decadent anti-*Bildungsroman* suggests, the late-Victorian "aesthetic education" became an increasingly bleak one. Magic-portrait stories of the *fin de siècle* register the traumas of gender inequity and high capitalism far more clearly than they do the possibilities of political self-cultivation seen in German aesthetic works of the late eighteenth century.

The eventual commercial success of the Aesthetic Movement as the reigning fashion of the 1870s and 1880s helps explain the failure of its intellectual ancestors' and leaders' political aspirations. In the context of literary culture, late-Victorian magic-portrait stories expose a pattern whereby high-capitalist commercialism helped shroud and shatter the political efficacy of Arnoldian self-culture. If, however, the political ambitions that motivated Victorian aesthetes failed to materialize, aestheticism's larger cultural history—that which includes fictional literature—succeeded in wielding a profound influence on Western literary traditions and on the institution of literary criticism itself. At century's end, in place of realized political goals, we find a body of fiction that established and perpetuated a gendered language of artistic and critical authority—a language made up of masterful male artists and objectified female muses. Embodied in magic-portrait stories, this cultural language functioned as a public forum for late-Victorian contests among embattled writers and groups of writers, especially gendered battles between and among male and female authors, emblematized by the competing male homoerotic and feminist aestheticisms of Pater and Lee. At the same

time, in shaping the cultural consciousness of what characterizes a modern artist, the genre supplied some of the most enduring sources of cultural fascination: the Byronic artist-adventurer, the mad artist, the tragic female sitter, and the Mephistopheles-like Svengalis and Lord Henry Wottons. These stories make and combat arguments about who gets to be an artist and what kind of social power accompanies that role.

By the 1880s and 1890s, Victorian aesthetes found in the magic-portrait genre an ideal vehicle for expressing their contrasting aesthetic principles and for asserting their participation in the fashionable "art for art's sake" call to embody thought in art—acts which similarly required competing for cultural authority. The *fin-de-siècle* literary scene was becoming saturated with new schools (e.g. Symbolism and Decadence), with hostile camps (e.g. the Naturalists and the New Women novelists), and with new market challenges for struggling writers. The magic-portrait fiction produced by male and female aesthetes during this period reflects these gendered battles for an authoritative place in the late-Victorian avant-garde. This archive includes such works as Ouida's *Frescoes* (1883), Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), Lee's *Hauntings* (1886-90) and "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" (July 1896), Henry James's "The Liar" (1889) and *The Tragic Muse* (1889-90), Marion Hepworth Dixon's "A Thief in the Night" (Jan. 1895), Victoria Cross's "Theodora: A Fragment" (Jan. 1895), Ella D'Arcy's "The Death Mask" (July 1896), Evelyn Sharp's "The Other Anna" (April 1897), and Arthur Symons's *Spiritual Adventures* (1905). While some of these texts, especially those of Pater and Symons, display a continued engagement with aestheticism's (and the genre's) Romantic origins, the works of female aesthetes narrate new ways of critiquing misogynistic magic-portrait narratives in a diverse effort to construct new narratives about women's roles in

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artistic creation. Notably, the female-authored works listed above are almost all published in the avant-garde periodical, the *Yellow Book*. We also see that late-Victorian magic-portrait stories assert the power of the art critic as *the* authoritative mode—the mode of being and thinking that guarantees social authority.

Magic-portrait fiction is defined by its integration of art criticism through characters who create, view, and analyze painted portraits. In works published during the first half of the nineteenth century, this generic feature registers philosophical experiments, both hopeful and horrific, about what it means for a male artist to obtain an "aesthetic education." During the late nineteenth century, however, this feature more clearly registers changes in the social role of art criticism, which was in the throes of being institutionalized as an academic discipline. High-art magic-portrait stories transition from housing art criticism to articulating meta-criticism that accounts for new theories of art and artistic practice. Thus, while not teleological, the genre's *fin-de-siècle* flourishing is rather Hegelian in that it exhibits a kind of coming into self-consciousness in the way criticism works within the stories. Fictionalized acts of art criticism conveyed through ekphrasis represent the key trope that links the genre's—and the movement's—antagonistic strains: i.e. the elite, high-art magic-portrait stories and the popular magic-portrait stories that satirize aestheticism. The criticism articulated through the nineteenth-century magic-portrait story helps render it a distinctly Victorian genre, one that retains a retrospective embrace of Romanticism, while forging modern, topical investments in the increasingly "disciplined" practice of criticizing art. Whereas the purported founders of aestheticism (i.e. Ruskin, Arnold, Pater) sought liberal political change, the movement's defining practice of embodying thought in art resulted, by century's end, in a

fundamentally literary critical project—in a rich body of literary critiques set to bear on an aestheticized world.

No one exhibits this pattern more emphatically than Oscar Wilde. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Intentions*, Wilde evokes this late stage in the magic-portrait genre's development by asserting that a crucial component of the Romanticism heralded by Victorian aesthetes over and against Realism was owed to the critical faculty—to literary criticism as a primary source of the creative spirit. As the character of Gilbert in "The Critic as Artist" (1891) puts it, "there is no fine art without self-consciousness, and self-consciousness and the critical spirit are one" (Wilde *Intentions* 122). Gilbert goes on to declare that an "age that has no criticism is either an age in which art is immobile, hieratic, and confined to the reproduction of formal types, or an age that possesses no art at all…It is to the critical instinct that we owe each new school that springs up, each new mould that art finds ready to its hand" (Wilde 123-4). Wilde applies his own creatively critical faculty to a wide array of arts, but, in the context of the overlapping histories of magic-portrait fiction and aestheticism, he applies it with the most wide-ranging cultural influence to the ekphrastic portraits that constitute this history. As we will see in Chapter Six, Wilde wrote two magic-portrait stories, including the single most famous one; he critiqued Pater's *Imaginary Portraits*; he reviewed at least four female-authored magic-portrait stories; he repeatedly lauded the authors at the center of the genre and the movement; and he even published articles on the art of portrait painting and on the phenomenon of the "London model." It is the long nineteenth-century era of magic portraits traced in this dissertation—especially the stories of Goethe, Balzac, Ouida, and Pater—that Wilde praised for its school-inventing critical creativity. Yet, to the extent

that *fin-de-siècle* magic-portrait stories functioned as a forum for staging the authoritative act of art criticism, they did so with high stakes for the discipline then under construction. Paradoxically, in their indirect contribution to the formation of the literary critical field, magic-portrait stories contributed to the very hierarchical, gendered, institutional structures that have prevented us from discerning a genre hiding in plain sight.

<u>III. How Magic-Portrait Fiction Became a Secret</u>

While critics generally agree about the difficulty of defining British aestheticism, and limit their studies accordingly, only recently have we begun to debate the proper *objects* of study. Conventionally, analyzing aestheticism means analyzing non-fictional art criticism, painting, and poetry, to the exclusion of the aesthetic form that dominated the nineteenth century: prose fiction.[21] Despite practices and assertions by Pater, Lee, and Wilde that "imaginative prose," as Pater calls it, constitutes the form best suited to the modern world, scholars and educated readers still associate the Aesthetic Movement with a coterie of avant-garde male poets who critiqued the bourgeois, didactic, effeminate novel. The usual suspects for studies of the movement include Rossetti, Pater, A. C.

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[21] The following pivotal studies exemplify the tradition of focusing on poetry, painting, and art criticism, or on the role of a single author's work in the rise and fall of the movement: Rachel Teukolsky's *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (2009), Angela Leighton's *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (2007), Elizabeth Prettejohn's *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (2007), Linda Dowling's *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (1996), Jonathan Freedman's *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (1990), and Carolyn Williams's *Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism* (1989). However, Kirsten MacLeod explicitly challenges this paradigm in *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing, and the* Fin de Siècle (2006), though she focuses on aestheticism's aftermath, and Talia Schaffer's *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (2000) encourages more research on the prose fictional works of female aesthetes. Notably, Stefano Evangelista's *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (2009) analyzes representations of Hellenism across key aesthetic texts and, in doing so, opens up new connections among male and female aesthetes and their various aesthetic productions—specifically, those of Pater, Wilde, Vernon Lee, and Michael Field.

Swinburne, J. A. M. Whistler, and other male painters, poets, and critics, to the exclusion of the female aesthetes, such as Ouida, Alice Meynell, and Lee, and the peripheral male authors, such as Henry James and George Du Maurier, whose criticisms of the movement helped define the literature identified by contemporary readers as "aesthetic." Scholars regularly refer to the *Yellow Book* (1894-1897) as the defining magazine of the movement, or, as Talia Schaffer puts it, the "public voice of aesthetic sensibility," for its contributors could be called "a who's who of aestheticism" (Schaffer 153, 1). And yet, studies of the journal's contents overwhelmingly focus on poetry and illustrations, rather than the short stories and novellas that filled its pages. Scholarship about a notoriously diverse movement thus neglects to account for the fact that novels and short stories formed a prominent part of the movement, as in such famous novels as *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), as well as in lesser-known works, such as Vernon Lee's *Miss Brown* (1884) and the *Yellow Book* magic-portrait stories of Marion Hepworth Dixon, Victoria Cross, Ella D'Arcy, and Evelyn Sharp.

This pattern of neglecting the role of fiction in the history of aestheticism derives from enduring institutional structures. Since the turn of the twentieth-century the field of Victorian studies has maintained critical, historical, and methodological divisions between literary aestheticism and popular nineteenth-century fiction. We associate popular fiction with realism, social reform agendas, and literary techniques oriented toward the moralistic or material motivations of the serialized "triple-decker." In contrast, we associate the literature of aestheticism with neo-Romantic poetry, non-fictional essays and reviews about art, and above all, the avant-garde experiments with literary form found in such works. According to dominant narratives of the *fin-de-siècle* cultural shift,

these texts and literary strategies, as opposed to those of the Victorian social reform novel, collectively paved the way for what we call modernism, especially the Bloomsbury group's strain of modernist innovation.

Perhaps the single most powerful idea underpinning this narrative is the question of social purpose. The term aestheticism often refers to art without a social or moral purpose—art that embraces the ideals of technical perfection and "love of beauty." Our conception of what Amanda Claybough calls the nineteenth-century "novel of purpose" is rather rigidly divided, such that we resist investigating the social "purposes" of aesthetic literature.[22] Polemical statements by aesthetes themselves confirm this division: for example, Swinburne, who first translated the phrase *l'art pour l'art* from the French in his 1868 essay on William Blake, explicitly repudiates the interpretation of artistic merit on the basis of art's moral message: "The one fact…worth taking into account," Swinburne writes, "is simply mere excellence of verse or colour…let us hear no more of the moral mission of earnest art" (Swinburne 92). Given statements such as these, critical schisms between aesthetic literature and social reform fiction seem logical—so logical, in fact, that the distinct styles, authors, histories, and sociopolitical investments of these competing literary bodies have shaped the field of Victorian studies. Few scholars who research aestheticism also research popular narrative fiction; our intellectual division of labor follows the generic, gendered, and hierarchical boundaries between middlebrow prose fiction and highbrow art writing established during the formative period of literary criticism as an academic discipline.

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[22] See Amanda Claybough, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

What Swinburne later says in the very same study of William Blake illuminates the ways aestheticism and the intertwined history of magic-portrait fiction defy these structural divisions and master narratives. Swinburne pleads with his readers not to disregard Blake's eccentric "Prophetic Books" as nonsensical signs of the poet's madness: instead, he insists, "let [all readers] know and remember, having once been told it, that in these strangest of all written books there is purpose as well as power, meaning as well as mystery" (185-6). With an almost moralistic tone, Swinburne emphasizes Blake's "purpose" at the same time as he declares his own purpose to restore the poet's sullied reputation. Throughout the essay, Swinburne displays his explicit drive to revalidate Blake's "Poetic Genius," just as Rossetti had begun revalidating Blake more than a decade earlier, just as Ruskin attempted in *Modern Painters* to revalidate Turner, and just as Pater in *The Renaissance* attempted to revalidate Winckelmann and thereby endorse a homoerotic vision of Germano-Hellenic *Bildung* (Swinburne 93).[23]

This paradigmatic celebration of disregarded artistic ancestors, articulated through literary portraits that narrate the aesthetic educations of the artist-heroes in question, was one of the primary modes male Victorian aesthetes used to convey ambivalently countercultural and patriarchal purposes. Rereading these texts uncovers plainly conveyed objectives and less plainly conveyed ideologies underlying aestheticism's definitive terms and figures, including the "love of beauty," which is persistently coded as male heterosexual love for a woman's beauty, and artistic "mastery," which is persistently treated as an all-male enterprise passed down through generations of

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[23] See Rachel Teukolsky's acute interpretation of Ruskin's controversial praise of Turner in her chapter, "Picturesque Signs, Picturing Science: Ruskin in the 1840s," in which she explains that the "unrelenting negative press disparaging Turner's paintings in the late 1830s and 1840s formed the immediate background for *Modern Painters I*" (Teukolsky, *The Literate Eye*, 29).

forgotten masters. Ultimately, then, the scintillating tag line of *l'art pour l'art*, translated

by Swinburne and typically thought to signify beautiful forms over and against

purposeful social content, constituted a variously ironic, political, subjective, and

sensationalistic social act caught up in the very ideological and material conditions

Victorian aesthetes strategically claimed to reject.[24]

The intricately high and low cultural history of magic-portrait fiction defies the

traditional divisions that structure Victorian studies in ways numerous enough to make it

difficult to perceive the very existence of the genre. For example, writers as distinct as

Margaret Oliphant and Walter Pater, Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Vernon Lee, Mary Penn

and Oscar Wilde, wrote magic-portrait stories. As we will see in Chapters Three and Four

in particular, both popular periodical authors and male and female aesthetes saw in the

genre a flexible means of representing and combating social problems. My recovery of

the form builds primarily on two studies, which similarly help modern-day readers

discern the category-bending literary history of aestheticism: Dowling's *Vulgarization of*

Art (1996), discussed above, and Talia Schaffer's *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*

(2000).[25] By resurrecting the neglected literature of prominent female aesthetes, Schaffer

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[24] Some recent scholars have illuminated how leaders of aestheticism were making strategic, political maneuvers designed to reshape social conventions. See, for example, Rachel Teukolsky's "The Politics of Formalist Art Criticism: Pater's 'School of Giorgione'" in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, eds. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2002).

[25] See Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 2000). Nicholas Daly's *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) also represents an important, recent study that unsettles these traditional classifications and master narratives about aestheticism; Daly explores, among other things, the intertwined developments of aestheticism and the commercially successful, mass-cultural phenomenon of "sensation." I draw upon his criticism in my reading of George Du Maurier's sensational magic-portrait novel *Trilby* (1894) in Chapter Three.

aggressively challenges the rigid classifications between literary aestheticism and popular

fiction. Her research shows how popular, female-authored fiction shaped the arts and

ideas of the Aesthetic Movement, too often restricted to a small coterie of male artists and

critics. Female aesthetes, such as Ouida, Lucas Malet, and Alice Meynell, published both

influential art criticism and popular, experimental, anti-realist narrative fiction. Most

importantly for the history of magic-portrait fiction, Ouida, Schaffer argues, invented the

aesthetic novel now associated with Oscar Wilde, George Meredith, and J. K.

Huysmans.[26] I build most directly on Schaffer's research by recovering and analyzing the

forgotten magic-portrait fiction of female aesthetes, particularly Ouida and Vernon Lee.

Perhaps the most insidious barriers to identifying the magic-portrait genre, given

its defining incorporation of art criticism and aesthetic philosophy, relate to the gendered

associations of philosophy and fiction as they continue to shape critical practice. While

recent scholars of Victorian culture have diversely explored the relations between fiction

and the visual arts, and those between art criticism and the visual arts, there remains

relatively little analysis of the relations between eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy

and nineteenth-century fiction, despite the compelling links between German

philosophies of *Bildung* and Victorian *Bildungsromane*.[27] This disciplinary

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[26] Ouida published over 40 novels and, as Schaffer observes, "[t[housands of people read the dramatic, romantic novels Ouida produced between 1859 and 1897, making her one of the first 'best-sellers' in English literary history" (123). As I discuss in Chapter Four, Ouida penned at least four magic-portrait stories in the 1860s and 1880s, influencing both other women writers and Oscar Wilde.

[27] See Marc Redfield's *Phantom Formations: Aesthetic Ideology and the* Bildungsroman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) and Rosemary Ashton's *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980). This particular trend, as it appears in scholarship on aestheticism, indicates national and period-based biases in that critics favor the study of French neo-classicism over German aesthetic philosophy, while commonly sticking with texts published during the Victorian period, as opposed to venturing into Romantic-era literature in order to analyze Victorian reanimations of it. I follow

compartmentalization of the male-dominated narrative of Kantian aesthetics and

traditional histories of Victorian fiction intersects with common literary historical

divisions between feminized fiction and masculinized philosophy, divisions played out in

a long line of critical books and anthologies that portray British aestheticism as an

exclusively male enterprise. This history stretches from Walter Hamilton's inaugural *The

Aesthetic Movement in England* (London: Reeves & Turner, 1882) to Graham Hough and

Eric Warner's *Strangeness and Beauty: An Anthology of Aesthetic Criticism, 1840-1910*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) to the majority of book-length studies

produced today.[28] As the genealogy sketched above suggests, the magic-portrait genre

demands analysis of the intersections among Victorian fiction, art criticism, and aesthetic

philosophy just as much as it demands that we explore the role women writers and

novelists played in the history of aestheticism. I hope that the genre's "secret history,"

and the future anthologies that emerge from its resurrection, will help unsettle this

gendered economy of artistic and critical reproduction.

Dowling and Prettejohn in arguing for more investigation of aestheticism's German Romantic
origins.

[28] The 2006 Norton Anthology of English Literature includes the following late-Victorian
authors: Matthew Arnold, George Meredith, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Christina Rossetti, William
Morris, A. C. Swinburne, Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Michael Field (b. Katherine
Bradley and Edith Cooper), Oscar Wilde, and Ernest Dowson. It does not include Ouida, Vernon
Lee, Alice Meynell, or any of the other women writers discussed in Schaffer's *Forgotten Female
Aesthetes*, published six years before the 2006 Norton edition. Schaffer's and Kathy Alexis
Psomiades's edited volume *Women and British Aestheticism* (University Press of Virginia 2000)
and Kirsten MacLeod's *Fictions of British Decadence: High Art, Popular Writing and the* Fin de
Siècle (Palgrave 2006) are among the works helping to unsettle this male-dominated narrative.

IV. Chapter Overview

In Chapter One, "The Aesthetic Education of Man: The Philosophical Origins of Magic-Portrait Fiction," I trace the genre's origins from eighteenth-century aesthetic philosophy to prototypical novels and tales by Matthew Lewis and E. T. A. Hoffmann to the first magic-portrait story, Joseph Hardman's "Colonna the Painter" (1829).[29] The chapter's first section establishes the relevant tenets and cultural and political stakes of what Schiller calls the "aesthetic education of man," unfolded through Walter Pater's 1867 literary portrait of German art historian, Johann Joachim Winckelmann. "Winckelmann," an art-critical *Künstlerroman*, crystallizes Pater's aesthetic philosophy, which depends on a deep engagement with German aesthetics and the tradition of *Bildung* from which the magic-portrait genre springs. "Winckelmann" narrates the intertwined self-developments of three male artists: Winckelmann, Goethe, and Pater himself. I use the text to illuminate the magic-portrait story's origins in notions of male aesthetic *Bildung* and the philosophers and fiction writers integral to the form's invention, particularly Schiller and Goethe. Building on Linda Dowling's research, I show how Pater engages Kant, Schiller, Hegel, and others in order to revalidate the degraded form of prose fiction; Pater's attempt to revalidate what he called "imaginative prose" represents the argument that underpinned magic-portrait stories published throughout the Victorian period by writers who sought sensual means of theorizing the role of art in society. This reading thus establishes the links between German philosophy and Victorian fiction, Goethean Romanticism and Paterian aestheticism, and

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[29] NB: This step-by-step review is overly long for the purposes of my dissertation defense. I have included extended descriptions of the two chapters (Four and Five) which are excluded from the manuscript, but which were largely complete when I submitted the document and thus called for discussion in the context of revisions for the book.

demonstrates how fundamental the intellectual and literary terrain of a man's "aesthetic education" was for the development of both the genre and the movement.

The chapter's second section analyzes foundational fictional works by Romantic authors, including Walpole, Lewis, Goethe, and Hoffmann. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), and Goethe's *Faust* (1808) introduce the painted portrait or mirrored image of a beautiful woman as a site of crisis for male protagonists, typically limited to single scenes. Influenced by *The Monk*, Goethe's *Bildungsromane*, and the German aesthetic tradition, Hoffmann produced numerous prototypical magic-portrait stories between the years 1815 and 1820. Hoffmann's tales test the premise of a male protagonist's self-cultivation—or degeneration—through the painted portrait of a beautiful woman. I focus this analysis on Hoffmann's "Meister Martin" (1819), a male-dominated *Künstlerroman* about three artists—a painter, a silversmith, and a cooper—in which Hoffmann depicts the painted portrait of a beautiful woman as a central instrument in the fictionalized process of male aesthetic *Bildung*. In the chapter's final section, I resurrect Hardman's 1829 story "Colonna the Painter," which transforms the ekphrastic portrait from a motif into a structuring principle and which employs all of the magic-portrait genre's defining features. This analysis at once anatomizes the genre and shows how Hardman's story anticipates Victorian art-critical debates and aspects of Pater's male homosocial aesthetics, as depicted in "Winckelmann" and *Imaginary Portraits*. The genealogy of men's "aesthetic educations" studied over the course of this chapter establishes the philosophical origins and formal characteristics of the genre and, in doing so, illuminates the German Romanticism of Victorian aestheticism.

Chapter Two, "The Genre Hiding in Plain Sight: Magic-Portrait Fiction from Balzac to Rossetti," examines the first wave of magic-portrait stories, published between the years 1830 and 1850 by authors across Europe and America. This chapter shows the genre's early thematic focus on the sexual politics of artistic reproduction in the context of a male artist's attempt at artistic mastery. Texts by Balzac, Hawthorne, Poe, and others shift from Hoffmann's and Hardman's philosophical *Künstlerromane* to no-less-philosophical narratives about the fatal inseparability of sexual politics and artistic mastery, which conventionally end in the death of the woman who sits for her portrait. Drawing on Romantic-era magic-portrait fiction from Hoffmann to Poe, however, Dante Gabriel Rossetti transforms the deadly scene of portraiture into a triumphant manifesto for a new school of art: in "Hand and Soul" (1850), he articulates the philosophy of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which represents the nascent phase of the Aesthetic Movement in England. Rossetti's magic-portrait story tells the tale of a male artist-hero who paints the portrait of his own soul, embodied as a woman, and thereby produces a masterful portrait rediscovered centuries later by a museum-going male art lover. In the chapter's final section, I examine Rossetti's self-conscious borrowings from early magic-portrait fiction and the legacy of his aesthetic practices for late-Victorian culture.

Contextualizing "Hand and Soul" within the joint histories of the genre and the movement shows that Rossetti's aesthetic practices, including his treatment of his model/wife Lizzie Siddall and his cultivation of a brotherly community of artists and buyers, would bring to life ideals fictionalized in early magic-portrait fiction. Rossetti helped popularize magic-portrait ideals—including the angelic, sickly, or deathly female muse, the self-isolating male painting master, and the modern-day spectator who

resurrects a forgotten master—for the Victorians influenced by his verbal and visual arts. This chapter shows that early magic-portrait stories theorize art's sexual, psychological, commercial, and spiritual powers, as opposed to art's potential function as a source of political regeneration. The genre's first wave thus shifts away from the politically charged Whig aesthetic tradition from which the genre originally emerged, and toward an ever increasing focus on the sexual politics of artistic reproduction—whether fatal or triumphant.

Chapter Three, "Popular Portraits: Ekphrastic Reform, Anti-Aestheticism, and Beautifully Dead Women in Dickens, Reade, and Du Maurier," analyzes popular novels and short stories that critique aestheticism using the same magic-portrait formal strategies employed by Victorian aesthetes to articulate their aesthetic projects. I study works published during the "before," "during," and "after" phases of the Aesthetic Movement— Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), Charles Reade's "The Picture" (1884), and George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894)—which represent a social reform novel, a now-obscure magic-portrait story, and a best-selling magic-portrait novel. All three critique aestheticism, whether in its nascent stage or in its full-blown dominance of the cultural scene, and they do so through ekphrastic and embodied portraits of beautiful women. I use the term "ekphrastic reform" to describe how the ekphrastic portrait of a beautiful, usually dead or dying woman enabled Victorian writers to convey their ideas for social change. Narrowing our focus from the magic-portrait genre *writ large* to the ekphrastic portraiture at its formal center illuminates how and why the same trope functioned as the primary site for competing aesthetic projects.

Whereas Hoffmann, Hardman, and Rossetti weave art criticism into their magic-portrait stories through authoritative male artist characters who produce or observe masterful portraits, Dickens, Reade, and Du Maurier transform ekphrastic scenes into moments of satire or social tragedy. Their stories underscore the misogynistic violence of the magic-portrait premise through not only painted portraits, but also through female characters depicted as embodied portraits. Dickens's Lady Dedlock is treated as a living, breathing image whose fetishization by Londoners thwarts social reform, whereas Du Maurier's *Trilby* wages a direct attack on the icon of the male artistic master by depicting Trilby's body as Svengali inspects or abuses it. These popular portraits use ekphrastic portraiture to expose social problems, not to obliquely advocate new socioartistic possibilities. Together, these texts illuminate an ekphrastic aesthetics of reform through which popular novelists satirize high-art practices for their reliance on a misogynistic aesthetic ideology. Ultimately, however, the cultural critiques of Dickens, Reade, and Du Maurier are not easily identifiable as feminist, for they ambivalently luxuriate in the very practices they purport to condemn. The history of popular magic-portrait fiction shows that writers across demographics—male and female, canonical and obscure, highbrow and middlebrow—used the ekphrastic portrait of a beautiful woman to explore social problems, and their attempts diversely question, reconfirm, and assail the degraded role of woman in/as culture.

Chapter Four, "Female Subjectivity and the Sexual Politics of Magic-Portrait Fiction at the *Fin de Siècle*," examines another body of works that challenge the genre's and the movement's gender politics. Novels and tales by women writers from Ouida in the 1860s to George Eliot and Mary Penn in the 1870s to Frances Forbes-Robertson in

the 1890s rewrite the "aesthetic education of man" and, in doing so, imagine new roles and identities for the female subjects caught up in the violence of portraiture. These writers alternately critique the patriarchal *Künstlerroman* formula and rewrite the gendered power dynamics surrounding the production of a painted portrait. This genealogy of female-authored magic-portrait fiction helps reveal that, while the genre emerged through intimate and international circles of male philosophers and novelists, its flourishing at the end of the nineteenth century depended diversely upon the role of women in a high-capitalist cultural scene with new markets and new writers competing for commercial viability. The problem of the Romantic political-aesthetic philosopher increasingly becomes the problem of the modern author seeking financial security and professional legitimacy—a legitimacy caught up in the gendered definitions of art theorized throughout nineteenth-century magic-portrait stories.

The chapter's first section analyzes Ouida's "Favette and Thargelie; or My Pastel-Portrait by La Tour" (1862), one of the first female-authored magic-portrait stories (and one of Ouida's earliest works), which critiques the treatment of women as pictures. Ouida asserts her own art-critical authority by constructing a frame story about her La Tour portrait and the visions she imagines through it. In this instance, Ouida's portrait narrates the tale of a woman who performs a new identity—that of actress "Thargelie"—in order to escape the married life of "Favette" symbolically imprisoned in the portrait her erstwhile lover keeps of her. The chapter's second section analyzes George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and Mary Penn's "Desmond's Model" (1879), which similarly evoke the gothic in their feminist revisions of the magic-portrait premise. Like Dickens, Eliot borrows from the genre without restricting herself to it: *Daniel Deronda* exhibits her self-

conscious shift away from phrenology and toward the tools of ekphrasis and the prophetic portrait, which she had learned from Hawthorne's *Twice-told Tales* and *The Marble Faun*.[30] In a pivotal scene, Eliot's female protagonist Gwendolyn Harleth becomes an embodied portrait of the kind analyzed in Chapter Three: while performing a tableau from Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*, she gazes toward a wall panel which suddenly unveils the portrait "of an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms." The uncanny picture prophecies the death of Gwendolyn's cruel husband Grandcourt. But, the tableau scene also diversely revises the magic-portrait formula, for Eliot positions a female subject as both spectator and art object, self-conscious performance artist and traumatized subject. The prophetic picture on the wall, combined with the Shakespearean picture Gwendolyn herself reanimates, serves not merely as a gothic device to foreshadow future suffering, but as part of Eliot's feminist commentary on the lived experience of women. As with the female protagonists in Ouida's magic-portrait stories, Gwendolyn's survival depends on her capacity to perform new identities that challenge an ideology according to which women are fetishized as pretty pictures.

The chapter's second section concludes with a reading of Mary Penn's "Desmond's Model" (1879), one of two magic-portrait stories Penn authored, along with "A Painter's Vengeance" (1883). "Desmond's Model" exemplifies the strain of popular magic-portrait stories, published in middlebrow magazines, which use aestheticism's defining themes and motifs, such as a remote Italian Renaissance setting, a dandified male artist, and the ideal of creating a masterful "imaginary portrait"—i.e. the portrait of

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[30] See Hugh Witemeyer's *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

a long-dead historical figure portrayed using a modern-day model. Other works within this subcategory include the anonymous "Luca Morato, the Majolica Painter of Urbino" (April 1869 in *Temple Bar*) and Pauline Roose's "Paolo's Model" (1893 in *The Argosy*). In "Desmond's Model" Penn narrates a gothic adventure in the life of the dandified male artist Desmond and his best friend Thorburn, whose journey to an isolated Italian town leads to their discovery of a beautiful woman, Bianca, seemingly perfect for the imaginary portrait of Lucretia Borga Desmond hopes to create. In the end, Bianca's possessive husband nearly kills both Thorburn and Desmond; Thorburn shoots the husband to his death; and Bianca saves Desmond's life—describing him as "'beautiful…like the pictures of the blessed St. John'" (Penn 489)—before rejecting his marriage proposal. Penn's story takes recognizable elements of the Hardmanian magic-portrait tradition and reworks them toward a feminist critique, which at once condemns the fatality of men who possessively aestheticize women and depicts a female subject who defies both portraiture *and* marriage, while saving the life of a male painter made vulnerable by his pursuit of mastery.

In the chapter's final section, I resurrect Frances Forbes-Robertson's forgotten magic-portrait story, "Jotchie: A Sketch" (1894), which builds on the feminist aestheticism originated by Ouida. In "Jotchie" Forbes-Robertson creates a successful female artist protagonist who adopts the *nom de guerre* "Helen Forrester," but with tragic consequences, for her lover cannot find her and unknowingly becomes betrothed to her sister. In narrating the contemporary struggles faced by women artists, "Jotchie" represents another strain of magic-portrait fiction—works by New Woman writers—a subcategory exemplified by Amy Levy's magic-portrait novel, *The Romance of a Shop*

(1888). Like "Jotchie," *The Romance of a Shop* rewrites the genre's premise by constructing female artist characters and, in Levy's uncommon case, using photographic as opposed to painted portraits. The works studied throughout this chapter exploit the magic-portrait genre in order to revise the gender ideology that underpins it.[31] The chapter shows that, in magic-portrait fiction by late-Victorian women writers, the aesthetic education of man becomes either an object of revisionary feminist critique or a set of cultural codes to be discarded in favor of new stories about modern female artist subjects.

Chapter Five, "*Imaginary Portraits* and *Hauntings*: Magic-Portrait Fiction and the Aestheticisms of Walter Pater and Vernon Lee," analyzes the philosophies Pater and Lee articulated through their magic-portrait stories. The first section traces Pater's post-*Renaissance* turn toward the magic-portrait genre and his corresponding cultivation of the myth of Dionysus as a concrete means of conveying his philosophy of Hellenism. I argue that Pater adapted the magic-portrait genre in great part to narrate the "aesthetic education of man" as/through that of Dionysus, whose pagan, yet Christ-like spirit is reanimated in portraits of self-sacrificial male artists. After the publication of *The Renaissance*, Pater continued to write even more explicitly about ancient Greece, but

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[31] This chapter, especially my reading of Ouida's "Favette and Thargelie," builds on Talia Schaffer's *Forgotten Female Aesthetes* (2000). As Schaffer observes, aestheticism was a movement in many ways *about women* and concerned with women's issues, such as domesticity, spectatorship, and beauty, conceived as a feminine category. Yet, the magic-portrait stories published by female aesthetes (such as Ouida and Vernon Lee), those published by non-aesthetes (such as Mary Penn and Margaret Oliphant), and those published by New Women writers (such as Frances Forbes-Robertson and Amy Levy), self-consciously challenge the gender politics of male-dominated aestheticism and, in doing so, engage its misogynistic codes—not just issues that pertain to women. While Schaffer's research reveals the still-understudied network of female aesthetes who conversed and published alongside Pater and Wilde, her focus on women writers—and her rhetorical opposition between the high-cultural aestheticism of the *Yellow Book* and the popular aestheticism of *The Woman's World*—presents a division between "high" and "low," male and female, that threatens to reconfirm the very gender divide her study unsettles.

during this period he struggled with a rarely discussed volume of essays that never went to print during his lifetime, a book to be titled *Dionysus and Other Studies*. This volume, as Stefano Evangelista observes, "was to trace the growth, development, and survival through history of the romanticism of ancient Greece and present it as a trans-historical current."[32] Yet, on November 30, 1878, Pater suddenly asked his publisher to stop the printing at his own expense. His letter to Alexander Macmillan explains his decision as one motivated by the ill-fitting form his essays have taken: "I think it would be a mistake to publish the essays in their present form; some day they may take a better and more complete form" (*Letters* 34). Three months before officially abandoning the volume, Pater had published his first imaginary portrait, "The Child in the House" (1878), and he pursued his efforts to translate the abstract idea of ancient Greece into concrete form by writing almost exclusively imaginary portraits for the rest of his life—through his last publication, "Emerald Uthwart" (1892). This analysis suggests that Pater attempted to fulfill the ambitions *Dionysus and Other Studies* seemed incapable of fulfilling through his *Imaginary Portraits*, especially "Denys L'Aurreoix" (1886).

The chapter's second section examines the influence of previous magic-portrait fiction on Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* through a close reading of "Denys L'Aurreoix." This text tells the story of a Dionysian artist-hero named Denys and the unnamed, present-day traveler who pieces together Denys's long-forgotten story, just as Rossetti's museumgoer in "Hand and Soul" resurrects the forgotten life and art of Chiaro dell'Erma. Pater's detective-like narrator ventures across the French town of Auxerre, finding

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[32] See Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 44. The essays for this collection, published posthumously as *Greek Studies* (1895), represent Pater's ongoing debate with Arnold, who argued for what Pater interpreted as a rigidly Apollonian interpretation of classical Greek culture.

stained-glass and tapestried fragments of Denys's portrait in order to recreate the history

of this "denizen of old Greece itself actually finding his way back again among men"

(Pater 316). My analysis illuminates the formal strategies Pater borrows from fiction by

Hardman, Hawthorne, Poe, Browning, Rossetti, and Eliot.[33] According to the morbid,

male homoerotic theory of aesthetic influence articulated in "Denys L'Aurreoix," only

death secures meaning and sociality. This imaginary portrait celebrates the aesthetic

education and death of the Dionysian artist as a source of connectivity between past and

present, self and other, body and art. Pater's aestheticism values the authoritative male

artist's self-sacrifice through acts of death-as-rebirth, which propel the cycle of cultural

reproduction. This is the sacrifice made by both Winckelmann and Denys L'Auxerre

when they die. Rather than promoting themselves, as do magic-portrait masters like Du

Maurier's Svengali, Pater's culture heroes sacrifice themselves for art, and for the

meaning-making structures that Pater believes remain eternally alive in the Romanticism

of ancient Greece.

The chapter's third section reevaluates Vernon Lee's aestheticism in the context

of magic-portrait cultural history. Emerging in dialogue with her mentor's philosophy,

Lee forged a controversial feminist critique of the male-dominated movement.[34] Her

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[33] The following texts were especially influential for Pater: Hawthorne's "Prophetic Pictures (1837) and *The Marble Faun* (1860), Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1842), Browning's "My Last Duchess" (1842), Gogol's "The Portrait" (trans. 1847), Rossetti's "Hand and Soul" (1850), and Eliot's *Romola* (1862-3).

[34] The progression of Lee's career closely mirrored that of Pater. Both published their first novels the same year and turned towards the magic-portrait genre around the same time. Notably, Pater praised Lee's essay on "The Portrait Art of the Renaissance" in *Cornhill* (May 1883), writing, "'It is not *easy* to do what you have done in the essay on 'Portrait Art',…—to make, viz. *intellectual theorems* seem like the life's essence of the concrete, sensuous objects, from which they have been abstracted' (Pater 1970, 53-4)" (Quoted in Evangelista 97-8). Indeed, this achievement of theorizing through "concrete, sensuous objects" represents one of the shared drives that characterize both Pater's and Lee's aesthetic philosophies.

introduction to *Juvenilia: Essays on Sundry Æsthetial Questions* (1887) distills her interpretation of aestheticism as a mistake of immaturity—as an intoxicating set of juvenile aesthetic educations that fail to develop beyond childhood because they are thwarted by forays into sexual perversion.[35] Yet, aestheticism is a mistake that Lee nevertheless embraces in order to redefine it through her own artistic maturity. My analysis in this section focuses on how Lee fictionalizes a version of this critique in her first novel, *Miss Brown* (1884), a magic-portrait satire in the line of Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894). Lee's controversial *roman à clef*—which met with outrage in the aesthetic community—mocks the aestheticisms of Rossetti, Wilde, and others, who recognized themselves in her novel, just as Whistler recognized himself in *Trilby*.

Miss Brown tells the story of Anne Brown, a beautiful Italian servant girl, whom the wealthy aesthete Walter Hamlin "discovers" and seduces in the manner of Rossetti's discovery and seduction of his model-mistresses discussed in Chapter Two. Hamlin educates Anne in an effort to transform her into his own personal muse. In the end, however, she develops an independent mind, even choosing to study political economy, while Hamlin degenerates into a sexually predatory narcissist. Contextualizing the novel within the magic-portrait genre's history reveals Lee's ambivalent critique of the genre and the movement. *Miss Brown* at once challenges the Rossettian aestheticism emblematized in "Hand and Soul," while attempting to revise the "aesthetic education of man" at the genre's center in order to give voice to a woman's perspective—to a woman's aesthetic education.

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[35] Lee, *Juvenilia: Being a Second Series of Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions, Vol. I* (University of California Libraries reprint of January 1, 1887 edition). See Evangelista's reading of *Juvenilia* in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, Eds. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Palgrave Macmillan 2006), 103-5.

The chapter's last section examines a magic-portrait story collected in Lee's *Hauntings*, "Dionea" (1890), published the same year as *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In "Dionea," rather than waging a satirical attack on aestheticism, Lee uses the magic-portrait genre to revise Pater's male homosocial theorization of Dionysus. Throughout her career, she variously embraces the Dionysian—as in, for example, her article on "Dionysus in the Euganean Hills: W. H. Pater in Memorium" (1921)—but, generally she sought to rewrite its role in aestheticism's cultural imaginary so as to incorporate women and women's sexuality. I interpret "Dionea" as Lee's attempt to simultaneously revise two major strains of aestheticism's narrative of the aesthetic education of man: Pater's male homoerotic Dionysus and the *femmes fatales* through which heterosexual male artists produce masterpieces. Lee critiques these icons by conjoining them into a single character: in Dionea she portrays a Dionysian Venus figure with a "Madonna face" who proves ambiguously creative and destructive to those around her. Like Dorian Gray, Dionea alternately operates as a villain and a victim, as a source of power and as a vulnerable art object at the mercy of others. Lee's story, which ends with a fatal scene of portraiture, unsettles the alternately angelic and seductive magic-portrait icon of the tragic female sitter, all the while arguing that Dionysian aesthetic power is not exclusive to men. Instead, the drive functions as a kind of "haunting" that ambiguously pervades socioartistic worlds.

This chapter shows that, while Pater argues for a morbid, male homosocial ideal of cultural regeneration, Lee advances a cultural critique of the misogynistic, male homosocial aestheticisms established by her mentors. In this way, her critical philosophy more clearly parallels Oscar Wilde's. Together, the magic-portrait stories of Lee and

Wilde represent a *fin-de-siècle* shift from Pater's reimaginings of ancient cultural ancestors to metacritical challenges to contemporary aesthetic philosophies, such as Realism, Symbolism, and Decadence. Ultimately, Lee's aestheticism was not merely a feminist attack on the aesthetes who preceded her, but rather a complex elaboration of one of the central concepts of the magic-portrait genre: the notion that art influences life in indefinable ways.

The final chapter, "Oscar Wilde's Magic-Portrait Mashup: 'The Decay of Lying' and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," analyzes the most famous Victorian magic-portrait story. I argue that Wilde's novel makes the culture-clashing move of synthesizing popular magic-portrait plots in the act of articulating his neo-Romantic, anti-realist philosophy, proposed the previous year in "The Decay of Lying" (1889). The chapter begins by examining Wilde's diverse contributions to the magic-portrait genre in novellas, articles, and reviews, and illuminating the dozens of magic-portrait stories from which he draws to create the composite *Picture of Dorian Gray*. The chapter's second section reviews Wilde's philosophy of "The Decay of Lying" and shows how the philosophy itself depends upon the nineteenth-century canon of magic-portrait fiction for its central claims about the relations of "imitation" between Art and Nature. By synthesizing previous magic-portrait stories in order to advance a literary critical philosophy of aesthetic influence, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* reveals perhaps more than any other text the deep mutual imbrication of the magic-portrait genre and British aestheticism.

In the chapter's final section, I explore the novel's radical sexual politics, which represent Wilde's most explosive collision of high and low cultural codes. In Dorian

Gray Wilde places a male protagonist, not in the authoritative position of the masterful artist, but in that of the tragic female sitter. This reworking of the heteronormative generic formula redeploys the Victorian semiotics of the fallen woman in the framework of a dandified male subject. Wilde constructs in Dorian Gray a kind of gender-doubled, Dionysian anti-hero, who constantly alternates between the feminine and the masculine, the homosexual and the heterosexual, art object and artistic subject, victim and villain. My reading unsettles conventionally rigid homoerotic interpretations of the male circle at the story's center, exposing the sexual and gender multiplicity toward which Wilde's philosophical fiction repeatedly strives. Fulfilling the ideals proposed in "The Decay of Lying," Dorian exists more clearly as a philosophical possibility—made up of the material of literary critical references—than as a character tied to the "real" world. Wilde's neo-Romantic magic-portrait mashup tests the fault lines between high and low art, fiction and philosophy, homosexuality and heterosexuality—categories more intimately connected than his audiences liked to think.

My dissertation ends with an Afterword, "The Death of a Genre, 1900-1929," in which I discuss the magic-portrait story's relatively rapid demise and reinvention in the wake of Wilde's explosive novel. Although Vernon Lee, Arthur Symons, and Edith Wharton published important works within the magic-portrait tradition during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf contributed more diversely, if obliquely, than any other author to the genre's afterlife. Her reinventions can be found in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando* (1928), and *Between the Acts* (1941). Stretching across the long nineteenth century, the intertwined histories of magic-portrait fiction and British aestheticism reveal the tenacity of the concept of the aesthetic education of man—

a concept that endures from late-eighteenth-century philosophies of *Bildung* all the way to Woolf's Lily Briscoe, one of several female artist characters whose stories challenge male heterosexual definitions of art and artistic reproduction.

CHAPTER I

THE AESTHETIC EDUCATION OF MAN:
THE PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS OF MAGIC-PORTRAIT FICTION

In the first scene of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Basil

Hallward confesses his adoration for Dorian with this proclamation:

> 'He is all my art to me now,' said the painter gravely. 'I sometimes think, Harry,
> that there are only two eras of any importance in the world's history. The first is
> the appearance of a new medium for art, and the second is the appearance of a
> new personality for art also. What the invention of oil-painting was to the
> Venetians, the face of Antinous was to late Greek sculpture, and the face of
> Dorian Gray will some day be to me.' (Wilde 12)

Basil's testimonial offers more of a philosophical analysis than a personal confession.

Rather than describing the physical appeal of his handsome sitter or the state of his own

emotions, Basil argues for a capacious art-historical analogy that links "the invention of

oil-painting" and "the face of Antinous" to "the face of Dorian Gray." The painter's

declaration of love becomes indistinguishable from a theory of how "a new medium" or

"a new personality" can punctuate world history—a theory through which Wilde

deliberately invokes Walter Pater's Hegelian interpretation of art history in his essay on

"Winckelmann" (1867). This passage, appearing in perhaps the most famous scene

within the most famous Victorian magic-portrait story, distills the combination of

aesthetic philosophy and erotic romance that characterizes the genre. As Wilde's

philosophical and literary allusions suggest, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* self-consciously

originates as much in Pater's aestheticism as it does in the popular magic-portrait genre.

Indeed, as this chapter will argue, the magic-portrait genre and Pater's

aestheticism share intellectual and formal origins in a rich network of Romantic

philosophy and fiction. The developments of the genre and the movement across the nineteenth century are so intricately intertwined that tracing the origins of the magic-portrait story means addressing how the architects of aestheticism reanimated the works of their Romantic predecessors. When we account for the Romantic theories and artworks that formed the basis of innovations by such Victorians as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Pater, and Wilde, we discover that the literary historical origins, rise, climax, and decline of magic-portrait fiction coincides with the lifespan of the Aesthetic Movement in England. Prototypical magic-portrait stories first appear in gothic romances of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth-century and, not coincidentally, Wilde repeatedly uses the terms "romantic" and "Romanticism" in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and throughout his critical volume *Intentions* (1891). This literary historical trajectory evokes the truism that Victorian aesthetes were haunted by Romanticism—that they were the "Last Romantics," to borrow Graham Hough's book title.[1] Yet, while critics commonly observe the pattern in Victorian art writing of alluding to Romantic artists and artworks, we lack satisfying answers to questions such as: What exactly characterizes aestheticism's debt to Romanticism? What distinguishes the "romantic" from the "aesthetic"?[2]

There is little criticism to draw upon for constructing the origin story of magic-portrait fiction since the form has not yet been identified as a genre; more surprisingly though, criticism delineating the Romantic origin story of British aestheticism remains

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[1] In the revised version of "The Decay of Lying" (1889, 1891), for example, Wilde claims through the character Vivian that "Life goes faster than Realism, but Romanticism is always in front of Life" (*Intentions* 55). Wilde thus names an *older* aesthetic movement to advocate the "faster" modernity of the movement he flamboyantly represented. Oddly, then, his terminology keeps the very movement for which he fought unnamed and undefined.

[2] Often such tricky questions are complicated rather than answered, as in Forest Pyle's recent study of the "aestheticism" found in Romantic poetry (Pyle, "Kindling and Ash: Radical Aestheticism in Keats and Shelley" in *Studies in Romanticism* 42:4, Winter 2003).

limited. Mario Praz's *The Romantic Agony* (1933) represents one of the only book-length

studies of poetry and prose fiction to directly address the legacy of Romantic themes and

tropes across the long nineteenth century. Praz traces what he calls "romantic passions,"

namely sexual drives and images, from "'Medusean' beauty" in Goethe, Shelley, and

Keats to "English sadism" in Swinburne and Toulet.[3] In *The Last Romantics* (1949),

Graham Hough gathers studies of Ruskin, Rossetti, Morris, Pater, Whistler, and Yeats,

but only in his introduction does he sketch shifts that define the Romantic-Victorian

transition, such as the increasing emphasis on the visual arts inspired by Ruskin's *Modern

Painters*.[4] Ironically, this scarcity of studies may derive from the fact that everyone

already *knows* that the Victorian aesthetes were the last Romantics.[5] The question in

recent Victorian studies that continually attracts attention away from the neo-

Romanticism of aestheticism is that of how Victorian aesthetes contributed to the rise of

modernism.[6] Further complicating matters is the fact that the task of defining

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[3] Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*. Trans. Angus Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933; 2nd. Ed. 1951).

[4] Graham Hough, *The Last Romantics* (London: George Duckworth, 1949). Ultimately, Hough's book resembles Walter Hamilton's inaugural study of *The Aesthetic Movement in England* (1882), which similarly lacks any extended discussion of the movement's origins or comparative relations to Romanticism. See also Kenneth Daley's *The Rescue of Romanticism: Walter Pater and John Ruskin* (The Ohio University Press, 2001), which focuses on how Pater borrowed from Ruskin while "rescuing" aspects and definitions of Romanticism dismissed by Ruskin.

[5] To explore the questions and problems evoked by the Romantic inheritance seems unnecessary because the very existence of that inheritance represents a firmly rooted, unproblematic fact. In *Professions of Taste*, for example, Jonathan Freedman describes British aestheticism as "a moment in which the enterprise we have since come to see as central to the tradition of Anglo-American poetry and prose—the Romantic tradition—reaches its moment of climax, or its moment of exhaustion, or both" (Freedman 2). Rather than elaborating on the Romantic-Victorian distinctions within this tradition, Freedman goes on to delve acutely into the novels of Henry James.

[6] Generally speaking, scholarship about aestheticism is overwhelmingly focused on how its verbal and visual arts shaped later cultural developments, as opposed to how they appropriate and

aestheticism is itself a daunting one—daunting enough to consume an entire study without any sustained attention to literary predecessors. Jonathan Freedman articulates this difficulty when he names two competing aestheticisms in late-Victorian England: that "of fashion and frivolity and that of austere or flamboyant Romantic fervor and social alienation" (Freedman 2). Freedman's formulation emblematizes without explaining the two primary symptoms of a single problem: aestheticism's constitutive resistance to easy definition and its still-ambiguous relationship to "Romantic fervor and social alienation."

This chapter traces the Romantic origins of magic-portrait fiction from the English and German aesthetic philosophies that diversely grapple with what Friedrich Schiller's epistolary treatise terms *The Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794) to prototypical magic-portrait stories by English gothic novelists and German fantasy writers, and finally, to the first magic-portrait story "Colonna the Painter: A Tale of Italy and the Arts" (1829) by forgotten English author Joseph Hardman. Like the art-historical assertions Wilde voices through Basil, the earliest magic-portrait stories engage contemporary philosophies about art and aesthetic experience. The chapter's first section builds on Linda Dowling's study of *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* to show which Romantic philosophers shaped the Victorian debate about the "aesthetic education of man"—a debate that was waged, I argue, as much in magic-portrait fiction as it was in non-fictional art criticism. The philosophers positioned at the center of this conversation include, among others, Shaftesbury, Kant, Schiller, and

reinvent the arts of European Romanticism. See, for example, the recent works that have enriched our understanding of the shift from Victorian to modernist aesthetics, such as Rachel Teukolsky's *The Literate Eye: Victorian Art Writing and Modernist Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2009) and Andrew Eastham's *Aesthetic Afterlives: Irony, Literary Modernity, and the Ends of Beauty* (Continuum, 2011).

Hegel, whose works constitute what Dowling calls the "Whig aesthetic tradition," stretching from Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711) to Wilde's *Intentions* (1891). In order to illustrate how the Kantian theories within this Whig aesthetic tradition—especially Schiller's—saw an unlikely legacy in Victorian magic-portrait fiction, I focus my analysis on Pater's "Winckelmann." Categorically, this essay does not fit as neatly into the magic-portrait genre as do Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), but the essay represents a crucial text for our understanding of the genre's origins, for Pater's paean to Winckelmann forges his argument for the regenerative modernity of the prose romance for Victorian society. In "Winckelmann" Pater advocates the strategy he himself will take to realize "high" aesthetic philosophy through the "low" aesthetic form of prose fiction.[7]

In the chapter's next section, we see how fiction writers in England and Germany—particularly Horace Walpole, Matthew Lewis, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and E. T. A. Hoffmann—lay the foundations for a new genre through which writers take up the philosophical questions surrounding the "aesthetic education of man." The gothic and experimental fictions of these authors emerged from a rich exchange between Germany and England, and between and among philosophers and novelists, who published during an era defined by what today we would call "interdisciplinary" thought and literature. My analysis of this vibrant network of German and English Romantic writers begins with the first "haunted portraits," found in gothic romances by Walpole and Lewis. I examine the walking portrait in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* and the seductive portrait in Lewis's *The Monk* to illuminate how the magic-portrait genre will

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[7] Note that this section's focus on "Winckelmann," as opposed to one of Pater's more explicit magic-portrait stories, is an expediency—the product of a major time crunch—and will be changed, along with many other aspects of this chapter!

adapt and diverge from the Gothic tradition. I argue that the writers whose works shaped

the incipient genre—especially Goethe, Hoffmann, and Hardman—borrowed from

English gothic novels, but, in their (unwitting) efforts to shape a new genre, they engaged

German aesthetic philosophy far more than they did the gothic house of horrors. This

analysis concludes with a foray into Hoffmann's highly "interdisciplinary" oeuvre and a

close reading of one of his prototypical magic-portrait stories, "Meister Martin, Master

Cooper, and His Men" (1819), which tells the story of two male artists who discover who

they want to be and how they can win possession of a beautiful woman through their

struggles with different artistic practices. The chapter ends with a close reading of the

first magic-portrait story, Hardman's "Colonna the Painter" (1829), which exhibits the

defining features of the genre and its variegated use-value for Victorian aesthetes.

I interpret the birth of the magic-portrait story with Hoffmann's tales and

Hardman's "Colonna the Painter" as the generic crystallization of a narrative premise that

synthesizes philosophical and literary elements of German and English Romanticism: a

magic-portrait story is a *Künstlerroman*, or story of a male artist's self-development, that

revolves around the painted portrait of a beautiful woman. As we will see over the course

of this dissertation, the magic-portrait stories that theorize a male character's aesthetic

education vary widely. Male protagonists in magic-portrait fiction range from Hardman's

triumphant painter-hero to Pater's homoerotic artist-martyrs to Wilde's Faustian master

artist-critic. The philosophical question of how aesthetic experience can suture divisions

in the social subject increasingly slips into the (no less philosophical) question of how a

male artist can achieve mastery, and what that mastery looks like in a social context.

These questions pervade magic-portrait fiction. Over the course of the nineteenth century,

the fictionalized aesthetic education of man, so fundamental to the Victorian *Zeitgeist*, will become alternately heroic, hopeful, disconcerting, and fatally nightmarish—as in the tragic "education" Dorian Gray receives from Wilde's Mephistopheles, Lord Henry Wotton.

As the history sketched here suggests, my analysis of the magic-portrait genre's philosophical origins alters our understanding of aestheticism in ways that go beyond the nominal inclusion of Romanticism into the conversation, which, for most, invokes Blake, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. I follow Linda Dowling and Elizabeth Prettejohn in arguing that aestheticism responded to the calls of a specifically German and English Romanticism, which means shifting our attention to the neglect influences of Hardman and Hoffmann on Victorian culture.[8] Perhaps most importantly, the magic-portrait genre's genealogy of mutually constitutive philosophical and fictional texts helps us reinsert prose fiction into the history of British aestheticism. Doing so means redefining the "high" in the "high culture" designation conventionally assigned to the movement.

Aestheticism, as Carolyn Williams incisively defines it, "proposes itself as a systematic attitude of self-consciousness, a coherent stance or perspective on things, a method of attention."[9] She goes on to say that "Pater specifically addresses himself to

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[8] See Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (University Press of Virginia 1996), and Elizabeth Prettejohn, *Art for Art's Sake: Aestheticism in Victorian Painting* (Yale University Press 2007). More recently, Jonathan Bate has used the phrase "Twilight of Romanticism" to compare the Goethe-inspired reanimations of Shakespeare in works by Wagner, Swinburne, and Pater ("Shakespeare in the Twilight of Romanticism: Wagner, Swinburne, Pater" in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 146, 2010). In the context of my argument, Bate's article is a particularly useful (and unusual) one in that, like Prettejohn, Bate addresses the influence of German Romantic writers on Victorian aesthetes.

[9] Carolyn Williams, *Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 27.

articulating *theoretically* the function and operation of 'aesthetic criticism'" (Williams

27, emphasis added). The key terms Williams uses here—"self-consciousness," "method

of attention," "theoretical articulation"—capture the central roles "high" philosophical

and critical reflection play in the culture of aestheticism. At the same time, however,

Pater sought throughout his career to endorse a philosophically rigorous "method of

attention" that revalidates the "low" sensuous experience of art. Jessica Feldman reminds

us of this facet of the movement: "the aesthetic in its wider meaning," she writes,

> concerned itself with the possibilities of a 'low'—because sensuous, ordinary, or
> material—critique of rationality. Aestheticist writers in practice followed suit in this
> suspicion of cerebralism and abstraction: when Baudelaire, Poe, or Swinburne desired
> to 'efface' moralism from literature, it was the abstract law of bourgeois culture they
> sought to counterbalance with improving moral 'arguments' made of the sensuous
> elements of sound, rhythm, and imagery.[10]

As the following readings show, the "suspicion of cerebralism and abstraction" exhibited

by the founders and developers of magic-portrait fiction manifests itself as a deep

engagement with philosophy in the effort to re-form it. These re-formations happen in the

unlikeliest of places: prose fiction.

I. Unphilosophical Aesthetic Philosophy: Pater and His Predecessors

     Walter Pater begins his literary portrait of Johann Joachim Winckelmann in *The*

Renaissance (1873) by turning to another writer's words about the German art historian:

"Goethe's fragments of art-criticism contain a few pages of strange pregnancy on the

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[10] Feldman, Jessica R. *Victorian Modernism: Pragmatism and the Varieties of Aesthetic*
Experience (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 59. See also Friedrich Nietzsche's
physiological aesthetic philosophy, especially as articulated in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and his
critique of rationality, which depends on a redefinition of art.

character of Winckelmann" (*Ren* 114).[11] Only by essay's end do we grasp the meaning of the word "pregnancy" in this sentence. That is, once we have traversed Pater's narrative vision of Winckelmann's life, we see that Goethe's art criticism swells with a "pregnancy" of unrealized semantic and historical force until Pater performs his reproductive labor in the body of this text. Pater's "Winckelmann" enacts the rebirth of a distinctly German-English line of male homosocial influences, from Winckelmann to Goethe—through Pater—to the readers who choose to carry on the ancient Western project of cultural regeneration. Winckelmann's contributions to the lived and represented history of art emblematize this renovating project, preserved by the men who think and create at the center of historical moments of "Renaissance." Shortly after this loaded opening line, Pater invokes yet another famous German Romantic to validate his focus on Winckelmann:

> Hegel, in his lectures on the Philosophy of Art, has also passed a remarkable judgment on Winckelmann's writings:—'Winckelmann, by contemplation of the ideal works of the ancients, received a sort of inspiration, through which he opened a new sense for the study of art. He is to be regarded as one of those who, in the sphere of art, have known how to initiate a new organ for the human spirit.' (*Ren* 114)

Pater's introductory echo of Goethe's and Hegel's appraisals situates his portrait of Winckelmann in a philosophical tradition of German aesthetics while at the same time privileging a rather unphilosophical achievement: Winckelmann's creation of "'a new sense…a new organ for the human spirit.'" Pater's reanimation of a phrase in Hegel's lectures that includes the words "sense" and "organ" exemplifies his career-long insistence upon simultaneously engaging philosophical aesthetics and analyzing physical

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[11] Pater's essay on Winckelmann was first published in 1867, making it one of his earliest published works, following his essay on "Coleridge's Writings" (1866).

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realities. For Pater, a Renaissance of art in Victorian England had to involve a rejuvenation and legitimization of the bodily sensations enabled by the experience of art—the very sensations denigrated by Protestant orthodoxy and Victorian social conventions.

Yet, throughout "Winckelmann" Pater's allusions concentrate our attention not on other aesthetic philosophers, much less other art critics, such as Ruskin or Arnold; rather, the voice privileged above all others is that of German novelist, dramatist, and polymath: Goethe. "For, after all," Pater declares of Winckelmann, "he is infinitely less than Goethe" (145). This strategic hierarchy of writers illustrates a central object of praise throughout Pater's career—prose fiction—which seems surprising given the major genre with which we associate Pater is "aesthetic criticism."[12] In "Style" and elsewhere, he attempts to elevate the degraded form by using the term "imaginative prose," rather than "novel" or "fiction" (*Appreciations* 12). In the final paragraph of "Winckelmann," having just referenced Goethe's *Bildungsroman Wilhelm Meister* and Hugo's novel *Travailleurs de la Mer*, Pater returns to Goethe's literature in order to herald the romance novel as the ideal form for modernity: "Certainly, in Goethe's romances, and even more in the romances of Victor Hugo, we have high examples of modern art dealing thus with modern life, regarding that life as the modern mind must regard it, yet reflecting upon it blitheness and repose" (*Ren* 143, 147, 149).[13] This earnest celebration of romances—

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[12] See scholars, e.g. Paul Barolsky, who have interepreted Pater's criticism as a mode of fiction.

[13] This punch line to Pater's essay follows a sweeping study of art forms across the ages in the line of Hegel's introductory lectures, in which he famously constructs a history of art's development and decline in use-value in the face of philosophy's rise as the mode essential to post-Romantic modernity. Whereas Pater uses Winckelmann and Goethe as luminaries whose works exemplify the praxis for which he argues, his main philosophical interlocutors are Hegel and Schiller.

particularly of German Romantic fiction and nineteenth-century French fiction—as "high examples of modern art" seems strange, even outright contradictory, in the context of existing critical narratives of British aestheticism. The very idea of an aesthete praising prose fiction runs counter to scholarship focused on criticism, painting, and poetry. Why would a Victorian art critic explicitly writing within the authoritative tradition of philosophical aesthetics advocate the novel of all forms?

Answering this question requires understanding the distinctly philosophical and political motivations that drove Pater to embrace fiction in strategic and coded ways. His turn toward the prose romance served his advocacy of what Matthew Arnold understood as self-culture.[14] In *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy*, Dowling provides an intellectual history of the Victorian project of self-culture for which Ruskin, Arnold, Morris, Pater, and Wilde variously fought; Dowling locates the origins of this project in the Whig aesthetic tradition, a lineage of English and German thought, which crosses the categories of moral, political, and aesthetic philosophy and begins with Shaftesbury and the Scottish Common Sense school of George Berkeley and Thomas Reid.[15] *The Vulgarization of Art* explains the long lifespan of Shaftesbury's theory of *sensus communis*, which rests on the assertion that all human beings share the capacity to form a judgment about beauty. The story Dowling tells of *The Vulgarization of Art* in Victorian criticism and theory is at once groundbreakingly insightful and not yet fully

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[14] See Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*. Ed. Stefan Collini. New York: Cambridge UP, 1993.

[15] According to Billie Andrew Inman, the "undergraduate register at the Queen's College Library shows that" Pater's self-imposed study of philosophy during the early 1860s "proceeded from Fichte to Hobbes, to Ritter's *History of Ancient Philosophy* in Alexander J. W. Morrison's translation, to Hume, Kant, Schleiermacher, Reid, Berkeley, Bacon, Locke, Hegel, Lucretius, [and] Plato's *Theœtetus*" before returning again to Fichte and Plato (Inman 16).

realized by existing scholarship, for we still lack a history of the *actual* "vulgarization of art"—that is, the Victorian turn from philosophical treatises to "imaginative prose," which renders nineteenth-century letters so persistently difficult to assimilate into narratives of Western aesthetics.

In magic-portrait fiction we find the corollary history to Dowling's enormously useful account. The genre's founding and development represents the "secret"—secret because vulgarly popular—history of the fictional texts that diversely enacted and challenged Shaftesburyian philosophical imperatives, the very imperatives Dowling rightly interprets as fundamental to the "literary Liberalism" of Victorian aestheticism. The ever politically driven, reform-oriented Victorians, influenced as much by Kant as they were by John Stuart Mill, attempted to realize, challenge, or revise the speculative ideals articulated by post-Enlightenment thinkers. The chosen vehicle for doing so was neither the law nor the political treatise, but rather, prose fiction. The authors represented in this history exploited the troublesomely midde-class and increasingly commercialized, yet powerfully elastic aesthetic form in order to enliven or shatter Romantic ideas about the liberal social subject.

Pater's philosophy of "new senses" and "new organs" was a politically motivated one. He attempted to endorse through his own means the political campaign of Arnoldian Culture, a set of reform-oriented ideas with which Arnold self-consciously reanimated Shaftesbury's theory of *sensus communis*. While typically associated with moral philosophy, Shaftesbury's theory, as Dowling explains,

> had in fact emerged in response to a sense of political or historical crisis
> uncannily like that of Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy*. The resemblance is not
> accidental, for *Culture and Anarchy* is the great Victorian expression of an idea
> that had originated with Shaftesbury in the period of political demoralization

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following the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the beginning of what I shall be calling the tradition of Whig aesthetics" (Dowling 2).

Shaftesbury's response to political upheaval became a proposed solution for the problem of the liberal state, or more precisely, the problem of how to legitimize a government founded on the will of the people. He saw in the universal human capacity to appreciate beauty a legitimizing source for the liberal polity. Arnold's concept of "Culture" builds on this proposition, signifying (to borrow Dowling's phrase) an "induction into a polis of the mind or spirit where people become, through a lived experience of art, literature, and ideas, the better selves that had before lain undeveloped due to the accidents of social circumstance" (2-3). It was self-culture that could legitimize and potentially ensure the democratic objectives for which Whig political reformers and art critics alike campaigned.

In *The Renaissance* Pater offered not just lyrical, art-critical, and philosophical narrative portraits of male artists' lives, from Botticelli to Da Vinci, but also a practical method for his readers to participate in the Victorian liberal Renaissance. Pater exhorts his readers to ask the questions, "What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me?" (xxix). Anyone—the "high and low, learned and unlearned" (104), as Edmund Burke had put it in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757)—could respond to art in this way. However, while these questions heed the Shaftesburyian proposition of the universal capacity for aesthetic judgment, they contest the most influential of all adaptations of that notion: Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. For Kant, a person's experience with art, as distinct from another's, is irrelevant—even invalid—to the extent that judgments of taste are subjectively universal. Dowling

explains:

> Kant himself declared that it would be 'ridiculous' (*lächerlich*) for anyone to say 'This object…is beautiful *for me*. For if it merely pleases *him*, he must not call it *beautiful*' (52). Kant rejected the formulation 'beautiful *for me*' because its emphasis on private sensation denies the assumption that taste judgments are in a vital sense public.[16]

This distinction is crucial to Kant's theory because defining a judgment of taste in terms of the absence of any personal interest whatsoever is what permits us to assert its universality. And the universality of aesthetic experience is what gives it the potential power to ameliorate social and political ills wrought out of the modern disjuncture between personal and public spheres. In other words, the political efficacy—and, for Kant, the logical proof—of universal, "supersensible" aesthetic judgments depends upon their function as a source of disinterested unity for alienated social subjects in a politically uncertain world.

To the chagrin of many Victorian readers, Kant conveyed his profoundly influential account of the subjective universality of aesthetic judgments in nearly incomprehensible language.[17] At least, so thought Pater, who disagreed with Kant in the

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[16] Citing Paul Guyer, Dowling also notes the degree to which Kant borrowed from the Scottish school in reaching these conclusions: "As Paul Guyer demonstrated, Kant absorbed this assumption more or less unreflectingly from Shaftesbury and the Scottish common sense school, and it confronted Kant with the daunting task of providing both a working model for the operation of taste judgment and a rigorous logical proof for the claim of its subjective universality. This enormously difficult problem was undertaken—and ostensibly solved—in Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790), which so massively influenced all subsequent discussions of aesthetics" (Dowling 82).

[17] This conversation about the difficulty of understanding German philosophy was common enough to include German writers themselves: "'People are always complaining that German authors write for such a small circle, and even sometimes just for themselves', says Friedrich Schlegel (*Athenäum Fragments*, no. 275)" (Qutd. in Simpson 17). David Simpson observes the ambivalent pattern among British readers in particular of complaining about German obfuscation (and misinterpreting some ideas), while nevertheless reading the works coming out of Germany: "Hegel remains difficult for many modern readers, despite the degree to which so many of his general emphases and ideas have passed into common knowledge. These difficulties, and others

very act of advancing his Shaftesburyian call. Pater saw the "sad-coloured world of abstract philosophy" as the death chamber for the sociopolitical power art possessed to engender "a more liberal and comely way of conceiving life" in England's disturbingly industrialized, alienating modern state ("Poems by William Morris" 309; *Ren* 1). Properly contextualized, Pater's celebration of Goethe in "Winckelmann" recalls Goethe's famous introduction of Faust's character: "I have pursued, alas, philosophy, / Jurisprudence, and medicine, / And, help me God, theology, / With fervent zeal through thick and thin. / And here, poor fool, I stand once more, / No wiser than I was before" (Goethe *Faust* 12). What Pater attacks in Philosophy is not its failure to convey wisdom, but rather, its denigration of the human body and the individual senses—a denigration that Kant sanctions through his insistence upon disinterestedness.[18] For Pater, retaining the psychological criterion of value for aesthetic experience meant sacrificing the possibility of political and social liberation through art—through the very "supersensible" source Kantian philosophers had defined, however hesitatingly, as having such powers. Pater was responding not only to Whig aesthetic philosophies, but also to a multifarious "loss to the life of the senses" caused by Victorian social and religious orthodoxies. To restore this lost life demanded a revalidation of sensuousness and individualism. Moreover, the modern "student of aesthetics" must restore the senses in theme and in

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like them, led to widespread misunderstandings and frustrations among the first generations of readers, especially in Britain. Crabb Robinson half complained of Schelling's 'most profound abstraction & enthusiastick mysticism' (1929, p. 117), and Hazlitt attributed not a little of Coleridge's obscurity to his having 'wandered into Germany and lost himself in the labyrinths of the Hartz Forest and of the Kantean philosophy, and amongst the cabalistic names of Fichte and Schelling and Lessing and God knows who' (1930, p. 732)" (Simpson 17).

[18] Significantly, what Kant seeks to theorize in the third *Critique* is disinterested *pleasure*, which helps explain why Pater could at once embrace his ideas and be frustrated by their implications for readers who miss this motivation entirely.

form. Put differently: Pater's conceived Renaissance of art battled not philosophy, but

philosophical abstractions and absolutisms that he thought shattered philosophy's social

and subjective power.

Pater was not as antagonistic to philosophy as many critics suggest, and we must

qualify some of the claims made about his approach to the philosophical in order to refine

our understanding of his aesthetic project. Pater's argument was a formalist one—an

argument about *how* philosophy could be most effectively represented and used in

modern life. As these analyses suggest, he did not simply cast off philosophy, but rather

deeply engaged its history, beginning with his favorite figure: Plato. In addition to Plato,

he found plenty of precursors in German Romantic circles to support his formalist efforts

to rewrite philosophy *into* imaginative prose and thereby unite what we now call the

different "disciplines." Such precursors include Schelling, for example, who as David

Simpson observes, "proposes that philosophy and science will return to the poetic origin

from which they originally derived" and Friedrich Schlegel, who "anticipates the

eventual unity of science, poetry, and philosophy" (Simpson 9). In the Preface to *The

Renaissance*, Pater laments the rise of disciplinarity:

> Art and poetry, philosophy and the religious life, and that other life of refined
> pleasure and action in the conspicuous places of the world, are each of them
> confined to its own circle of ideas, and those who prosecute either of them are
> generally little curious of the thoughts of others. There come, however, from time
> to time, eras of more favourable conditions, in which the thoughts of men draw
> nearer together than is their wont, and the many interests of the intellectual world
> combine in one complete type of general culture. (xxxii-xxxiii)

With a eulogistic tone, Pater advocates a "complete type of general culture" that could

unify the high and the low, the philosophical and the artistic, the religious and the

sensual. Giving life to a "general culture" of this sort demanded—indeed, was possible

only through—the elevation of prose fiction, a middle-class form accessible to and produced by the widest range of the population.

The genre Pater cultivated in his attempts to revise and enact ideals articulated throughout the Shaftesburyian Whig aesthetic tradition already existed in a body of English and German Romantic fiction, a body that includes the works of Goethe and Hoffmann addressed in this chapter's next section. Writing within the same richly "interdisciplinary" circle, these writers engaged philosophers, such as Hegel, Fichte, and Schelling, who rebelled (some more strongly than others) against the Enlightenment rationality and transcendental abstractions with which Kant is typically associated. Indeed, the prose works of Hoffmann in the early nineteenth century and of Pater in the late nineteenth century respond more clearly and directly to Schiller than to Kant. It is perhaps unsurprising that Pater and his fellow Victorian practitioners of literary Liberalism engaged Schiller, for Schiller's epistolary treatise *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794) emerged—just like the treatises of Shaftesbury and Arnold—out of a moment of disillusioning political upheaval: the French Revolution. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* reacts as much to Kant as it does to the devastating violence and governmental failures Schiller had just witnessed. For our purposes, Schiller's bold theory would, even more than others of the Kantian tradition, anticipate the "aesthetic educations" narrated in philosophical fictions throughout the nineteenth century.

For Schiller, an aesthetic education represents the ideal means of resolving the essential divisions that alienate human subjects. Every human being is torn, that is, between the "sensuous drive" (*Sinnestrieb*) and the "formal drive" (*Formtrieb*)—between passion and reason, material desires and intellectual reflections. Advancing Kant's thesis,

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Schiller introduces the "play drive" (*Spieltrieb*), or the dialectical process of imaginative

"free play" through aesthetic experience, which secures the ideal, if never guaranteed,

reconciliation of these universal human tensions. The innovative concept of the "play

drive" revises Kant's hierarchizing validation of the cognitive function above bodily

experience. Indeed, as Dowling observes, Schiller "courageously decided to admit the

sensuous dimension of human life to full rights with the rational, insisting that 'it is the

task of culture' to 'do justice to both drives equally: not simply to maintain the rational

against the sensuous, but the sensuous against the rational too'" (Dowling 86). Following

Shaftesbury more than Kant, Schiller asserts that "[e]very individual man, it may be said,

carries in disposition and determination a pure ideal man within himself, with whose

unalterable unity it is the great task of his existence, throughout all his vicissitudes, to

harmonize" (Fourth Letter 31). In this letter, Schiller goes on to use terms such as the

"mechanical artist," the "fine artist," and the "statesman-artist" to define the different

modes through which individual artist subjects might operate in the context of a political

state (32-3). No wonder Schiller appealed to Arnold and Pater, what with their

Shaftesburyian projects for aesthetic democracy.[19]

Yet, Pater went further than Schiller in adapting Kant's formalist revelation of

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[19] Tellingly, given the afterlife of Schiller's ideas in philosophically and politically charged fiction, Reginald Snell proclaims (in his 1954 translation of Schiller's *Letters* that "as a piece of philosophical thinking they may be gravely faulty, as an essay in sustained argument they may be occasionally perplexing, but as an educational manifesto they are pure gold" (Snell 16). Notably, Plato—whom Pater probably admired more than any other philosopher, choosing as he did to devote his last published work, *Plato and Platonism*, to the classical thinker—stands at the beginning of what Herbert Read identifies as a sadly intermittent genealogy of thought about "education through art." Snell quotes this line from Herbert Read's *Education through Art* (1943): "To quote Herbert Read: 'It is surely one of the curiosities of the history of philosophy that one of the most cherished notions of this great man [Plato] has never been taken seriously by any of his followers, Schiller alone being an exception'" (Snell 17). While Pater is perennially neglected in histories of philosophy, he certainly stands as a philosopher who took up Plato's and Schiller's projects in his own writings.

subjective universality toward a model that could account more fully for sensuous experience. Pater embraces Schiller's aesthetic education of man, but revises its order of operations. Whereas Schiller exalts beauty as an elevation of concrete experiences up to the "land of knowledge" distilled in abstractions, Pater exalts the power of art to articulate knowledge buried in abstractions ("The Artists").[20] As Pater puts it in his Preface to *The Renaissance*: "To define beauty, not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find, not its universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of aesthetics" (xxix). And this goal he achieves in the text that follows by narrating at once his own aesthetic education, formed through his personal investigations into the lives of Renaissance artists, as well as a set of magic-portrait stories that narrate the aesthetic educations of Abelard, Mirandola, Botticelli, Robbia, Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Giorgione, Bellay, and Winckelmann.

The romantic yet cerebral narratives that comprise *The Renaissance* were politically charged in their very focus on the individual lives of dead artists, for through these portraits Pater supplies a practical methodology for his Victorian readers to follow. It is in the unphilosophical form of this model where his revisionary embrace of Schiller wages a debate with Hegel. Pater's critique of Hegel helps explain how the aesthetic education of man could become so central to both elite and popular magic-portrait fiction

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[20] Pater was perhaps as much frustrated with Schiller's *Letters* as he was inspired by Schiller's poem, "The Artists," which ends with these hopeful lines: "In clearness thousandfold thus throw / Your magic round the ravished gaze,— / Into one stream of light thus flow,— / One bond of truth that ne'er decays!" The same kind of fervor for the power of "clearness thousandfold" reappears in the art criticism of Ruskin and Pater alike.

in the Victorian wake of the Whig aesthetic tradition.[21] As the above analyses suggest, Whig aesthetic philosophers had tantalizingly offered, yet gloomily undermined the prospect taken up by the Victorians: that art could regenerate society. Hegel was rather more optimistic than most in that he proposed a theory of history as a progressive dialectic whereby the spirit of the age (*Zeitgeist*) achieves self-consciousness. But, for Hegel, philosophy is the ideal vehicle for the progression of *Zeitgeist*, owing to its unsullied realization of consciousness, in contrast to art, which sordidly depends on material embodiment.[22] Across Western history, Hegel thinks, art has reached higher heights in realizing consciousness and refining the human spirit (*Geist*), only to suffer death—at least, death in the degree of its usefulness—during the Romantic age. Art, Hegel famously writes, "is, and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past" (Hegel 12). Pater at once cultivated and rejected Hegel's ideas: he borrowed Hegel's sweeping visions of entire cultural histories, yet condemned his glorification of philosophy over art.[23] For Pater, art served the highest function for human progress

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[21] Along with Hegel, Dowling includes Jacob Burckhardt and Jules Michelet among the many thinkers Pater engaged for his political project: "To celebrate the Renaissance in Pater's terms," she observes, "was to join G. W. F. Hegel and Jacob Burckhardt in hailing its progressive and individualist character and, even more, to unite with Jules Michelet in understanding it as a specifically liberal revolution" (Dowling 77).

[22] Schiller agreed with Hegel: "subject matter," he writes in *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, "always has a limiting effect upon the spirit, and it is only from form that true aesthetic freedom can be looked for" (Schiller 155).

[23] In his portrait of Da Vinci Pater explicitly contests Hegel's conviction that the "modern idea" can no longer be embodied in art. At the close of his vision of the Mona Lisa, Pater summarizes a linchpin of Hegelian thought: "modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life" (*Ren* 80). He then challenges this assertion with a work of art: "Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy [of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences], the symbol of the modern idea" (*Ren* 80). Her image at once *embodies* and (in a nod to the French Symbolists) *symbolizes* the spirit of modernity. For Pater, history at once disrupts and empowers art objects in a life-and-death dialectic through which onlookers may access the synthetic "outward form" of

precisely *because* of its ties to material reality. The key for Pater was subject matter. The subject that could render art powerful in its very dependence on "matter" was the matter of a man's aesthetic education. Schiller's *Letters* crystallized for him the subject that could make even a romance novel high art.

The "aesthetic education of man" thus names a theme simultaneously at the heart of the Victorian "Spirit of the Age"—by which I cite not just Hegel, but also John Stuart Mill's 1831 essay and emblem of the intellectual transition from Romanticism to Victorianism—and at the heart of the forgotten genre of magic-portrait fiction. The genre's history demands that we amend Dowling's interpretation of the way Schiller's ideas infiltrated the culture of aestheticism. According to Dowling, Schiller's "bold gesture…failed to survive Schiller himself. For Schiller's revolutionary message had been choked at birth by the smothering verbiage of his own prose"; she goes on to claim that "it became Pater's task to complete the 'aesthetic education of man' that Schiller had begun" (86). But, Schiller's ideas had not died with Schiller. Nor did Pater do in *The Renaissance* what no one had done before him.[24] What Dowling calls "the first step to releasing the renovating power within aesthetic experience" by liberating it from transcendental abstractions was a step that had already been taken by writers throughout the Romantic period (85). Both philosophers and fiction writers explored the possibilities

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"all 'the ends of the world.'" This formulation opposes both death as *telos* and the "modern idea" as realizable only in a progressive movement across time.

[24] I think the reason why recent critics have not seen the prominent connections among, say, Schiller (philosopher and poet), Hoffmann (fantasy fiction writer and music critic), and Pater (art critic and fiction writer) is because the disciplinary elasticity that characterizes the intellectual productions of Romantic and Victorian authors is clouded by our 21st-century disciplinary divisions between philosophy, history, English, and other languages. Despite the ongoing mantra of "interdisciplinary" research, the modern disciplines that structure academia often still prevent us from making connections across fields and historical practices.

of an "aesthetic education" not just in reference to Schiller's propositions, but also to the larger Germano-Hellenic ideal of *Bildung*, or self-cultivation, to which Schiller's works contribute.

In their influence on Pater's thinking, the philosophers and texts explored above merge (albeit diversely) in the German tradition of *Bildung*, which embodied and endorsed the synthesis of philosophy, politics, and art the Victorians found so appealing.[25] Indeed, for Mill as for Pater, the German notion of personal growth through richly variegated experiences lies at the foundation of social progress. Schiller defines the ideal in this often-quoted line from the Twentieth Letter, in which he describes the aim of an aesthetic education as the "cultivation of the whole of our sensuous and intellectual powers in the fullest possible harmony" (99). Yet, behind Schiller stood Johann Gottfried Herder, whose works arguably did more than Schiller's to secure the epistemological and methodological grounds for Victorians' "unphilosophical" forays into aesthetic *Bildung*. Herder, a political nationalist, conceived of philosophy itself as the theory of *Bildung*. For him, philosophy must always work toward practical results. The titles of Herder's works illuminate these convictions: *How Philosophy Can Become More Universal and Useful for the Benefit of the People* (1765), *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity* (1774), and *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* (1793-97). Most importantly for our purposes, Goethe's transformative encounter with Herder in 1770 shaped the literary movement known as Weimar Classicism inaugurated by Goethe and

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[25] Other leaders of the German tradition of *Bildung* include Campe, Winckelmann, Humboldt, Goethe, Schiller, Kant, and Fichte, among others. Harvey Goldman provides a useful explanation of the origins of *Bildung*, especially as it relates to nineteenth and twentieth-century fiction, in *Politics, Death, and the Devil: Self and Power in Max Weber and Thomas Mann* (University of California Press, 1992), 26-37.

Schiller in the late 1780s. This is the movement through which Goethe produced *Wilhelm Meister* (1795-6), the first *Bildungsroman*, or novel of formation, which set the stage for more than a century's worth of *Bildungsromane* in Europe.

The literary tradition of the *Bildungsroman* supplied the formal framework for the magic-portrait genre, the earliest instances of which take the form of *Künstlerromane*, or artists' *Bildungsromane*. In "Winckelmann" Pater revises the convention of focusing on a single individual and instead narrates a centuries-long history of male homosocial *Bildung*, punctuated by German writers who generated "a new sense for the study of art." Above all, he praises Goethe for developing the personal and literary practice of *Bildung* (or, *Ganzheit*, "life in the whole"). Pater claims that it was Winckelmann's groundbreaking art historical practice that furnished Goethe and his inheritors with a formal model for blending cultural history, prose literature, the plastic arts, and personal experience toward the achievement of *Bildung*. Only by heeding Winckelmann's art historicism, Pater claims, could Goethe then exquisitely realize the great Hellenic-Romantic ideal of self-cultivation.[26]

Yet, Pater's celebratory formulation of *Bildung* in "Winckelmann" luxuriates in ideals that late-nineteenth-century magic-portrait fiction will paradigmatically challenge. When in *School for Aesthetics* (1804) Jean Paul Richter hails the power of the imagination—which, he says, "unites all parts into wholes and transforms all parts of the world into worlds. It *totalizes* everything"—Richter names the cognitive capacity that

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[26] Significantly, other Victorians cited Goethe as an authoritative example for the (non)doctrine of British aestheticism, especially its argument for disassociating art from didacticism. Symonds, for example, uses Goethe's life as a way to warn readers about "always looking for culture in the decidedly pure and moral" and Vernon Lee describes "art for art's sake" as a form of "Goethianism" (Quoted in Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece*, 46-7).

many magic-portrait protagonists turn into an abject social nightmare (Richter 293, emphasis mine). The "totalizing" vision of the masterful male artist can shatter entire worlds with his aestheticizing gaze. The threat of fanatical artistic "genius" and related forms of fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*), which Kant calls an "undermining disease," take fictional shape in the murderous, egomaniacal aesthetes of nineteenth-century magic-portrait stories (*CJ* §29). Appearing nearly a century after the German Romantics he reanimates, Pater's celebratory portrait of Winckelmann thus highlights the unevenness of the cultural history that emerged in the wake of the Whig aesthetic tradition. Yet, as the general morbidity of Pater's literature suggests, even he, author of such optimistic declarations about a regenerative Victorian Renaissance, grew increasingly troubled by the "strange pregnancy" of a philosophical romance. Let's see what he and other Victorian magic-portrait writers learned from the prototypical magic-portrait fiction of Goethe and Hoffmann.

II. Walking Portraits, Artful Devils, and Hoffmann's Masters

In 1783, Philip Massinger's 1629 tragicomic play *The Picture*, a story of male sexual jealousy evoked by a painted portrait, was adapted and retitled *The Magic Picture* by English author H. Bate. Bate's play was subsequently restaged throughout the nineteenth century. Bate's reanimation of Massinger's tragicomedy exemplifies a pattern in English and German literary history during the period from 1764 to 1829, when the motif of the "haunted portrait" or "walking portrait" became a staple in Romantic fiction. First introduced (in narrative, as opposed to dramatic fiction) by Horace Walpole in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), the motif appeared variously in gothic novels, fantasy fiction,

and formally experimental dramas, such as Goethe's *Faust* (1808).[27] *Faust* contains not a painted portrait, but rather, a "magic mirror" (*Zauberspiegel*) in which Faust sees an image of the beautiful Margarete, whom he seduces and fatally ruins. Published during the decades just before Goethe's influential work, gothic romances such as Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) house ancestral or religious portraits that torment their viewers. The gothic haunted portrait can sigh, bleed, or break from its frame. Distinguishing between the supernaturally sighing portrait in Walpole's novel and the Goethean experiments found in Lewis's novel will help us see which aspects of the Romantic-era "magic picture" remain and which disappear in the first wave of magic-portrait fiction. Following this brief comparative analysis, my reading of E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Meister Martin" (1819) shows how Hoffmann's syntheses of Goethe's *Faust*, the German *Künstlerroman*, and the English haunted portrait in fantastical tales about music masters, painters, and even coopers, represent the prototypical magic-portrait stories developed into a new genre (however unwittingly) by Hardman and the Victorians. As we will see, for the authors of Hardmanian magic-portrait fiction, the Gothic tradition becomes subordinate to Goethean strategies of joining philosophy and fiction in narratives about male artists who glorify or kill beautiful women in order to produce masterful art.

   The Castle of Otranto inaugurates a tendency among English gothic novelists of using painted portraits to create powerful effects in single scenes. These portraits do not structure the central conflict, but may haunt the narrative. For example, the ancestral portrait in Walpole's novel makes one appearance early on, and functions as a kind of

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[27] This publication date is somewhat misleading, given that Goethe began composing *Faust* in 1792, the text was first published in 1808, and a revised version appeared in 1828-9.

warning or denunciation of the merciless Manfred, Prince of Otranto. After his son's

sudden death, Manfred threatens the young Isabella (intended bride to the now-dead son)

that, in order to secure an heir to his throne, he will divorce his barren wife and marry

her. At this moment, "the portrait of his grandfather, which hung over the bench where

they had been sitting, uttered a deep sigh, and heaved its breast" (Walpole 22). A startled

Isabella takes her chance to run away, while Manfred stands distracted, "unable to keep

his eyes from the picture, which began to move"; Prince Manfred watches the portrait

> quit its panel, and descend on the floor, with a grave and melancholy air…The
> spectre marched sedately, but dejected, to the end of the gallery, and turned into a
> chamber on the right hand. Manfred accompanied him at a little distance, full of
> anxiety and horror, but resolved. As he would have entered the chamber, the door
> was clapped to with violence by an invisible hand. (Walpole 22-23)

This passage marks the entirety of the portrait's supernatural actions, which torment

Manfred. Yet, while the grandfather's sighing, marching "spectre" is never explained,

characters throughout the narrative, especially Manfred, feel terror upon facing what

appears to be another walking portrait: that of Alphonse, a previous prince of the castle.

Ultimately, we learn that this "walking portrait" was actually Theodore, Alphonse's

descendant and the rightful heir to the castle. As Theodore Ziolkowski argues in

Disenchanted Images: A Literary Iconology (1977), English gothic novels share a pattern

of presenting seemingly supernatural portraits, which become rationalized by story's end,

usually through cases of mistaken identity.[28] "Virtually no Gothic romance," Ziolkowski

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[28] Ziolkowski fills *Disenchanted Images* with textual examples and, in so doing, illuminates the
different means by which gothic and fantastic tales rationalize the walking portrait. More broadly,
he argues that the rationalization of seemingly supernatural forces and later parodies of the
walking portrait motif constitute the two dominant patterns in gothic fiction of the late eighteenth
and early nineteenth centuries.

claims, "is complete without a similar case of mistaken identity" (Ziolkowski 86).[29] This

significant body of haunted portraits—variously supernatural, rationalized, and parodic—

encompasses fiction by Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen, and Washington Irving.[30]

The haunted portraits found in these works raise a crucial question for the study of

magic-portrait fiction: What is the genre's relationship to the Gothic? This question is

especially important, given the dominant role the gothic tradition has played in the few

existing scholarly studies of Victorian "magic-picture mania."[31] The principal critic of the

form, Kerry Powell, does not consider the significance of *fin-de-siècle* "magic-picture

mania" outside of the history of gothic fiction, claiming instead that magic-portrait stories

"rely on the ritual incantations of Gothic tradition for much of their effect" (Powell 406).

Yet, as this chapter's first section suggests, the literary historical trajectory we discern

when we move from Schiller and Goethe to Pater and Wilde does not pivot on the gothic

tradition, nor, as we will see in Chapter Six, do works such as *The Picture of Dorian

Gray* depend on the gothic house of horrors for their cultural force. The Romantic origins

of magic-portrait fiction expose the genre's persistent focus on the drama of a male

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[29] For example, Ziolkowski observes, the "anonymous thriller *The Wandering Spirit, or Memoirs of the House of Morno* (London 1801) revolves entirely around a mysterious portrait and the subsequent confusions of identity" (Ziolkowski 86).

[30] The key works by these authors, which I lack the space here to discuss, include Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816), Scott's "The Tapestried Chamber, or the Lady in the Sacque" (1828), Jane Austen's *Emma* (1815), Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), and several stories in Washington Irving's *Tales of a Traveller* (1824).

[31] As I discuss in the Introduction, the canon of magic-portrait fiction constructed in this project expands (more than doubling) the 60 or so texts first named in Ziolkowski's *Disenchanted Images* (1977) and Powell's articles, "Tom, Dick, and Dorian Gray: Magic-Picture Mania in Late Victorian Fiction" (*Philological Quarterly* 62:2, Spring 1983) and "Hawthorne, Arlo Bates, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (*Papers on Language and Literature* No. 16, 1980). Karl Beckson also discusses "magic-portrait mania" in his insightful book, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (1992), which cites Powell's research on the form (See Beckson 47).

character's aesthetic education, as opposed to the crisis of mistaken identity.[32]

A comparative study of Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) helps illuminate the ambivalent role the Gothic would play in the magic-portrait genre's development during the first half of the nineteenth century. Perhaps the most famous English gothic novel next to *The Castle of Otranto* and Anne Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Monk* represents an early use of the seductive portrait premise—the premise one finds just a few years later in Goethe's fatally intoxicating "magic mirror" of Margerite. In Chapter II of *The Monk*, the priest Ambrosio contemplates a painted portrait of the Virgin Mary, which he idolizes and lusts after in a moment of philosophical reverie. The scene begins with Ambrosio congratulating himself on his achievement of asceticism: "'Who,' thought he, 'who but myself has passed the ordeal of youth, yet sees no single stain upon his conscience? Who else has subdued the violence of strong passions and an impetuous temperament, and submitted even from the dawn of life to voluntary retirement?'" (Lewis 64). His self-congratulations quickly turn into fears about how "the fairest and noblest dames of Madrid continually present themselves at the abbey": he asks himself, "Am I not a man, whose nature is frail and prone to error?" (Lewis 65). At this moment, he resolves to train his mind to conquer "objects of temptation" by exposing himself to them. His eyes then alight upon the portrait of the Virgin, which he has adored for two years. Succumbing to sexual fantasies about the beautiful pictured woman, he bursts into frustrations:

> Fool that I am! Whither do I suffer my admiration of this picture to hurry me?

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[32] As we will see in Hardman's "Colonna the Painter" and works studied in later chapters, such as Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, examined in Chapter Three, mistaken identity does become a useful motif in Victorian magic-portrait fiction. However, it is not a concept that defines the genre or drives its earliest instances.

> Away impure ideas!...Temptation, did I say? To me it would be none. What
> charms me, when ideal and considered as a superior being, would disgust me,
> become woman and tainted with all the failings of mortality. It is not the woman's
> beauty that fills me with such enthusiasm: it is the painter's skill that I admire; it
> is the Divinity I adore. (Lewis 65-6)

Ambrosio's struggle in this scene exemplifies the diverse functions of the portrait in
magic-portrait fiction. Rather than behaving supernaturally, the picture of the Virgin
wields its power—its "magic" as it were—by occasioning a philosophical and
psychological battle between the sensual and the ascetic, the erotic "passions" and
religious "Divinity." The monk performs cogitative acrobatics to convince himself that
his desire is an intellectual one, not a mortal, physical one, and his rationalizations pivot
on a claim about the sensual appeal of a "painter's skill." In this way, the painting
provokes a reflection akin to (if far less expansive than) the passages of art criticism
found within Victorian magic-portrait stories.

Lewis's novel presages the magic-portrait story in yet another way, for as readers
may recall, the pictured Virgin whom Ambrosio lusts after precisely because she is
"ideal" and not "tainted with all the failings of mortality" is in fact a very real woman
named Matilda, who later seduces Ambrosio.[33] The portrait of the Virgin thus functions
less as the site of a single, startling scene and more as a structural trope that directs
subsequent plot twists. In contrast to *The Castle of Otranto*, *The Monk* anatomizes the
nascent thematic and formal terrain of the magic-portrait story, which involves erotically
charged portraits of women, men who seek to master themselves and, or through, art, and
philosophical or psychological reveries about art, aesthetic influence, and the social self.

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[33] Notably, the character of Matilda not only anticipates Goethe's Margerite, but also alludes to
The Castle of Otranto: the name Matilda appears in Walpole's earlier novel as the forbidden
woman figure who falls in unsanctioned love with Theodore and with whom Frederic falls in lust.

Haunted portraits of the Walpole variety could not serve as the narrative epicenter for a

genre definitively concerned with philosophical, critical, psychological, and erotic uses of

art within dramas of artistic reproduction. Matilda's Virgin Mary portrait—and its

evocation of the philosophical binary between reason and passion—distills the wider

cultural contributions the gothic romance did make in the magic-portrait genre's

development. For magic-portrait storywriters will carry on the gothic ritual of waging a

"Romantic" rebellion against Enlightenment thought, characterized by a new emphasis

on imagination, emotion, and subjectivity.[34] As we have seen, this rebellion was

advanced by radical philosophers, such as Schelling, Fichte, and Schiller, and thus

constituted a dialogic body of cultural forces coming from both England and Germany.

Detailing some of the characteristics of this rich mutual exchange gives a sense of

how this line of cultural transmission among philosophers and novelists could form the

basis for the nascent magic-portrait genre. While Pater would explicitly converse with

German philosophers in his essays, Samuel T. Coleridge, Thomas Carlyle, Matthew

Arnold, and George Eliot all engaged German predecessors and contemporaries by

translating their works.[35] In the realm of fiction, a dialectic of influence thrived between

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[34] Ziolkowski's summary of the Gothic more generally is compelling and useful, especially for new students of the Gothic: "Intellectually and aesthetically it anticipated the gradual movement from neoclassical ideals of order and reason to the new romantic belief in emotion and the imagination. Philosophically it exploited the new appreciation of terror that Burke had recommended as a means toward the experience of the sublime. Politically it embodied the new sense of freedom that characterized the revolutionary age. Psychologically it signaled a turn from the portrayal of manners in an integrated society to the analysis of lonely, guilt-ridden outsiders. In literature it exemplified a longing for adventure and excitement in explicit departure from the moralizing and essentially conservative tone of sentimental-domestic novels" (83-4).

[35] See David Simpson, *The Origins of Modern Critical Thought: German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism from Lessing to Hegel* (Cambridge University Press 1988), 18-22, for more information on the diverse exchange between English and German writers.

England's gothic romances and Germany's analogous literary phenomenon: the horror

novel (*Schauerroman*). German horror novels were so successful that, according to Eitel

Timm, "it became fashionable to claim English Gothic novels as being translations from

German originals in order to increase their circulation" (Timm viii). In the realm of

philosophy, leaders of the German aesthetic tradition made pronouncements about the

power of art that engaged or inspired novelists in Germany, England, and America.[36] For

example, Friedrich Schlegel, as David Simpson observes, made the radical claim that

"the three great tendencies of his age were the French Revolution, Fichte's philosophy,

and Goethe's *Meister* (*Athenäum Fragments*, no. 216), and opined that the function of art

might include 'exalting politicians and economists into artists' (*Ideas*, no. 54)" (Simpson

15). In the line of Schlegel and Fichte, Friedrich Schelling "saw in art the unique means

for making the insights of philosophy available to the wider public, thanks to its

dependence upon forms that can be represented in the world rather than merely thought

or argued" (Simpson 15).[37] While these enthusiastic assertions may conflict with the

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[36] Numerous critics have traced the influence of German philosophy—radical, idealist, and transcendental theories—upon novelists in England and America. Eitel Timm, for example, names Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Edgar Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Thomas Carlyle as some of the pivotal American and English writers who formed the "fervent mutual exchange of ideas between Germany and the English-speaking countries" (Timm, *Novellas of Ludwig Tieck and E. T. A. Hoffmann*, vii). Other significant German thinkers who shaped the canon of aesthetic philosophy, history, and art at the turn of the nineteenth century include Baumgarten, Winckelmann, Tieck, Humboldt, and Schleiermacher.

[37] Simpson qualifies this observation by stating that "[t]his idea was always, however, more successfully articulated in theory than in any account of actual or potential practice" (15). While he may certainly be right about the literature we categorize within the discipline of philosophy, analyzing fictional literature expands our understanding of "successfully articulated" theories and "account[s] of actual or potential practice." Significantly, given Fichte's influence on the writers studied in this chapter, Simpson also notes the optimistic claims Fichte made about poetry: he "saw in poetry the potential for 'flooding the life of all with the spiritual culture that has been attained' (1968, p. 68), but his extended remarks…on the role of the author in disseminating that spiritual culture in the present are much more skeptical. Like Shelley and Schopenhauer, he

predominant investments or tenets proposed by even the most radical German

philosophers, they reveal a culture in which the tension between philosophy and art was a

productive one—defined not by disciplinary rigidity, but by formal and theoretical risks,

partnerships, and "romantic" experiments.

Most importantly for our purposes, Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*

was shaped by his intimate intellectual partnership with Goethe. In Reginald Snell's

Introduction to Schiller's treatise, Snell explains the details of this relationship:

> More important than all the influences mentioned, of course, is that of Goethe; the
> writing of the first Letter dates, almost within a month or two, from the beginning
> of that remarkable ten-years-long personal and poetical-philosophical
> association... Schiller was at this time in constant touch with Goethe; he was
> reading *Wilhelm Meister* in instalments [sic] throughout the period of the
> composition of the Letters…; and Goethe's influence is at least implicit all the
> way through his argument, becoming explicit in his account of the triumph of art,
> in his exaltation of the 'natural', in his reverent attitude towards the antique, in his
> view of the artist as the true man, the unity of the sensuous and the spiritual.
> (Snell 10)

The results of Goethe's influence upon Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Man* appear

most clearly in their articulation of something approaching a practical model for

reforming or developing the individual subject through aesthetic experience. Simpson

describes this project as the "most detailed attempt at such a theory of practice" one can

find in German aesthetic philosophy (Simpson 16).[38] Ultimately, Schiller stops short of

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suggests that the proper audience for the pure idea is likely to be discovered only in later
generations" (Simpson 15).

[38] According to Simpson, Schiller "poses without solving (or intending to solve) the question of
the relation of personal development to public welfare. It is 'man's inner being' that must first be
reformed by the aesthetic education (*AE*, p. 59; and below, p. 137). The effects of such reform,
working through example and upon the leisure hours of others, can in theory rejuvenate at least a
small class of fellow humans. But the very condition that preserves the purity of the aesthetic
experience, its identity not as product but as a process or ideal that can never be fully realized in
actuality—'for man can never escape his dependence upon conditioning forces' (*AE*, p. 153)—
means that it is never likely to be available to large numbers of people. The aesthetic state that

embracing even the possibility of "practical" reform on a large scale, but, as an author of poetry, plays, histories, and translations, he also never resists deep engagement with aesthetic forms and fellow artists. The modern sentimental poet, as Schiller theorizes him, distills the thrust of his notion of "aesthetic education": the sentimental poet devotes himself to an ideal he can never fully achieve, but which brings with it a sublime process worth the cost of infinite deferral. Magic-portrait storywriters will test this notion of a man's aesthetic education—and often with as much tragedy as Schiller's framework ultimately implies—and they did so in the act of inventing an elastic genre of prose fiction that helped fashion the Aesthetic Movement in England.

Schiller's philosophical partnership with Goethe finds a rich afterlife in the formally complex fantasy fiction of E. T. A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), German music critic, composer, and fiction writer. According to Joseph Hayse, Hoffmann "had grown up on Goethe, Schiller, and the other literary rebels of the last century, but by the time he began to write, Schiller was dead, and Goethe, now respectably part of the establishment, not only turned his back upon his earlier 'excesses' but also condemned younger authors for imitating his own 'enthusiastic' youthful works" (Hayse xiii). Owing to this shift in the leading figures of German literary culture, a generation gap developed whereby novelists of the 1810s and 1820s acknowledged the influence of the "classical" works they had all read—e.g. Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and Schiller's *The Robbers* (1781)—but they adopted a newer Romanticism, represented by Novalis, Ludwig Tieck, Jean Paul Richter, A. W. Schlegel, Sir Walter Scott, and Matthew

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Schiller describes at the end of his treatise must then exist in the everyday world more as a utopian imperative than as an anticipated social development" (Simpson 16).

Lewis.[39] At least three (though possibly more) of these writers published prototypical magic-portrait stories.

The influences discussed above collide in Hoffmann's prototypical magic-portrait fiction. Hoffmann, as Hayse puts it, "was so taken with M. G. Lewis's *The Monk* that he began *The Devil's Elixirs*, his own novel about a monk's fall from grace, even before completing *Fantasy Pieces*" (Hayse xiii). The story "Arthur's Court" (1815), published a year prior to *The Devil's Elixirs* (1816), reveals Hoffmann's career-long fascination with the seductive portrait premise—that is, the tale of a male character intoxicated by the image of a beautiful woman. The hero of "Arthur's Court" falls in love with the portrait of a woman clothed in medieval German dress; once he finds the original and discovers that she has married someone else, he, like Ambrosio in *The Monk*, reassures himself that he has not lost his love because ideal beauty exists only in art. Indeed, for readers unfamiliar with Hoffmann's fiction, Peter von Matt helpfully argues that the quintessential Hoffmann story revolves around a portrait through which a male hero retains his personal ideal of feminized beauty: "the hero encounters a picture and succumbs to its magic; the picture comes to life in the form of a living girl whom he pursues and desires; at a crucial moment, however, he transforms her in his imagination back into an image—not of transitory human existence but of an ideal existing eternally in his imagination."[40] This pictorial, imaginary ideal evokes the philosophical and

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[39] According to Hayse, Hoffmann and his sympathetic contemporaries were "attuned to Novalis's *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* ("The Apprentices of Isis") and Wackenröder and Tieck's *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* ("Outpourings from the Heart of an Art-Loving Monk"). They admired A. W. Schlegel's translations from Shakespeare and Calderon…[and] [t]heir favorite novelists were Jean Paul and Walter Scott" (Hayse xiii).

[40] Peter von Matt, *Die Augen der Automaten: E. T. A. Hoffmanns Imaginationslehre als Prinzip seiner Erzählkunst* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1971), 66 (Quoted in Ziolkowski 87).

psychological stakes of magic-portrait plots, which are as invested in male self-development as they are in the troublesome presence of women as images.

The well-established connection between Lewis's *The Monk* and Hoffmann's *Devil's Elixirs* evokes a larger insight about the trajectory of magic-portrait fiction, for, together, the devil tales of Goethe, Lewis, and Hoffmann formed the basis for reanimations in late-Victorian fiction, including two of the most popular *fin-de-siècle* magic-portrait stories. The lines of transmission move from Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) to Goethe's *Faust* (1808) to Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs* (1816, English trans. 1824) and Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894). All of these stories share an interest in the devil as a master artist, and they narrate dramas of influence using a magic mirror or portrait. In these works the devil, conceived as a "master of all arts," becomes a useful figure for exploring what happens when a male artist—or in the case of Wilde's Lord Henry Wotton and of Du Maurier's Svengali, an "aesthete"—becomes hyperbolically realized as a *master*. The trope of the devil as master artist predates European Romanticism; its roots, according to Maximilian Rudwin, can be traced to German myth (Rudwin 279). In making this claim, Rudwin focuses on legends that attribute the invention of music to the devil, and in discussing these, he cites Gérard de Nerval's "La Sonate du Diable" (1830)—a text that I examine in Chapter Two as part of the first wave of magic-portrait stories. As Rudwin observes, Tartini's *Sonata del Diavolo* (1713) supplies the subject matter for Nerval's story.[41] Hoffmann, too, focuses on the art of music. He constructs a Mephistopheles in the music master Councillor Krespel, who

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[41] Maximilian J. Rudwin, *Devil Stories, An Anthology* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921), 279.

remains his most famous character. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three, the demonic protagonist of "Councillor Krespel" (1816) provides the basis for Du Maurier's characterization of Svengali in *Trilby* and, as Hayse argues, for Bram Stoker's Count Dracula and Shelley's Frankenstein. Indeed, Hoffmann not only wrote tales that later became the classical ballets *Coppelia* and *The Nutcracker*; he also influenced such canonical nineteenth-century writers as Dickens, Dumas, Balzac, Baudelaire, Poe, Hawthorne, Gogol, Dostoevsky, and Conan Doyle.[42]

In the 1820s, both Hoffmann's contributions to the nascent magic-portrait genre and a new cultural awareness of Schiller's life and works entered the British literary scene primarily through one powerful voice: Thomas Carlyle's. Carlyle's "accomplishments with German literature," observes Eitel Timm, "namely his translation of *Wilhelm Meister* and his authorship of *The Life of Schiller*, contributed largely to his reputation as a man of letters" (Timm xiii). Carlyle's mode of commending German literature—not to mention his notoriously idiosyncratic style—emblematize the vibrant exchange between German and English writers, novelists and philosophers, and their shared focus on the lived experiences of artful men. Carlyle's introduction to his translation of Hoffmann's works, which forms part of his anthology on *German Romance* (1827), entails an imaginative retelling of Hoffmann's life. As if to ensure his own

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[42] Along with Dickens, Carlyle, Wilde, and Du Maurier, these authors are, in Hayse's words, "among the writers who have been cited as beneficiaries of his prodigal invention" (Hayse vii). Hayse goes so far as to suggest that "[t]here is not a major or minor literary 'movement' which is not to some degree reflected in Hoffmann's prose fiction […] Often, within a brief sentence or two, his narrative can shift from the most naturalistic realism to a frightening 'Gothic' Romanticism. Then, abruptly, Hoffmann may load the next paragraph with sensory images evocative of 'Symbolism,' comparable to Baudelaire or Mallarmé" (Hayse xiv-xv). This unsung literary history suggests that, while many scholars have observed Hoffmann's influence on nineteenth-century American literature, his impact on Victorian culture remains largely neglected.

participation in the tradition of literary investigations into men's aesthetic educations, Carlyle depicts Hoffmann's life in a fashion somewhere in between Pater's earnest portraits in *The Renaissance* and Lytton Strachey's acerbic portraits in *Eminent Victorians*. Carlyle asserts that Hoffmann hoped to "realiz[e] his long-cherished wish, a life devoted to Art" (Carlyle in Timm 187). Like Pater and Strachey after him, Carlyle even appears to fabricate parts of Hoffmann's life, often speculating about how he must have felt during certain experiences. In the haughty "polished circles" of Berlin, for example, Carlyle writes,

> Hoffmann prospered ill: he was sharp-tempered; vain, indeed, but transcendantly [sic] vain; he required the wittiest talk or the most entire audience; and had a heart-hatred to inanity, however gentle and refined. When his company grew tiresome, he 'made the most terrific faces;' would answer the languishing raptures of some perfumed critic by an observation on the weather; would transfix half a dozen harmless dilettanti through the vitals, each on his several bolt; nay, in the end, give vent to his spleen by talking like a sheer maniac; in short, never cease till, one way or other, the hapless circle was reduced to utter desolation. To this intellectual beverage he was seldom twice invited; and, ere long, the musical and literary Tea-urn was for him a closed fountain. (Carlyle in Timm 191)

For Carlyle, historical truth matters less than vivid characterization, which he achieves here by portraying Hoffmann as an unrivaled, if consequently solitary wit who could converse "like a sheer maniac" if he should ever suffer "inanity." Carlyle's apparent ambition to present an acute narration of a male artist's life similarly motivates the magic-portrait genre. The passage above might double—distantly, but not coincidentally—as a description of Lord Henry Wotton.

"Meister Martin, Master Cooper, and His Men" (1819) is a subtle study of two male artists whose competition for a beautiful woman relies not on the overdetermined symbol of the devil, but rather on the social operations of art and the male homosocial

aspiration for *Bildung*.[43] Set in sixteenth-century Nuremberg, "Meister Martin" tells the story of Friedrich and Reinhold, a silversmith and a painter, whose romantic and professional lives are subject to the whims of Tobias Martin, master cooper of Nuremberg's Honourable Guild of Coopers. Martin stubbornly insists that he will only permit his daughter, the beautiful Rosa, to marry a man who proves "to be the most utterly perfect master of his craft," that he must do so by constructing a masterful two-fudder cask, and that he must be a cooper and no other kind of artist (Hoffmann 242). This thought experiment of sorts forces Friedrich and Reinhold to learn the limits of their desires and their artistic skills. The two "journeymen" cross paths, introducing themselves as coopers, for, as they later discover, both are traveling to Nuremberg to marry Rosa and both have repressed their interests in other art forms in order to meet Master Martin's ultimatum. Most of the narrative unfolds as a comparative study of their characters, shaped by different aesthetic passions, struggles, and talents. Friedrich is a quiet, anxious, earnest, and self-sacrificial silversmith, while Reinhold is a handsome, charming, cosmopolitan painter who regularly bursts into song. The question dominating the narrative is how each man can reconcile his erotic desires with his aesthetic tastes and artistic ambitions. What kind of artist—or craftsperson—will each become and who will marry Rosa?

The story involves multiple painted portraits—all of which depict Rosa—and the conflict revolves around Rosa's portrait to the extent that her image haunts the ensuing narrative and its resolution depends on how the central male characters cope with that

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[43] For an excellent recent reading of this story, see Victoria Dutchman-Smith's *E. T. A. Hoffmann and Alcohol: Biography, Reception and Art* (Modern Humanities Research Association: University of London, 2010), 115-24.

image. In the opening scene, Hoffman's narrator describes Rosa's beauty through an extended ekphrasis of two actual paintings, one by Albrecht Dürer and one by Peter von Cornelius: "Gracious reader!" the narrator proclaims,

> Let those beautiful maidens whom he has portrayed, instinct with grace and charm, sweetness, gentleness, pious meekness, rise before you. Think of their noble, tender figures; the pure, rounded foreheads white as snow; the rose-tint suffusing the cheeks; the delicate lips, red as cherries; the eyes, looking far away, in dreamy longing, half shadowed by the dark lashes, as moonlight is by thick leafage. Think of all the heavenly beauty of those forms, and you will see the lovely Rosa. (239)

To see Dürer's "beautiful maidens" with their "delicate lips" and "eyes, looking far away" is to see Rosa. And yet, the very next paragraph begins: "Let me, however, remind you of another great young painter…our German Master Cornelius, in Rome. Just as he has made Margaret (in his illustrations to Goethe's mighty *Faust*) appear, when she says—'I'm not a lady of rank; nor am I fair,' such was Rosa, when she felt constrained, bashfully and modestly, to evade the ardent advances of some admirer" (239). Hoffmann's ekphrastic allusions to Dürer, Cornelius, and Goethe imply that Rosa exists—in appearance and in character—only in the realm of art. By portraying her through visual and verbal representations of *other* pictured women, Hoffmann secures her imagistic identity and her association with ideal beauty as a category realizable only in art. It is this feminized, heterosexual definition of beauty that motivates the imaginations, ambitions, and competitions among the men who control and pursue her.

Yet, whereas the magic-portrait genre will become defined by its focus on the art of painted portraiture, "Meister Martin" weaves together a panoply of arts and crafts, both actual and imagined, from paintings and songs to silver sculptures and two-fudder casks. In fact, "Meister Martin" was inspired by a treatise on music: Johann Christoph

Wagenseil's essay on the German mastersingers, which Wagenseil attached to his 1697 chronicle of Nuremberg.[44] Hoffmann published widely as a music critic, hoping (unsuccessfully) to achieve fame through musical compositions, rather than fiction.[45] These contextual details help explain Hoffmann's integration of critical and theoretical reflections about music and other arts throughout the narrative, which represents one of the primary precedents it set for the magic-portrait genre. In addition to the interartistic portraits of Rosa and the masterpieces eventually created by Friedrich and Reinhold, the story contains a prophetic song (the lyrics of which, sung by Martin's grandmother on her deathbed, inspire Martin's ultimatum about Rosa's marriage); a prophetic tale-within-a-tale told by Reinhold to Freidrich about the importance of male friendship (254); and several songs collectively sung by the coopers as they work (249-51, 258-9, 272). When they are not working or singing in Martin's shop, Friedrich and Reinhold discuss the master artists who instructed them and critique regional art, as when Reinhold condemns "'the woodenness, the bad drawing, and the hardness of your Dürer and your Cranach'" (251, 274). Even other characters make art-critical observations: a drunken partygoer listening to the two men sing thinks "that Friedrich caught the beautiful German 'modes' even better than Reinhold, who had just a little too much of the Italian school about him" (259). Hoffmann soaks the atmosphere of the narrative in artistic production and interpretation.

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[44] The full title of this treatise is *Commentary on the Free City Nuremberg of the Holy Roman Empire* (1697). See Stanley Appelbaum, "Introduction" to *Four Stories by E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Mineola, NY: Dover 2003), xi. Appelbaum observes that this treatise also served as the "direct inspiration for" Hoffmann's earlier story, "Mademoiselle de Scudéry" (1818).

[45] For the best anthology of Hoffmann's music criticism, see *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings:* Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer, *Music Criticism*, Trans. Martyn Clarke, Ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

By story's end, the frequent forays into music appear digressive because the conflict is resolved only through Reinhold's climactic act of portraiture, which recalls our attention to Hoffmann's introductory ekphrases. Reinhold, at first concealing himself from Friedrich and Martin, paints a stunning portrait of Rosa, which Friedrich discovers unexpectedly. Standing before the canvas, "transfixed like a statue," Friedrich declares: "'it is all clear to me now. You have gained the prize for which I—wretched that I am!— was bold enough to try. What am I, compared to you; what is *my* art, to *yours*?'" (273). Reinhold quickly unsettles Friedrich's self-effacing equation of artistic talent with sexual conquest by confessing his personal history and the circumstances surrounding the portrait. He explains that, despite his German ancestry, he always hated German art and traveled to Italy to learn the art of painting from Italian masters; yet, one day he caught sight of a small portrait of the Madonna by Albrecht Dürer and it restored his affection for the art of his native country. Upon arriving in Nuremburg and seeing Rosa, he recalled Dürer's Madonna:

> 'it seemed to me as though that Madonna which beamed so brightly in my heart were walking the earth…I saw and thought of nothing but Rosa. Even art was only precious in my sight because I could go on drawing and painting Rosa hundreds of times, over and over again.' (274)

Reinhold's ecstasy in seeing and painting the image of ideal female beauty as he and Dürer conceive it invokes the self-same pattern found across Hoffmann's fiction. Reinhold insists to his awe-struck friend that he adores his art above the life required to marry Rosa. To this point, he complains about the "sicken[ing]" trade of the coopersmith: "'since I have been busy at this picture, that miserable handicraft sickens me inexpressibly. I *cannot* take a hammer in my hand again, come what will!'" (274). Reinhold's renewed passion for painting implies a larger economy of value according to

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which the tale hierarchizes fine arts above the "handicrafts" and classes painters who

adore "art for art's sake," as it were, above artisans who "take a hammer in [their]

hand[s]" to construct a two-fudder cask.

Hoffmann reiterates this aesthetic ideology in Reinhold's subsequent speeches

and in Friedrich's mimicry of his friend's self-reclamation. Finally quitting the prospect

of marrying Rosa, Reinhold declares,

> 'As soon as I had finished her portrait, my heart was at rest; and I often felt, in an
> inexplicable manner, as though Rosa had really been the picture, and the picture
> the real Rosa…How could that heavenly child whom I have worn in my heart—*as*
> I have worn her in my heart—ever become my wife? Ah, no! she must forever be
> resplendent in the masterworks which my soul shall engender.' (276)

Reinhold's speech confirms his apparent sexual satisfaction through artistic expression—

through keeping Rosa's image "forever…resplendent in the masterworks which my soul

shall engender." Friedrich, in turn, suffers from the psychological imprint of his friend's

masterpiece, wrought out of his devotion to his art: "Reinhold, and Rosa's portrait he

could not drive out of his mind" (278). Feeling as much fear of failure as repressed love

for "his own glorious art" of silverwork, Friedrich follows his friend's lead and asserts

his disgust for the "brut[ish]" life of the coopersmith as well as the "stifl[ing]"

determinism of Master Martin's ultimatum, which restricts what Schiller called the play

drive (277). He stops working at the Guild and plans to return to his former master, but

makes a "keepsake" for Rosa before departing. Friedrich fashions a delicate silver goblet

"ornamented all over" with symbols of flowers and angels (280). These symbols happen

to correspond to those described in the prophetic song that inspired Martin's ultimatum;

Martin thus concludes that Friedrich must be the proper suitor for his daughter. In the

final scene, Reinhold returns to Nuremburg to attend the wedding and to give his friend a

painting "representing Master Martin in his workshop with his journeymen…at work on the great cask, with Rosa just come in at the door" (284). Thus at each turn, Hoffmann constructs an art object to convey a plot twist, a characterization, or a resolution—in short, to convey both meaning and individual social development.

Self-serving acts of artistic creation save both Reinhold and Friedrich in an ending that idealizes the salvific power of male homosocial aesthetic *Bildung*. Despite the neatness of its denouement, however, the narrative is generally nuanced in its subjective and philosophical characterizations, for Hoffmann blurs the boundaries between art and craft, beauty and utility, mastery and skill, success and joy. And we keep wondering, who is a villain and who is a hero? Did Reinhold deceive Friedrich by lying about his love for Rosa and concealing his past as a painter? The answers never become clear, but the happy resolution removes the concern. What remains clear throughout the story is its philosophy that self-realization and sexual conquest come only through one's pursuit of the art best suited to him.

In response to the aesthetic philosophies of Hoffmann and the other Romantic thinkers discussed throughout this chapter, the authors of the first wave of magic-portrait stories will do the following: test the philosophical implications of a man's "aesthetic education"; expand the haunted or seductive portrait motif into the structuring principle, often, but not always, in a *Künstlerroman*; shift the primary narrative focus from music or multiple art forms to painted portraiture; and, finally, through the newfound focus on visual art, carry on Goethe's and Hoffmann's strategies of integrating art criticism and aesthetic theory into fictional narrative. So, when Graham Hough in *The Last Romantics* says that Ruskin's *Modern Painters*—the first volume of which appeared in 1843—was

the work that "gave an enormous stimulus to interest in the visual arts," we must qualify

this causal claim, for the interest in the visual arts that comes to define Victorian culture

was already thriving in nascent magic-portrait fiction of the late 1810s and 1820s by

Hoffmann and Joseph Hardman (Hough xv). Hardman's tale exemplifies the adaptation

of Romantic themes, philosophical drives, and formal practices into a Victorian genre

that revolves around the painted portrait.

III. "Colonna the Painter": An International Genre Emerges

Beginning in 1829, what had functioned as a motif typically limited to single

scenes or episodes transformed into the structuring principle of short stories by writers in

England, France, Russia, and America.[46] The following analysis shines an overdue

spotlight on the first magic-portrait story: English author Joseph Hardman's "Colonna the

Painter: A Tale of Italy and the Arts," published anonymously in *Blackwood's Edinburgh

Magazine* in September 1829. Of the first wave of works that transformed a motif into a

genre, Hardman's tale is the only obscure text.[47] Yet, given its publication history in

England and America, and its extraordinary formulation of enduring tropes, Hardman's

text represents the most significant work in the genre's early history. While not all

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[46] These writers include Joseph Hardman, Honoré de Balzac, Nikolai Gogol, Nathaniel
Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Gérard de Nerval, Novalis, and J. Sheridan Le Fanu.

[47] I have located only three critical mentions of Hardman: W. T. Bandy's three-page article
"Coleridge's Friend Joseph Hardman: A Bibliographical Note" (*The Journal of English and
German Philology* 47: 4, Oct. 1948), Wendell Harris's *British Short Fiction in the Nineteenth
Century* (Wayne State UP, 1979), and John Pfordresher's "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Hand and
Soul': Sources and Significance" (*Studies in Short Fiction*, 19:2, Spring 1982). Critical neglect of
"Colonna the Painter" may help account for the failure to recognize the preponderance of magic-
portrait stories in the 1830s and 1840s and of the genre itself. Notably, neither Kerry Powell nor
Theodore Ziolkowski cites "Colonna the Painter" in their research on Victorian literary portraits.

Victorian readers could access French or German works, Hardman's was accessible and widely read. Four months after its original publication in *Blackwood's*, the story reappeared in the Philadelphia magazine, *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art* (Jan. 1830), the Boston magazine *Littell's Living Age* (Nov. 1845), and again in Edinburgh and London in the first volume of the well-known anthology *Tales from 'Blackwood'* (1858). While John Pfordresher describes it as a story "in the style of E. T. A. Hoffmann," it constitutes what we might call a "textbook example" of a Victorian magic-portrait story (Pfordresher 110). "Colonna the Painter" contains almost every thematic and formal ingredient adapted, expanded, or challenged by later writers. Few of the genre's practitioners employ all of its defining traits as does Hardman, making his text an ideal means of anatomizing the genre and illustrating its influence on British aestheticism.

Before launching into the frame story for Hardman's tale within a tale, let's look at the first textual frame: the epigraph. Hardman selects Coleridge's not-yet-published 1828 translation of Goethe's intratextual poem "Kennst du das Land?" ("Know'st thou the Land?"). First appearing in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrejahre* (1795-96), the poem's three anaphoric stanzas about Italy's luxurious landscape are twice sung to Wilhelm by the gypsy girl Mignon. In "Colonna the Painter" Coleridge's translation of Goethe's song/poem begins, "Know'st thou the Land where the pale Citrons blow, / And Golden Fruits through dark green foliage glow?" and ends, "Know'st thou it well? O thither, Friend! Thither with thee, Protector! would I wend."[48] W. T. Bandy explains in a short

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[48] Hardman, "Colonna the Painter," 351. The full epigraph appears as follows:

    Know'st thou the Land where the pale Citrons blow,
    And Golden Fruits through dark green foliage glow?

biographical article on Hardman that, when "Colonna the Painter" was republished in

Tales from "Blackwood" (1858), the text "was preceded by [the following] short note

which had not appeared in the earlier printings":

> 'The following "Tale of Italy and the Arts" was submitted in MS. to the late Mr. Coleridge, who signified his approval by giving to the writer, as an appropriate heading, two then unpublished stanzas from his admirable translation of Goethe's Song of Mignon in 'Wilhelm Meister,' beginning 'Kennst du das Land?'[49]

Hardman's epigraph thus announces not only his intimate friendship with Coleridge and

their shared affinity for Goethe, but also Coleridge's respect for the high quality of

Hardman's story and the apparent fascination with Italy felt by all three of them. The

epigraph emblematizes three cultural forces that typify the aesthetic strain of magic-

portrait fiction: the embrace of German Romanticism, the allure of Renaissance Italy, and

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> O soft the breeze that breathes from that blue sky!
> Still stand the Myrtles and the Laurels high.
> > Know'st thou it well? O thither, Friend!
> > Thither with thee, Beloved! would I wend.
>
> Know'st thou the House? On Columns rests its Height;
> Shines the Saloon; the Chambers glisten bright;
> And Marble Figures stand and look at *me*—
> Ah, thou poor Child! what have they done to thee!
> > Know'st thou it well? O thither, Friend!
> > Thither with thee, Protector! would I wend.
> > > S. T. COLERIDGE; *from* GOETHE

[49] See Bandy, 395-6. Bandy provides a bleak picture of extant knowledge about Hardman himself or his relationship with Coleridge: "Although the *Dictionary of National Biography* describes Joseph Hardman as 'a London merchant, who was intimate with Coleridge,' standard biographies of the latter throw little or no light on their friendship" (Bandy 396). Usefully, however, the letters collected in Margaret Oliphant's *Annals of a Publishing House: William Blackwood and his Friends* (1897) reveal Hardman's own words about the stories he published in the magazine. In a letter, presumably to Oliphant dated November 5, 1840, Hardman writes: "Some ten or twelve years have now elapsed since I was a regular contributor to 'Maga' and in constant correspondence with your able, intelligent and very liberal father. My contributions were drawn chiefly from German and Danish sources, and consisted of romantic and piquant tales, freely altered from the original, and adapted to British taste and feeling. I sent him also many amusing tales on Italy and the Italians, which he liked and employed in many numbers to lighten the Magazine…Amongst the tales were the Sphinx, the Duellists, Colonna the Painter,…" (Quoted in Bandy 396; Oliphant Vol. 2, 287-88).

the translation and intermingling of art forms, especially word and image.

Because Carlyle had translated *Wilhelm Meister* in 1824, educated Victorian readers would have perceived evocative implications in this "appropriate heading." For example, the translated poem draws attention to the problems and pleasures of cross-cultural—as well as cross-temporal and cross-spatial—exchange. Peter Robinson explains this striking fact about the poem's many lives: Coleridge's version is a translation of a translation, for Goethe makes it clear to his readers that

> though we have just read it in German, the poem is to be imagined as heard by Wilhelm in Mignon's 'Italian original' that 'is not communicated to us'. Though Goethe appears to have written 'Kennst du das Land?' as an original poem in his own language,…it is offered as a translation from elsewhere.[50]

Given these contextual intricacies, Hardman's epigraph revels in the kaleidoscopic conceptual practice of translating art—the very thing practiced by Hardman's characters and by late-Victorian aesthetes in their ekphrastic explanations of paintings and sculptures. The reanimated presence of "Know'st thou the Land?" reinforces the text's formal and intellectual ties to German Romanticism at the same time as it evokes a metacritical call for English writers to adapt Goethe's analytical art, to emulate the Keatsian "negative capability" of translation, and to similarly crave the sight of Italy.[51] In these ways, Hardman's story anticipates the Victorian aesthetic revival of the Italian Renaissance—a word which, by the time Pater published *Studies in the History of the*

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[50] Robinson, 104. As Robinson observes, Goethe's poem/song "thus exemplifies a subgenre of original works presented as if translated, of which Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, her love poems addressed to Robert Browning, are perhaps the most famous example in English poetry" (Robinson 104).

[51] Goethe fulfilled this desire four years after first composing his poem in 1782-3. See Robinson, *Poetry in Translation: The Art of the Impossible* (The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 104.

Renaissance in 1873, had become a byword for aestheticism.[52]

Painted portraiture is the Renaissance art of choice in "Colonna the Painter."

Hardman calls attention to the translation of image into word by conveying Colonna's

portrait through a frame story. The unnamed speaker—a present-day English soldier who

feels listless after the peace-begetting fall of Napoleon—seeks to fulfill his childhood

dream of visiting Italy. Through relics he finds at a decaying mansion in Lombardy, the

soldier uncovers the dramatic life story of "Colonna," a sixteenth-century painter.

Colonna's story is evoked in a pair of frescoes and elaborated in the "time-stained"

journal of Colonna's friend, Angelo Pisani. The portraits, titled *La Scoperta* and *La*

Vendetta, depict the story's climactic events: 1) Colonna painting the portrait of his

enemy Barozzo, who assassinated his father and who is betrothed to the woman he loves,

and 2) Colonna's triumphant assassination of Barozzo. As we eventually learn, Colonna

himself painted these frescoes and gave them to his friend. Over the course of the story,

Colonna paints five portraits, discusses at least as many with Angelo, and even sits for

sketches by his friend as the latter attempts to learn the art of painting.[53] Hardman uses

ekphrasis to situate his text in an art historical universe: when describing *La Scoperta*, for

example, the narrator tells us that Colonna appears "in the plain garb rendered familiar to

modern eyes by the portraits of Raphael…and his tall figure displayed a classic symmetry

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[52] The following magic-portrait stories are among those set in Italy: D. G. Rossetti's "Hand and Soul" (1850), the anonymous "Luca Morato, the Majolica Painter of Urbino" (1869), Mary Penn's "Desmond's Model" (1879), A. de G. S.'s "The Magic of a Face" (1879), Vernon Lee's "Amour Dure" (1887), Ouida's "The Adder" (1888), W. W. Fenn's "A Painter I Knew" (1892), and Pauline Roose's "Paolo's Model" (1893).

[53] Colonna paints the Madonna (as a gift for Angelo's mother), Laura (from memory and from life), Angelo (his pupil), Barozzo (his client), and the narrative frescoes depicting *La Scoperta* and *La Vendetta*.

and grandeur, which forcibly reminded me of that magnificent statue, the reposing Discobolus" (352). Throughout the text, the fundamental trope of ekphrasis variously fosters suspense, diegesis, identity confusion or revelation, admiration of physical beauty or artistic mastery, and heavily allusive commentary about art.

Following Hoffmann, Hardman integrates art criticism into the narrative through digressions within ekphrastic passages as well as through dialogue or commentary explicitly devoted to debating aesthetic principles or historical figures.[54] In two early scenes, Colonna discusses questions of aesthetic judgment with local Venetian artists, including famous Italian painter Paulo Veronese (354-5), and later disputes the relative merits of Titian and Michelangelo with his new friend Angelo (356-8). In fact, Colonna and Angelo *become friends* through their discussion of art. In his debate with Angelo, Colonna argues for the principal importance of color over design in painting, of which he considers Titian the unequivocal master. "'What are the sharp and vigorous lines of Michael Angelo but dreams and shadows,'" he insists,

> 'compared with the pure and exquisite vitality of a head by Titian? Any beardless tyro may by plodding industry, produce a drawing as accurate, if not as free, as the off-hand sketches of Raffaelle [sic]; but to delineate real life with its exquisitely blended tints and demi-tints; its tender outlines, and evanescent shades of character and expression; to accomplish all this by lines and angles is impossible. It requires the *magic* aid of colouring, controlled by that deep and rare perception of the beautiful, that wondrous harmony of intellect and feeling, which is…the proudest, highest attribute of man' (357, emphasis added)

Colonna makes a sophisticated, proto-formalist argument here about "the magic aid of

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[54] Hardman even incorporates a knowing use of the two terms that dominate eighteenth-century philosophical aesthetics—the "beautiful" and the "sublime"—into one of the story's several descriptions of the Italian landscape: "'Certainly,'" Angelo says, "the lake of Garda displays a rare combination of the beautiful and sublime. The shores abound in the wild and majestic, in variety and beauty of local tints, and picturesque vicissitudes of light and shade; while the olive-crowned Sirmio, like the island-realm of a Calypso, reposes in regal pride upon the waters, and seems to hold in vassalage the opposite shores, and amphitheatre of mountains" (370).

colouring" relative to the lifelessness of "lines and angles"—part of an aesthetic philosophy reiterated throughout the story. He thus reveals himself to be a hero through his authoritative knowledge and perspective on great art, coupled with the climactic act of portraiture that helps expose his enemy.

Colonna's intricate, two-part confession to Angelo advances this *Künstlerroman*, for it is in these monologues that he reveals his secret ancestry as "'the sole survivor of one of the most illustrious families in Florence'" (370), his false identity as a poor artist, and his motley yet impressive education. "Colonna of Venice"—born Montalto of Florence—explains that he studied the languages of Greece and Rome in Florence, where he sought the instruction of legendary artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari, then studied painting in Venice with none other than Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese. Colonna's confession recalls the scene in "Meister Martin" when Reinhold makes his extended confession to Friedrich, revealing that he is in fact a painter, not a cooper, and that his education by "some great masters" in Italy, "the land of art" shaped his (not so) hidden identity (Hoffmann 273-5). In Colonna we find the antithesis of Hoffmann's Master Krespel (titular artist-devil in "Councillor Krespel" [1816]) and an exaggerated version of Friedrich (timid hero in "Meister Martin" [1819]). In narrating the *Künstlerroman* of Montalto-cum-Colonna, then, Hardman builds on Hoffmann's model to inaugurate a prominent figure in Victorian magic-portrait fiction: the adventurous artist-hero.

In a fascinating homology between literary fiction and art history, Colonna's aesthetic philosophy resonates with the controversial mid-century Victorian art criticism that shaped British aestheticism: Colonna's principles anticipate those of John Ruskin and the early Pre-Raphaelite painters, who promoted natural imagery and figures painted

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from life.[55] The Pre-Raphaelites called for a return to the Ruskinian spirit of "truth to nature" and they condemned the reigning style of Sir Joshua Reynolds (nicknamed "Sir Sloshua" for his "lax" methods and lazy use of color), who privileged broad brush-strokes, dramatic chiaroscuro, and conventional gestures. Twenty years earlier, the fictional Colonna similarly endorses rich, detailed color over "sloshy" chiaroscuro, and natural, "noble" figures over artificial, overly conventional idealizations. In his first lengthy conversation with Angelo, Colonna applies these values to Paolo Veronese's "Nuptials of Cana" (1563, reproduced below).[56]

The controversy surrounding Veronese's massive painting, as it is fictionalized in

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[55] The cherished principle of painting from life, as opposed to copying from statues or designs, reappears repeatedly throughout the text. In the case of painters seeking to depict historical figures, the practice of using living models was termed "Imaginary Portraiture," for these artists reimagined the appearance of persons, often saints, whose features were unknown. Colonna recommends this practice and employs it when painting a Madonna for Angelo's mother. I highlight these facts as significant because it is this Italian Renaissance tradition that Pater cites in the title he gives to the genre of magic-portrait fiction: *Imaginary Portraits* (1886).

[56] Note that the "Nuptials of Cana" is variously referred to as "The Marriage at Cana," "The Wedding at Cana," or "The Wedding Feast at Cana." Also, in Hardman's story "Paolo" appears as "Paul" Veronese.

Hardman's tale, presages the controversy surrounding John Everett Millais's Pre-Raphaelite painting, "Christ in the House of His Parents" (1849-50).[57] Colonna mentions the "Nuptials of Cana" when criticizing a fellow artist for unjustly attacking it; Colonna recalls the man's review thus:

> 'He objected to the insignificant appearance of Jesus and his disciples, and to their position at the table in the middle-ground of the picture. The painter introduced them into this great work because their presence was indispensable; but he avoided giving them any prominent position, conceiving it impossible for any human artist to convey an adequate personification of our glorious Redeemer. Moreover, they were but accessory to his real object, which was to represent the busy crowd of guests, the banquet, and the architecture…(357)

Millais's "Christ in the House of His Parents" was judged harshly by Victorian critics for similar reasons, especially for "the insignificant appearance of Jesus" as a diminutive child standing in front of a carpenter's table (See Millais's painting reproduced below).

Charles Dickens famously called Millais's Christ "a wry-necked boy in a nightgown who seems to have received a poke playing in an adjacent gutter" (Dickens 265). The links between the aesthetic principles found in "Colonna the Painter" and those of influential

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[57] Note that, while in comparing Hardman's treatment of "Nuptials of Cana" to harsh Victorian reviews of "Christ in the House of His Parents" I am aligning Ruskin with the Pre-Raphaelites, I do not mean to imply Ruskin's approval of this painting. In fact, Ruskin was disappointed by it.

mid-Victorian art critics extend even to the study of architecture. Colonna hails the interior and exterior designs of Gothic cathedrals: "'How grand were the conceptions of the rational barbarians [of the middle ages] to whom Europe is indebted for these vast and noble structures!'" (361). Two decades later, Ruskin, following A. W. N. Pugin, famously praised the Gothic architecture of Venice in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3).

Yet, far from accentuating either Colonna's imagined contributions to Venetian art history or his relationships with his famous mentors, the narrative alternately emphasizes his solitude and his friendship with Angelo. Colonna repeatedly warns Angelo that he requires distance and independence—that he must remain free to disappear from their shared home (Angelo's estate in Lombardy) for days at a time. His characterization as a Byronic artist-hero anticipates the fetishization of autonomy by male Victorian aesthetes and, later, male modernists. At the same time, Colonna's ambitions to obtain revenge and love depend on his immersion in male homoerotic friendship. During their first long intercourse about art, Colonna declares, "'Oh! how I burn with impatient ardour to behold the storied isles and continent of Greece!'"—to which Angelo remarks that he recently visited the islands and "'greatly improved my knowledge of ancient Greek'" (358). At this comment Colonna "started impetuously from his chair, and strained me in a vehement embrace. 'Oh! rare and fortunate incident!'…you are the companion I have so long and vainly sought…You will, you must be, the chosen friend of my soul!'" (358). This moment mimics the scene in Hoffmann's "Meister Martin" in which Friedrich embraces Reinhold in a tearful revelation of newfound friendship: "'The more I look at you,' Friedrich said, 'the more I am drawn to you. I distinctly hear a voice

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within me which tells me you are my true friend'" (251). In Hardman's story the soulmates determine to live together at Angelo's villa and, at Colonna's provocation, make a pact: Colonna will instruct him in painting, serving as his model, and in return, Angelo will teach him modern Greek. On the garden-filled grounds of Angelo's estate the men revel in their mutual training and "read together the Greek poets and historians."[58]

In such plot twists as these Hardman follows Hoffmann's idealistic community of male artists, while also anticipating Pater's call for a similar mode of communal, male homoerotic *Bildung*, most clearly articulated in "Winckelmann" (1867). Colonna not only covets Greek life and art; he also embodies Dionysus, Greek god of wine. His character thus prefigures magic-portrait protagonists such as that of Pater's "Denys d'Auxerrois" (1886), examined in detail in Chapter Five. "'From these rambles,'" Angelo writes, "'he would often return at sunset over the lake in a small bark, crowned like a youthful Bacchus with vine leaves and ivy, and singing wild Dithirambics to his guitar, while the surrounding villagers, by whom he was idolized, followed him in their boats with shouts of joy and festivity'" (362). At one point, Angelo's commentary about his intimate, idolized friend engages the anachronistic question of "art for art's sake," for Colonna "'intimated that he had never yet painted for emolument, nor for the gratification of others'" (360). So, for what does he paint, if for nothing else? Colonna-the-youth paints for the self-fulfilling love of masterful art and Colonna-the-hero paints to win two social

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[58] Hardman, 362. Given the centrality of Hellenism to the literature of Victorian aestheticism, it is worth noting that Hardman treats ancient Greece with a degree of ambivalence; at one point, Colonna criticizes Greek architecture (361) and, later, we learn that the enemies Colonna kills include Barozzo's retinue of Greek men.

prizes: murderous revenge and a beautiful woman.[59]

Women do not make an appearance until halfway through the story when Colonna finally confesses his love for Laura, a muse-like figure whose name alludes to the love object of Italian poet and humanist Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374). Petrarch's Laura was likely Laura de Noves, pictured below (Laurentian Library, Florence, details unknown).

Hardman gives Laura virtually no independent voice or character, using her instead as a vehicle to develop Colonna's subjectivity. Through her subservience to Colonna's art and affection Hardman explores the everyday erotics of the gaze and the sexual politics of art making. These themes merge in Colonna's recollection of their meeting, which invokes Petrarch's discovery of Laura in the church of Sainte-Claire d'Avignon:

> 'I had long admired her as the most lovely woman in Venice. Her head has all the beauty of a fine antique, lighted up by dark eyes of radiant lustre, and heightened by a smile of magic power and sweetness. I have more than once sketched her unrivalled features when she was kneeling at church, and her fine eyes were upraised in devotional rapture. In public places, and at mass, I had frequently seen her, and our eyes had so often met, that she could not but learn from mine how fervently I admired her.' (363-4)

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[59] Note that the revised version of this chapter (and later chapters) will address a shift in the sexual politics of magic-portrait fiction across the genre's history: Hardman's story exemplifies the triangular model of male homosociality Eve Sedgwick theorizes in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1985), but later stories reflect a move toward formulations of desire among a quartet of bodies and objects—male artist, female sitter, male spectator, and painted portrait—which typically privilege heterosexual circuits of desire and identification.

Romantic and vocational desires combine in Colonna's memory at the same time as the

conflicting seductions of sexuality and religious fervor grow confused, as in his image of

Laura praying with "'her fine eyes…upraised in devotional rapture'" while he gazes at

her longingly. Angelo corroborates Colonna's pattern of mixing his love for a beautiful

woman with his passion for the beautiful art he can make out of her: "When he spoke of

her, it was invariably in the language of an artist. He admired the rare and absolute

symmetry of her face and form…[and thought] how much it was to be regretted that her

rank and education precluded the possibility of her benefiting the arts as a model" (369).

Colonna compares the beauty of Laura's face to the "splendours of…colouring" he

discerns in Titian's portrait of the dying saint, Pietro Martire. In this fascinating passage

Colonna's infatuation with Laura becomes inextricably entangled with his admiration for

Titian. His ekphrasis of "Pietro Martire"—a painting which he unveils himself in the

church while waiting to catch sight of his beloved—parallels his description of Laura,

whose "veil was raised" to expose a face that proved the superior work of art.[60]

Hardman's comparison of Laura's beauty to that of a martyred saint prefigures, as we

will see in Chapter Two, the Pre-Raphaelite vision of ideal female beauty as sickly and

ethereal.

　　　As the drama progresses, Colonna's conflicting desires—aesthetic and social,

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[60] This anecdote—a story within a story within a story—about the veiled Titian portrait of Pietro
Martire is a fascinating one. Colonna explains to Angelo that, while eagerly waiting to see Laura,
in the hopes of "subdu[ing] in some measure the wild agitation which chafed me, I withdrew the
curtain which veiled Titian's divine picture of Pietro Martire" (364). "'But,'" Colonna goes on,
"'no masterpiece could allay the glowing tumults of my soul, and again I paced the church with
feverish impatience. At length the peerless Laura entered, and, alas, poor Titian! the charms of
thy creative pencil withered as she approached—the vivid splendours of thy colouring faded
before the paramount beauties of nature!'" (365).

heterosexual and homoerotic—threaten the achievement of his goals. We discern this threat through Angelo, who expresses concern about Colonna's decision to accept Barozzo's request for portraits: "I entreated him to relinquish his design of painting the portraits of Laura and Barozzo, from an apprehension that a lover so fervent and demonstrative would, in some unguarded moment, excite suspicion, and frustrate the accomplishment of his ultimate views" to escape with Laura (375). The risk worrying Angelo is that of sexual jealousy—of Barozzo's rage, should he discover the mutual attraction felt by Colonna and Laura. Indeed, Laura's erotic presence in Colonna's *Künstlerroman* produces a tension in the story's economy of desire, beyond Colonna's personal conflict between adoring a woman and appreciating great art: this is the central tension between homoerotic male friendship and heterosexual male jealousy. If male artistic mastery represents the solution to Colonna's troubles, male sexual jealousy lies at the root of them. Not one, but two sagas of male sexual jealousy catalyze his quest for revenge: 1) his father Montalto's love for the beautiful Isabella, whose jealous tyrant of a father imprisoned him and had him executed, and 2) Barozzo's jealous possession of his vigilantly scrutinized fiancée Laura, and Colonna's own envious disgust for Barozzo. During the story's climactic fight scene, Colonna exploits Barozzo's capacity for envy by mentioning his reciprocated love for Laura. This proves "a taunt…beyond all human endurance" that ensures Colonna's assassination of his enraged enemy (383).

The most significant precedents established in "Colonna the Painter" for later magic-portrait story writers, especially for Victorian aesthetes, include Hardman's invocation of Goethean Romanticism; his imaginative, ekphrastic reconstruction of Renaissance Italy; his structural and thematic focus on portraits; his integration of art

criticism into narrative exposition; and his exploration of how aesthetic and social—

especially sexual—desires intersect and conflict. The preponderance of painted, dreamed,

living, and dead faces in "Colonna the Painter" also exemplifies the formal mixture of

romanticism and realism that will come to characterize the genre. Yet another feature of

the first magic-portrait story ranks among these influential precedents: the revelation or

confusion of identity made possible by a portrait, which always blurs the boundaries

between art and life. In Venice Colonna conceals his name and ancestry by living and

dressing as a poor artist; only in the climactic scene of portraiture, when he begins to

paint Barozzo's likeness, do the identities of the two men transform in each other's eyes

as they exchange gazes.[61] All of the plot's tentacles thus find their epicenter in the

painted portrait, which makes possible a homoerotic love story, a heterosexual love story,

a revenge story, and the *Künstlerroman* of an artist-hero who ultimately achieves the

power to paint the frescoes of his life just as he pleases.

<center>***</center>

Hoffmann's and Hardman's origin stories teach us that the high and low cultural

histories that define Victorian aestheticism—its high-minded political and aesthetic

philosophies and its fashionable popular fictions—were always, to some degree,

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[61] Forced to stare at the artist he hired, Barozzo suddenly detects Colonna's identity, for he recognizes the artist's resemblance to his father. In turn, by accurately interpreting the anxiety spreading across Barozzo's face, Colonna discovers his sitter's identity as the man who killed his father. Notably, before this portraiture scene, Laura surprises Colonna by revealing that she knows his true identity, which she perceived in returning his gaze; she studied his face as one studies a painted or sculpted portrait: "'The heroic cast and expression of your features, and the unembarrassed ease and elegance of your deportment, bore the genuine stamp of nobility by descent and education'" (366). The following magic-portrait stories similarly use the scene of portraiture, rather than the portrait itself, as a—or the—central conflict, a tactic that recurs particularly in tales of sexual jealousy: "The Portrait" (1833-4) by Gogol, "The Prophetic Pictures" by Hawthorne [See links to Hardman on pages 376-77 of this story], "Hand and Soul" (1850) by D. G. Rossetti, "Kidnapped for a Portrait" (1851) by Robert Postans, among others.

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intertwined because of the Shaftesburyian arguments motivating the movement's leading voices. To argue that every political subject, even a member of the lower classes, shares a *common* capacity for aesthetic judgment was to call for the engagement of that "lower" culture. With a magic-portrait story, and its characteristic integration of art criticism and aesthetic theory, Pater could at once endorse Kantian commitments to self-consciousness and fictionalize Schiller's ideal of the aesthetic education of ma and Goethe's perceived realization of it. Pater's principal predecessors in these endeavors were Hardman and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, for their magic-portrait stories offered optimistic articulations of aesthetic *Bildung*. However, it is this quality of Hardman's story—its happy resolution— that makes it exceptional in the genre's long-nineteenth-century history. As the next chapter will show, the first wave of magic-portrait stories aggressively ascribe life-or-death stakes to the gendered act of portraiture. The early works of the genre at once exploit and challenge Romantic ideals; together, they constitute a study in the fatal threats posed by a male artistic master.

CHAPTER II

THE GENRE HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT:
EARLY MAGIC-PORTRAIT FICTION FROM BALZAC TO ROSSETTI

The spate of stories about male artists and their painted portraits published across

Europe in the 1830s and 1840s announced the arrival of a new genre. Tales by four

writers constitute what I consider the first wave of magic-portrait fiction: Hardman's

"Colonna the Painter" (1829), Honoré de Balzac's "Sarrasine" (1830) and "The

Unknown Masterpiece" (1837), Nikolai Gogol's "The Portrait" (1833-4), and Nathaniel

Hawthorne's "The Prophetic Pictures" (1837). These works were followed in the late

1830s and early 1840s by those of Gérard de Nerval, J. Sheridan Le Fanu, Novalis,

Robert Browning, and Edgar Allan Poe. Building on the formal innovations of Goethe,

Hoffmann, and Hardman, these writers delve into the universe of the masterful male artist

to establish the magic-portrait story as a distinct, international genre. By 1850, when

Dante Gabriel Rossetti sought a literary form for his manifesto of the Pre-Raphaelite

Brotherhood's aesthetic philosophy, he chose the magic-portrait story.

This chapter recovers the early history of a genre as it coheres through

appropriations and distinctions from its Romantic predecessors, gains popularity across

Europe, and enters through Rossetti's "Hand and Soul" (1850) the sphere of high art in

Victorian England. The authors and texts selected here expand on the scholarship of

Kerry Powell, who alternately lumps the nineteenth-century magic picture into the

category of the Gothic and asserts the influence of certain key authors.[1] When doing the

latter, Powell argues that

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[1] See Kerry Powell's "Tom, Dick, and Dorian Gray: Magic-Picture Mania in Late Victorian
Fiction" (*Philological Quarterly* 62:2, Spring 1983), 149.

Poe, together with Hawthorne and Gogol especially, can be credited with transforming the magic portrait into more than just another appliance in the Gothic chamber of horrors. It was these three who made organic to the picture itself an examination of the duality of art and life, the myth of Faust, the theme of the pariah, the dream of eternal youth, the clash of puritan morality and unbridled hedonism, and the like. And among these diverse concerns the remarkable portrait became the bonding agent—became, that is, the primary *donné* in fiction treating the magic picture with more subtlety, and lending it more importance, than Gothic novelists had done. (Powell "Tom, Dick, and Dorian Gray" 149)

By examining how Hawthorne, Gogol, and Poe shape the development of a new genre, I am building on Powell's recognition of their innovations and expanding the list of mid-century contributors to include Balzac, Nerval, Le Fanu, Novalis, Browning, and Rossetti. While Powell gives a somewhat cluttered list of themes, we will see that the major focus of the first wave of magic-portrait fiction is the sexual politics of artistic reproduction in the context of a male artist's attempt at mastery.

The first magic-portrait stories expand and alter the genre as it was invented by Hoffmann and Hardman. They share developments initiated by Hardman, such as the focus on painted portraiture and the formal experimentation with frame stories. Indeed, nearly all of the works analyzed here tell tales within tales. The genre's first wave also reflects an expansion of themes, for they narrate stories of male artistic self-development, but generally widen the central conflict to address larger questions about how life and art influence one another. Hawthorne, for example, fashions the trope of the "prophetic picture," a painted portrait whose future-foretelling powers signify a terrifyingly ambiguous influence beyond the scope of the god-like painter who created it. Whereas Hoffmann's "Meister Martin" interprets art as the site and source of a fully developed male self, these stories argue that art wields life-or-death stakes—that art kills. Together, these stories define the Victorian genre as a narrative form that theorizes the creation and

reception of art as a gendered social act with grave consequences. Thus, Hoffmann's philosophical fictions of *Bildung* become increasingly self-conscious philosophical fictions about the inseparability of sexual politics and artistic reproduction.

However, Rossetti's "Hand and Soul," like Pater's "Winckelmann," exemplifies the unevenness of this cultural history. Magic-portrait fiction published over the course of the nineteenth century does not simply progress from idealism to fatalism. "Hand and Soul" transforms the deadly scenes of portraiture found in the first magic-portrait stories into a triumphant manifesto for a new school of art. As John Pfordresher has shown, Rossetti constructs "Hand and Soul" out of the influences of Maturin, Hoffmann, Hardman, Poe, and Browning—in short, the works that constitute the early history of magic-portrait fiction, traced in Chapter One and in this chapter's first two sections. In drawing on these works, Rossetti exercises the genre's defining capacity to articulate aesthetic philosophy. I argue that Rossetti uses the magic-portrait genre to embody in prose fiction the aesthetic principles of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and that these principles, as enacted by his fellow Brothers and future followers, brought the misogynistic ideals fictionalized in early magic-portrait stories into the lived history of Rossetti's circle. My reading traces the explicit analogies between Romantic-era magic-portrait fiction and Pre-Raphaelite artistic and commercial practices. "Hand and Soul" thus represents a pronounced relationship between Victorian art and life, fiction and history, perhaps exceeded in its dramatic consequences only by the notorious relationship between *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Wilde's trial, imprisonment, and death.

In tracing the genre's early history, I devote the most attention to Rossetti's story because his passionate reanimation of the Romantic magic-portrait premise operates as a

carrier of the genre into the realm of high art. As scholars of aestheticism commonly

observe, Rossetti's verbal and visual arts, and his leadership of the Pre-Raphaelite

Brotherhood, mark the nascent phase of the Aesthetic Movement in England. Rossetti's

practices proved especially influential for Ruskin, Pater, Morris, Swinburne, Whistler,

and Yeats. As Jerome McGann remarks, "between approximately 1848 and 1912 Rossetti

was, in Whistler's final phrase, 'a king.'"[2] My analysis enhances existing accounts of

Rossetti's impact on the rise of British aestheticism by showing how "Hand and Soul"

helped secure the centrality of the magic-portrait genre in the annals of Victorian

aesthetic fiction by Pater, Ouida, Wilde, Vernon Lee, Henry James, and Arthur Symons,

among others.

Reevaluating "Hand and Soul" as an integral text in the overlapping histories of

magic-portrait fiction and aestheticism builds, in particular, on Jerome McGann's

scholarship. In *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game that Must be Lost* (2000), McGann

eloquently resurrects Rossetti's reputation as a philosophical artist. He perceives in

Rossetti's literature and painting "thinking enacted in and as artistic practice" (xv). In its

deliberate turn away from the philosophical treatise, McGann argues, Rossetti's art

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[2] McGann, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game that Must be Lost* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 2. Here McGann is refering to Whistler's assertion of Rossetti's controversial majesty while on his deathbed in 1903. As Ford Madox Hueffer recalls the scene in a *Harper's New Monthly* magazine article about the lives of the Pre-Raphaelites, "one of the watchers at Whistler's bedside during that painter's last hours has informed me that, something to the discredit of Rossetti having been said in conversation, Whistler opened his eyes and said: 'You must not say anything against Rossetti. Rossetti was a king'" (Ford Madox Hueffer, "Some Pre-Raphaelite Reminiscences" (*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* Vol. 120, 1910), p. 766). McGann offers a representative summary of Rossetti's profound influence on late-Victorian culture in the first chapter of *The Game that Must be Lost*, where he explains that the Victorian "age's two most imposing critics, Ruskin and Pater, both saw Rossetti as the period's central artistic presence. Their judgments are borne out by all the children of Rossetti—those he called from obscurity to attention, like Blake, Poe, Browning, and many others; those he called to self-attention, like Swinburne, Morris, Burne-Jones; and all those from Whistler to Yeats whose imaginations were shifted or shaped by Rossetti's ideas" (McGann 2).

"probes deeper than expository thought precisely because it does not exempt its own processes from the critical studies it undertakes" (xv). Ekphrastic translation plays a central role in Rossetti's self-reflexive, deconstructive art, which, as McGann puts it, "constructs an argument in images for the procedure of arguing by images" (33). It is the Schiller-esque devotion to an ideal never realizable through material aesthetic form that makes Rossetti's sensual images players in a "game that must be lost." Yet, McGann's study of Rossetti's intellectualism through imagistic sensuality focuses on poetry and, while he analyzes Rossetti's translations of works by Dante Alighieri and William Blake, he neglects to contextualize his readings within a cultural or historical framework, leaving readers wondering what Rossetti's avant-garde philosophical experiments mean for the larger history of Victorian culture. Contextualizing "Hand and Soul" within the history of this forgotten genre illuminates the Romantic ancestry and late-Victorian legacy of Rossetti's magic-portrait manifesto.

The following readings reveal stories that retain the philosophical rigor and art critical forays of Hoffmann's and Hardman's tales, but which reflect a shift in the genre's philosophical registers. Rather than representing recognizably political theories, these stories assert theories about art's sexual, psychological, commercial, and spiritual powers. According to this uneven cultural history, then, Rossetti's manipulation of the magic-portrait story in 1850 takes the genre—however unwittingly—in the direction of commercial culture and away from the Romantic nexus of moral, aesthetic, and political philosophy. In other words, as we will see in the chapter's final section, the genre's mid-century development represents the beginning of a competing force—capitalism—that increasingly renders futile the use of the magic-portrait story for political purposes. In

great part owing to Rossetti's famous aesthetics of the *femme fatale*, the increasing power of beautiful images of dead women to sell on the Victorian market becomes a potent force with which Pater's and Wilde's late-century "literary Liberalism" must contend. Put differently, Pater's and Wilde's cultivation of the Shaftesburyian "paradox of aesthetic democracy," as Linda Dowling terms it, will compete not only with the fantasy of an "aristocracy of everyone" endemic to Shaftesbury's theory, but also with a commodity culture saturated with commercially successful images of beautiful women. The authors who collectively invented the magic-portrait story helped pave the way for this Victorian obsession with beautiful pictured women and the men who make or kill them.

I. The First Wave: Balzac, Gogol, and Hawthorne, 1830-1837

The next magic-portrait story to appear in Europe after Hardman's "Colonna the Painter" is recognizable to every literary critic, though not for its contribution to a budding genre. Published in November 1830 as part of Balzac's monumental *La Comédie Humaine* (1799-1850), "Sarrasine" remains best known as the test case of choice for Roland Barthes's structuralist project *S/Z* (1970). As in Hardman's tale, the privately unveiled life of a dead artist named Sarrasine takes us to Italy—this time, eighteenth-century Rome—through a frame story provoked by an Adonis portrait and narrated by a man who knows the portrait's history.[3] "'He is too beautiful for a man,'" remarks the

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[3] For anyone unfamiliar with the story's premise: Balzac's party-going narrator—a kind of indoor *flâneur*—weaves a decadently gossipy web of Parisian high society, whose votaries are enraptured by the mysteriously wealthy Lanty family. Chief among the family's mysteries is the terrifying old man whom the Lanty ladies seem concerned to keep hidden from public sight in back rooms. At the present party our narrator's beautiful female companion, Mme. de Rochefide, runs in fright from this inexplicable human relic and, in doing so, encounters a massive portrait of an "Adonis lying on a lion's skin" (Balzac 231).

narrator's beautiful companion Mme. de Rochefide, instantly provoking his envy. "'I had the pain,'" he laments, "'of seeing her rapt in the contemplation of this figure…Forgotten for a painting!'" (232). Sexual jealousy motivates him to expose the unsavory origins of the portrait by Joseph-Marie Vien: "'that great painter never saw the original and maybe you'd admire it less if you knew that this daub was copied from the statue of a woman'" (232). Only by story's end do we learn that the original "statue of a woman" in fact portrayed the mutilated body of a man, whose sex was mistaken by the eponymous artist during his fatal search for love in Italy. Balzac thus uses the ekphrastic discussion of a portrait to spark a manifold mystery of sexual and aesthetic identity: Just as we wonder "Who is Colonna the painter?" upon "seeing" the two narrative frescoes described by Hardman's narrator, so too do we wonder "Who is the ghostly old man upon which the Lanty fortune depends?" and "Who is the 'woman' that inspired both the statue and the Adonis portrait?" The discovery that these two persons are one and the same shatters Sarrasine's illusions about art and women, and it disturbs Mademoiselle de Rochefide's confidence in the illusions that govern social life writ large. As this reading will show, Balzac's story abounds with echoes of the English and German Romantic "aesthetic educations" explored in Chapter One.

The story of Sarrasine, framed by the young couple's discussion of Vien's Adonis portrait, narrates a *Künstlerroman*, complete with allusions to Italian masters and critical claims about art woven into narrative exposition. Sarrasine proves his genius through the art of sculpture to Diderot and to his mentor Bouchardon, who compares him to Michelangelo and Canova (236). In 1785 Sarrasine leaves France for "the birthplace of the Arts" in the hopes of securing his fame as an artist; instead, he discovers a beautiful

Roman singer named "La Zambinella" (Countess de Lanty's great uncle). The combination of Zambinella's voice and her physical beauty intoxicates Sarrasine, for whom she embodies a Venus-like aesthetic ideal: "This was more than a woman, this was a masterpiece!" (238). He paints Zambinella from memory over and over again, nurturing his obsession in solitude and venturing outside only to watch her performances. Sarrasine confesses his love for Zambinella, who attempts futilely to reveal his sexual identity as a castrato. At an ambassador's fete, Sarrasine suffers the dual shock of seeing Zambinella in men's garb and of hearing an Italian Prince say: "'Are you joking? Where are you from? Has there ever been a woman on the Roman stage? And don't you know about the creatures who sing female roles in the Papal States? I am the one, monsieur, who gave Zambinella his voice'" (250). That night Sarrasine kidnaps the terrified singer, forces yet another confession from him, and hatefully gestures toward his own sculptural masterpiece, declaring, "'I shall forever think of this imaginary woman when I see a real woman.'…'Monster! You can give life to nothing. For me, you have wiped women from the earth'" (252). Sarrasine attempts to kill Zambinella only to be thrice stabbed himself by the singer's handlers, who come to rescue their lucrative star.

Just as Hardman's tale ends by returning to the painted portraits that frame Colonna's *Künstlerroman*, Balzac's narrator concludes the story of Sarrasine by recalling the portrait that inspired it. He explains to Mademoiselle de Rochefide that, following Sarrasine's death, Cardinal Cicognara, the man who saved his musical protégé's life,

> took possession of Zambinella's statue and had it executed in marble; today it is in the Albani Museum. There, in 1791, the Lanty family found it and asked Vien to copy it. The portrait in which you saw Zambinella at twenty, a second after having seen him at one hundred, later served for Girodet's *Endymion* [reproduced below]; you will have recognized its type in the Adonis. (253)

The narrator's explanation of the portrait's history suggests that masterful art derives

from sexual and cultural *translations* with alternately horrifying, unknown, and

untraceable origins. "Sarrasine" thus exposes the disturbing falsities of Edmund Burke's

classification of ideal beauty as definitively feminine in his *Philosophical Enquiry*

(1757). Yet, the story theorizes a wider scope for the problem of translation, which

functions as a condition of possibility for both gendered beauty and masterful art. The

framed story about a portrait we never see—a non-existent "origin"—evokes the Goethe

poem translated by Coleridge, which Hardman uses as his epigraph for "Colonna the

Painter," for, as we saw in Chapter One, Goethe's poem exists only in translation.

According to Balzac's far bleaker magic-portrait story, great art entails not only

adventures in Italy, but also a complex matrix of sexual and material translations, cultural

and spectatorial misinterpretations, bodily manipulations, concealed financial

transactions, and physical and emotional deaths.

Recognizing these costs, Mademoiselle de Rochefide ends the tale by lamenting

that "'all human feelings come down to the same thing, to horrible disappointments'"

(253). What Rochefide means here is that, upon hearing the narrator's secret-exposing

story, her initial sense of pleasure and fascination upon viewing the Adonis portrait has degenerated into one of "horrible disappointment." Her assessment recalls Lewis's *The Monk* and Hoffmann's "Meister Martin," in which male characters insist upon the superiority of artistic ideals over ugly mortal realities. However, through Rochefide's critical response, Balzac unsettles rather than reinstates the idealizing operations of Burke's definition of feminine beauty. He emphasizes beauty's identity as an illusion, not an ideal. In contrast to the tales of Lewis and Hoffmann, then, "Sarrasine" offers a cultural critique of gendered conceptions of beauty *and* a theory of artistic mastery as a matter of sexual and cultural translations burdened by deadly costs.

Two years later, Balzac produced another magic-portrait story, "The Unknown Masterpiece," composed in 1832 and first published in *L'Artiste* in 1837. Here Balzac returns to the theme of male artistic mastery, but this time through a *Künstlerroman* that weaves together the lives of four male artists at different stages in their careers, and thus evokes Hoffmann's "Meister Martin" (1819), which likely served as a source.[4] The conflict begins when aspiring young painter Nicolas Poussin visits the studio of his idol, Master Porbus, only to encounter an elderly, unknown artist named Frenhofer, whom Porbus himself appears to idolize. Through Frenhofer Balzac voices art criticism of the sort Hoffmann and Hardman convey through their male characters' conversations, yet Balzac focuses exclusively on the art of painting.[5] While the young Poussin gazes

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[4] Maximilian Rudwin observes that "E. T. A. Hoffmann furnished an especially fertile field for Balzac's imagination. He…was one of Hoffmann's greatest admirers. He repeatedly refers to him in his novels and even employs his characters. Balzac calls Hoffmann 'the poet of that which seems not to exist and yet has life' (*Une fille d'Ève*, 1838)" (Rudwin, "Balzac and the Fantastic" *The Sewanee Review* 33:1, Jan. 1925, 10).

[5] See, for example, such passages as these: "'You have hesitated,'" Frenhofer tells Porbus, "'between drawing and color, between the dogged attention to detail, the stiff precision of the

admiringly at Porbus's already-famous portrait of Saint Mary of Egypt, Frenhofer

delivers an elaborate critique of Porbus's painting. If only, he bemoans, you had the

"'power to breath a portion of your soul into your beloved work'" (5). Judgments such as

these anticipate the works of Hawthorne, Rossetti, and Wilde, with their fictional studies

of human souls captured in painted portraits. Yet, Balzac's criticism-filled story focuses

not on the souls portrayed in pictures, but rather, what enables, limits, and results from

one man's lifelong attempt to master the art of painting.

Balzac establishes through young Poussin's admiration for Frenhofer the

dominant desire in "The Unknown Masterpiece" as an ambiguous mixture of male

homosocial affection and intellectual ambition, whereby male painters strive with and

against one another to perfect their art. In the first pivotal scene, Frenhofer stands before

Porbus's canvas as if to school the two ignorant men, who watch in awe as he

philosophizes about Italian art and dares to "fix" Porbus's portrait of Saint Mary himself.

Referring to the portraiture of Raphael—the "King of Art"—Frenhofer professes,

> 'Form in [Raphael's] figures (as with us) is a symbol, a means of communicating
> sensations, ideas, the vast imaginings of a poet. Every face is a whole world. The
> subject of the portrait appeared before him bathed in the light of a divine vision; it
> was revealed by an inner voice, the finger of God laid bare the sources of
> expression in the past of a whole life.' (Balzac 6)

Inflected with religious fervor and philosophical gestures toward a definition of "Form,"

German masters and the dazzling glow, the joyous exuberance of Italian painters. You have set
yourself to imitate Hans Holbein and Titian, Albrecht Durer and Paul Veronese in a single
picture…but what has come of it? Your work has neither the severe charm of a dry execution nor
the magical illusion of Italian *chiaroscuro*'" (Balzac 5). Earlier, Frenhofer says: "'You have
hesitated between drawing and color, between the dogged attention to detail, the stiff precision of
the German masters and the dazzling glow, the joyous exuberance of Italian painters. You have
set yourself to imitate Hans Holbein and Titian, Albrecht Durer and Paul Veronese in a single
picture…but what has come of it? Your work has neither the severe charm of a dry execution nor
the magical illusion of Italian *chiaroscuro*'" (Balzac 5).

Frenhofer's appraisal of Raphael intoxicates both Poussin and Porbus. Notably, the language Balzac gives to his mysterious old master presages the mode of criticism used by Pater, whose description of Leonardo da Vinci's *La Gioconda* in *The Renaissance* (1873) resonates with Frenhofer's vision of a portrait expressing "the past of a whole life." Just as Raphael's figures remind Frenhofer that "[e]very face is a whole world," so Pater, citing *Corinthians* I.10:11, reanimates the Mona Lisa as "the head upon which all 'the ends of the world are come'" (*Ren* 80). In Balzac's tale, the language of religion appears again when Frenhofer, having finished his monologue about Raphael, touches up a perceived flaw in Porbus's portrait; through this act he becomes a divine, almost supernatural being in the eyes of the enthusiastic neophyte Poussin: Frenhofer becomes "something more than a man—a fantastic spirit living in a mysterious world" (11). Before day's end, yet *another* male painting master comes into play, if only through conversation—Master Mabuse, Frenhofer's now-dead mentor. Porbus privately warns Poussin that Frenhofer's personal fortune enabled Mabuse's extravagant life and eventual ruin, while sullying Frenhofer's own potential career. However, these warnings do nothing to deter Poussin from aspiring to the greatness represented by this unknown old man. What Poussin stands to lose, however, is not a fortune or a career, but rather, his beautiful lover, Gillette, who will become entangled in this plot for perfection.

Following Hoffmann, Balzac explores the fatal tension between ideal and real forms of female beauty. The mystery established by this male homosocial coterie revolves around Frenhofer's "unknown masterpiece"—a portrait of the beautiful courtesan, Catherine Lescault, which Frenhofer has spent ten years perfecting and which he keeps concealed in his studio. Frenhofer claims that he has not perfected his

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masterpiece because he has not yet found a living model that meets his standards of female beauty. At this challenge, Poussin schemes to offer his own beautiful mistress, Gillette, as a model in exchange for the chance to see Frenhofer's painting. The results of this exchange for all four parties are explosive. Poussin's request that his lover model for another man—a request akin to prostitution—meets with a pained and terrified response. When, in turn, Porbus suggests the idea of the exchange to Frenhofer, the old master at first rejects it, using language I quote at length for its extraordinary anticipation of magic-portrait stories and poems by Hawthorne, Rossetti, Browning, and Wilde:

> 'What!...show you my creation, my bride? Rend the veil that has kept my happiness sacred? It would be an infamous profanation. For ten years I have lived with her; she is mine, mine alone; she loves me. Has she not smiled at me, at each stroke of the brush upon the canvas? She has a soul—the soul that I have given her. She would blush if any eyes but mine should rest on her. To exhibit her! Where is the husband, the lover so vile as to bring the woman he loves to dishonor? When you paint a picture for the court, you do not put your whole soul into it; to courtiers you sell lay figures duly colored…Poetry and women only lay the last veil aside for their lovers. Have we Rafael's model, Ariosto's Angelica, Dante's Beatrice?' (Balzac 15)

Frenhofer's treatment of his portrait as a woman—a woman who "is mine, mine alone" and who "loves me"—makes him seem mad. He voices madness of the sort Browning portrays through the Duke in "My Last Duchess" (1842). And yet, Porbus and Poussin nearly match Frenhofer's fervor with their own unceasing hunger to see her for themselves. The epistemology of desire among Balzac's male characters, which evokes that of Hardman's "Colonna the Painter," ambiguously shifts between desire for each other, for knowledge about one another, for Gillette, and for sight of Frenhofer's mastwork.

After the exchange of women has been transacted, Frenhofer declares that his masterpiece is perfect—finished—for she is superior to Gillette. Yet, as Frenhofer unfurls

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another everlasting speech, Porbus and Poussin peer around his studio unable even to find the portrait in question. When they discover it, a shocked Poussin remarks to Porbus that he "'can see nothing but confused masses of color and a multitude of fantastical lines that go to make a dead wall of paint'" (19). Quietly, Porbus and Poussin share a revelation that the old man's greatness lies in his poetic speeches, not his painting. Herein lies (one of) the aesthetic theories evoked by this story: mastery in painting competes with—and may even be oppositional to the very possibility of—mastery in poetry. In this way, Frenhofer personifies a variation on G. E. Lessing's argument in *Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), which attempts to distinguish between the competing properties and aims proper to each of the sister arts.

The violent dénouement of "The Unfinished Masterpiece," like "Sarrasine," turns Hoffmann's preoccupation with the ideal image of female beauty into a bleak definition of artistic mastery. Together, the mortal shocks that conclude the tale argue that masterful art means death, loss, and suffering for both men and women. Upon realizing that his companions see "nothing" in his painting, Frenhofer weeps, only to insist that the two men must merely be jealous. Meanwhile, Gillette, relentlessly neglected by all of the men, sits in the corner horrified at the ease with which her lover sacrifices her for the sake of his art. Poussin's attempts to assuage her fail: "All at once the painter once more became the lover. 'What is it, my angel?' he asked her. 'Kill me!' she sobbed. 'I must be a vile thing if I love you still, for I despise you'" (20). Frenhofer gives the two men "a profoundly astute glance" filled with suspicion, contempt, and triumph, before ushering them out of his studio. The next day Porbus learns that Frenhofer died in the night after burning his canvases. Artistic mastery, Balzac suggests, if it is ever possible, is so caught

up in the violence of sexual politics that it can exist only as an illusion shattered, never grasped, or preserved at the cost of death.

Like Balzac, Nikolai Gogol admired Hoffmann and influenced the Victorians, if in ways less frequently appreciated today. Scholarship on Gogol's inspirations confirms the lineage of magic-portrait fiction from Walpole to Hoffmann to Gogol, who published "The Portrait" in 1834 and revised it in 1842. Charles E. Passage refers to Gogol as one of *The Russian Hoffmanists* and, according to Theodore Ziolkowski, Gogol also admired Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, and Irving's "The Adventure of the Mysterious Picture."[6] Contemporary criticism of the story's fantastical elements provoked Gogol to revise and expand his magic-portrait story nearly ten years after its first publication. The revision, which removes any supernatural elements, distances the story from its gothic predecessors, instead rendering it closer to a "realist" study in aesthetic influence.[7] The story's publication history helped secure its role in the popularization of the magic-portrait genre in England, for in October of 1847 the 1842 version was abridged and translated by Thomas B. Shaw in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, which would go on to publish magic-portrait stories by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1859, Margaret Oliphant in 1884 and 1885, and Oscar Wilde in 1889. Later in the century the tale would appear again in two London publications shortly before the 1890

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[6] See Ziolkowski's *Disenchanted Images*, 112, and Passage's *The Russian Hoffmannists* (The Hague: Mouton, 1963), 146-48.

[7] Ziolkowski provides a lengthy explanation of Gogol's 1841-2 revision: "Above all, the supernatural elements have been completely disenchanted"; for example, "there is no longer any mystery about the appearance of the painting in the artist's lodgings: he carries it home under his arm. Similarly, the old painter does not attempt to burn up the portrait; he gives it to a friend who appreciates its genius" (Ziolkowski 117-8).

appearance in England and America of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.[8]

In a rare exception to the genre's characteristic focus on sex and gender, Gogol's story analyzes the problem of money in the male-dominated art world through a complex set of framed tales within tales. "The Portrait" tells the story of a poor painter named Tchartkóff who ventures into a *bric-a-brac* shop in St. Petersburg. There he discovers the dusty portrait of an "Asiatic" old man, whose devilish eyes "looked out of the portrait, and in some measure destroyed its harmony by their strange and lifelike expression" (457-8). On a whim Tchartkóff buys the portrait, only to suffer terrifying dreams in which the figure with piercing, life-like eyes comes alive and unloads coins onto his bed. Dream ambiguously translates into reality when Tchartkóff discovers money inside the portrait's frame, money that he uses to stave off his landlord and begin his life anew. Tchartkóff quickly becomes a greedy, fame-seeking commercial painter who purchases his reputation by flattering his aristocratic sitters with idealized likenesses. Soon Tchartkóff's life represents a crisis of male authority in the face of the portrait that lingers in his now-lavish studio and tortures him until his death. As we later learn through a framed story, the portrait depicts a long-dead usurer, who fatally cheated generations of customers out of their livelihoods. The evil usurer's painted likeness, we learn, functions as the object/symbol whose intoxicating influence upon viewers enables its subject's immortal capacity to destroy the lives of whoever "consumes" it.

"The Portrait" focuses on a male artist's crisis of identity, yet, whereas Balzac and

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[8] Kerry Powell makes this literary historical point when observing Gogol's influence on Wilde: "In Gogol's *Portrait*, therefore, we encounter detailed similarities with *Dorian Gray* which have never been pointed out despite Wilde's known interest in Russian fiction and despite publication of the tale in English translation by *two* London publishers only a short time before the first appearance of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (Powell "Tom, Dick, and Dorian Gray" 149).

others explore the fatal risks of artistic mastery, Gogol explores the risks of an alternative to mastery—commercial greed—personified in the devilish character of the Asiatic old man and his portrait's toxic influence on Tchartkóff. In this anti-*Künstlerroman*, male artistic authority suffers above all from the commodification of art, which at once corrupts artists, their productions, and their capacity for critical evaluation. For example, Tchartkóff's words betray his narcissistic anxiety when, at the height of his commercial celebrity, he makes a Wildean claim about the superior power of the spectator to determine aesthetic value:

> Concerning art and artists he now rarely spoke; he asserted that the merit of the old masters had been outrageously overrated; that, before Raphael their figures were rather like herrings than human beings; that it was the imagination of the spectator only that could find in their works that air of grandeur and dignity generally attributed to them. (471)

Ultimately, however, turning toward "the imagination of the spectator" to evade the pressure of history's cultural authorities does not assuage Tchartkóff's mounting personal crisis. The role of spectatorship—Tchartkóff's own spectatorship of a talented young artist's work—leads to his realization of threatening external powers, which he had hitherto escaped through delusional isolation. Only by discovering a beautiful painting by a new artist does Tchartkóff begin to see himself for the sell-out he's become. He decides that the source of his problems lies in the horrid picture of the Asiatic old man, so he gives it away. Yet, rather than attempting to outdo his new rival, he determines to buy and destroy all of the best pictures in St. Petersburg. In achieving this desperate feat of madness, he squanders his entire fortune, and yet still suffers from the nightmarish sense that every person around him is a portrait, and, worse still, the devilish face of the old man appears everywhere he looks. Tchartkóff dies in a paroxysm of fear. And this marks

only one—albeit the central one—of the multiple framed stories that make up Gogol's novella about a single painted portrait.

Unfolding through a Russian nesting doll formation of stories within stories, "The Portrait" pits men against other men through art objects that strip artists of the power that motivates them to produce art in the first place. Here and in later magic-portrait fiction, art objects betray artists and spectators alike by confronting them with various forms of counter-hegemonic authority, such as women's power, women's sexuality, the uncontrollable power of the spectator, and the uncontrollable power of art itself to influence social life. In Gogol's story, portraits symbolize the social ramifications of rising commodity culture on artists and non-artists alike. But the ambiguous power of a single portrait implies wider problems in the matter of aesthetic-as-social influence. For when Tchartkóff dies we are left to wonder the very thing we wonder about Dorian Gray: Who or what caused his degeneration? Was it the portrait of the Asiatic old man; the aristocratic female customers who first enticed him to alter his style; his own insatiable greed; or the spectators, including himself, with "imagination" enough to attribute artistic merit—the very imagination that leads to madness?

Of the European and American writers who produced the first wave of magic-portrait fiction, Nathaniel Hawthorne arguably wielded the greatest influence on the genre's development in that Victorians, such as popular periodical author Arlo Bates and female aesthete Vernon Lee, explicitly allude to Hawthorne in the body of their stories in order to ensure association with the genre he helped invent.[9] Hawthorne particularly

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[9] Arlo Bates mentions Hawthorne in his short story "A Problem in Portraiture" (*Scribner's* 6, Nov. 1889: 624), and Vernon Lee names him in reference to *The Marble Faun* in "Ghosts in a Roman Photograph Album" (*The English Review* May 1920: 433). (Lee's essay also appeared in *The Living Age* on June 19, 1920.)

admired Lewis's *The Monk* and Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*; in fact, his first

published work *Fanshawe* (1828) contains a primary character named Dr. Melmoth and,

as Ziolkowski observes, "several quotations are borrowed from Maturin's romance. It is

no surprise, then, to find that *The House of the Seven Gables* amounts to an adaptation of

the Gothic romance to American circumstances" (Ziolkowski 100). Hawthorne wrote at

least five works that share themes and tropes with the magic-portrait genre: "Dr.

Heidegger's Experiment" (1837), "The Minister's Black Veil" (1837), "The Birthmark"

(1843), *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851), and *The Marble Faun* (1860).[10] In

addition to these works, he penned two unmistakable magic-portrait stories: "The

Prophetic Pictures," composed in 1835 and first published in *Twice-Told Tales* (1837),

and "Edward Randolph's Portrait" in *Legends of the Province House* (1837). My analysis

will focus on "The Prophetic Pictures" because it is this story to which later writers and

critics—from Arlo Bates and Vernon Lee to W. J. Clarke and George Eliot—repeatedly

refer. Like the tales of Balzac and Gogol, Hawthorne's story shifts the focus from male

self-development to male anxiety and expands the dominant theme to encompass larger

issues of art's social—or, in Hawthorne's case, art's prophetic—powers of influence.

"The Prophetic Pictures" tells the story of a Boston couple, Elinor and Walter

Ludlow, who commission an artist to paint their portraits just before they marry.

Renowned for his capacity to depict the souls of his sitters, Hawthorne's unnamed artist

sees himself as a "Prophet" and represents a Faustian magician of sorts, whose powers

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[10] In "Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" (1837), Hawthorne employs a haunted portrait (of a deceased lover) as well as a magic mirror, but neither motif proves central to the story about an intoxicating, yet temporary potion drawn from Florida's Fountain of Youth.

nevertheless remain within the realms of intellectual genius and social influence.[11] Sure enough, life imitates art. Upon viewing the finished portraits, Walter suddenly suspects something of his fiancée, some unnamed sexual sin exposed in the artist's representation of her face, which now takes on the same unseemly expression. After the Ludlows marry and their portraits attract constant, mystified admirers, Walter nearly kills Elinor out of the rage provoked by his fault-finding gaze. The artist, driven by his narcissistic desire to review his masterpieces, returns to Boston just in time to save Elinor's life and to scold her for failing to heed the warning he conveyed through his fateful portrayal.[12] Hawthorne's artist thus becomes neither a Byronic hero like Hardman's Colonna, nor a disillusioned neophyte like Balzac's Poussin, but rather a divine, self-isolating, and troubled "master" like Balzac's Frenhofer, yet one rendered wicked by powers of social influence akin to those of Gogol's usurer. If Gogol's story argues for a kind of anachronistic "art for art's sake" as a requisite protection against the corrupting forces of commercialism, Hawthorne's story explores the opposite extreme: the dangers of an "art

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[11] While I have no space to discuss this fact at length, Hawthorne appended a footnote to his story, which reads as follows: "This story was suggested by an anecdote of Stuart, related in Dunlap's History of the Arts of Design—a most entertaining book to the general reader, and a deeply interesting one, we should think, to the artist" (Hawthorne 456). Ziolkowski explains this "anecdote of Stuart" in greater detail: "Hawthorne tells us in a note that his story was inspired by an anecdote concerning Gilbert Stuart that he found in William Dunlap's *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States* (1834). Stuart was once engaged by Lord Mulgrave to paint the portrait of his brother, who was going abroad. When Mulgrave saw the completed portrait, he exclaimed that he could see insanity in the face. 'I have painted your brother as I saw him,' was the artist's reply. Soon after the brother's arrival in India he cut his throat in an attack of madness. 'It is thus that the real portrait painter dives into the recesses of his sitters' minds, and displays strength or weakness upon the surface of his canvas,' Dunlap concludes. 'The mechanic makes a map of a man'" (Ziolkowski 118-9).

[12] However, the final lines of dialogue are ambiguous. The artist demands of Elinor—"'Did I not warn you?'" (469)—and yet, we readers remain unsure whether he means, "Did I not warn you *not to marry him*?" or "Did I not warn you *not to get your portrait painted*?" Each of these acts proves equally dangerous for a woman, who becomes not a "subject" for her family portrait, but a victim of the violence it makes possible.

for art's sake" mentality exemplified by a painter who privileges artistic mastery over human life.

Hawthorne theorizes, as Balzac does, the stakes of male sexual and artistic ambitions. Yet, in "The Prophetic Pictures" the economy of desire pivots on the collision of one man's sexual jealousy and another man's icy, Faustian precision, as opposed to the passionate desire for mastery we see in Hoffmann's and Balzac's tales. Hawthorne follows the German Romantic precedent of situating the central conflict in a *Künstlerroman* (albeit brief) of a European-educated artist without a family who, in this case, teaches anatomy, travels widely, and speaks the language of every country on the globe. Hawthorne's artist is variously called a "Prophet," a "citizen of the world," a "wizard," a "madman," a "magician," and a "polished gentleman" who "looked somewhat like a portrait himself." It is this overeducated gentleman's burning yet cold intellectual hunger that strikes the loudest emotional note in the story, next to the fear and fury he inspires in his victims. There is no love—no desire—in this story excepting perhaps the greedy urgency Walter exhibits about procuring the portraits. In the instant when the artist saves Elinor's life, he is not a hero. Instead, we discover, the combination of a male prophet-artist and a jealous husband yields not one, but *two* madmen, who alternately prey upon and save Elinor from the emotional trauma and near-homicide they jointly encourage.[13] The artist's epistemological monopoly becomes the flip side of

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[13] Significantly, Hawthorne renders Walter painter-like through an image placed in Elinor's mouth: after Walter has accused her of wearing a perversely concerned expression, she pleads, "'You paint my face with your own fantasies'" (457). Elinor futilely challenges Walter's comments about the female subjects depicted in the painter's studio gallery: of the everlasting Madonna which Walter praises, she says, "'where all things fade, how miserable to be the one that could not fade!'" and of the Virgin Walter calls "'kindly'" she says, "'Yes; but very sorrowfully, methinks'" (459). Meanwhile, Hawthorne's artist becomes an egomaniac for whom portraits of others double as "creations of his own": "So much of himself—of his imagination and

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Walter's paranoid, ignorant projection of sexual "knowledge" onto his wife. Hawthorne

thus uses both a male artist and a male spectator to call attention to the misogynistic

violence of portraiture and its roots in male psychosexual fantasies.[14] His story

anticipates the theme of male sexual jealousy, which appears in Robert Browning's

dramatic monologue, "My Last Duchess" (1842), and Henry James's first magic-portrait

story, "The Story of a Masterpiece" (1868).

The climactic scene illustrates the central theme of the Victorian magic-portrait

story: the magic—magic because ultimately indefinable—dialectic of influence between

art and life. As "Elinor watched the increasing wildness of [Walter's] face, her own

assumed a look of terror; and when at last, he turned upon her, the resemblance of both to

their portraits was complete. 'Our fate is upon us!' howled Walter. 'Die!'" (469).

Hawthorne's artist appears just in time to prevent Walter from killing his wife. Standing

"like a magician, controlling the phantoms which he had evoked," the painter declares to

himself that he "beheld the figures of his sketch. The picture, with all its tremendous

coloring, was finished" (469). In this moment Hawthorne's artist embodies the Faustian

devils of Goethe's and Hoffmann's fiction, yet presents what will become a

quintessentially Victorian preoccupation with the indistinguishable forces of life and art.

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all other powers—had been lavished on the study of Walter and Elinor, that he almost regarded them as creations of his own, like the thousands with which he had peopled the realms of Picture" (466). At the same time, Hawthorne describes the artist's masterful prophecy-through-painting as "a power indefinable even to himself," suggesting that even his divine knowledge remains incomplete. Inevitably, a morbidly lifelike representation that distills one's "inmost soul" will take on a life of its own.

[14] The psychology of portraiture reappears in later magic-portrait stories, including A. de G. S.'s "The Magic of a Face" (1879) and Francis Newton-Robinson's "An Artist's Vision" (1893). We can see overlaps between these works and sensation novels containing scenes of imagistic nightmares, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860).

II. The Woman Problem: Le Fanu, Nerval, Novalis, Browning, and Poe

Between 1839 and 1842 a cascade of magic-portrait stories appeared in Ireland, France, Germany, England, and America, testifying to Europe's steady interest in the genre. These tales, along with poems by Browning, helped popularize the genre and, in doing so, reveal which themes and tropes Victorian authors commonly cultivate in later magic-portrait fiction. As this analysis shows, Hawthorne's trope of the prophetic portrait and the theme of female sexuality will become generic fixtures throughout the century. This pattern begins in 1839, when Irish ghost story writer J. Sheridan Le Fanu produces the "Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter," which mimics Hardman's frame-story formula of unfolding a verbal record to explain a narrative portrait.[15] Schalken's portrait depicts his erstwhile lover Rose robed in white, while in the background lurks an alarmed man with his hand on his sword. By story's end, we learn that this painting records an experience in which a frightened Schalken receives a visit from the ambiguously dead Rose, whom he had hoped to marry until she was forced into the treacherous possession of a wealthy, but devilish ogre. Rose's veiled, vampire-like husband appears by all accounts to embody the portrait of a corpse—he never breathes or blinks—and Rose fails to escape him, thus leaving Schalken with only one avenue for preserving her, if only for himself: portraiture. "Schalken the Painter" tells the ghostly tragedy of a man who can only possess his lover in the form of her portrait. Le Fanu thus participates in the magic-portrait tradition whereby painted portraiture serves as the site

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[15] "Schalken the Painter" (1839) appeared in *The University Magazine*. Le Fanu also published two related stories: "The Watcher" (*The University Magazine* Nov. 1847) and "An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street" (*Dublin University Magazine* 1853).

through which men sadly, anxiously, violently, or fatally, attempt to contain women.

Other stories published during this period reanimate the Hawthornian prophetic portrait. In 1839, Gérard de Nerval published "The Devil's Portrait," a story akin to Novalis's fragmentary *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802) and D. G. Rossetti's unfinished "St. Agnes of Intercession" (1849-50). All three of these works deal with ancient portraits that foretell the lives of present-day protagonists—men who suffer the shock of seeing themselves in the painted likenesses of long-dead subjects. Like Rossetti's mid-century magic-portrait fiction, Nerval's *Contes Fantastiques* exhibits the influences of Goethe and Hoffmann, especially of Hoffmann's *The Devil's Elixirs*.[16] "The Devil's Portrait" at once follows the tradition of magic-portrait stories about devil characters while also emblematizing the Hawthornian subcategory of prophetic magic portraits. Nerval tells the following tale: "A Young English painter named Eugene travels to Venice, where he hopes to recover from the rejection by his beloved Laura. In the ruins of a church he comes across a painting called *La Fiancée du Diable*, in which he detects an eerily precise resemblance to Laura. Shocked to learn that the painter had lost his mind and committed suicide because of the model for his painting, Eugene falls ill and dies, thus fulfilling the prophecy of the portrait" (Ziolkowski 105-6). In stories such as these, diabolical female sexuality ensures the ruin of male painters who try to capture female beauty in a portrait and male spectators who suffer the sight of one.

Like Le Fanu and Nerval, Robert Browning takes up the theme of women's sexuality and of the salutary or threatening powers of a woman's image. While Browning's poetry defies the development of magic-portrait fiction as a narrative prose

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[16] Nerval even included a French translation of Hoffmann's "A New Year's Eve Adventure" in this collection.

form, his "painter poems" and certain of his dramatic monologues warrant mention because they helped popularize the genre's defining themes and forms, not least by influencing Rossetti. Browning's earliest published poem, "Pauline" (1833), adapts the Romantic trope of embodying a male artist's soul in the portrait of a woman—the trope that, as we will see, becomes the centerpiece of Rossetti's "Hand and Soul" (1850). "And of my powers," Browning's speaker professes,

> one springs up to save
> From utter death a soul with such desires
> Confined to clay – which is the only one
> Which marks me – an imagination which
> Has been an angel to me – coming not
> In fitful visions but beside me ever
> And never failing me. ("Pauline" 281-87)

Nearly a decade later, Browning explores the dark side of a work of art that "confine[s]" a woman's soul, not "to clay" but rather, within a painting concealed beneath a velvet curtain. The painted portrait of "My Last Duchess" in Browning's most famous dramatic monologue seems, for the Duke, to wield an uncontrollable power to appeal and enliven. Just as Balzac's Frenhofer possessively praises the life-likeness of his painted Catherine Lescault, so Browning's jealous Duke unveils his wife, there, "painted on the wall, / Looking as if she were alive" (1-2). As a poetic technique characterized by its experimentation with the limits of subjectivity, the dramatic monologue gives new life to the fundamental trope of magic-portrait fiction: ekphrasis. For ekphrastic commentary occasions the Duke's paranoid vision at the same time as it embroils his agent and the reader in his subjective response. We necessarily become spectators gazing through the Duke's eyes at his murdered wife's portrait where "she stands / As if alive" (46-7).

Browning's "painter poems" "Fra Lippo Lippi" (1855) and "Andrea del Sarto"

(1855) venture into the thematic territory that characterizes several early and late magic-portrait stories, such as Hardman's and Pater's works: the male Italian's *Künstlerroman*.

Yet, Browning's Renaissance painters are troubled, middle-aged men who reflect, however amusingly, upon fraught, disappointing careers. Their reflections not only generate vivid characterizations, but they also constitute lyricized passages of art criticism. Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi unleashes a fury of lamentations about the multiple, competing expectations of portrait painters, who face pitfalls whether they employ realism or idealism:

> Faces, arms, legs, and bodies like the true
> As much as pea and pea! it's a devil's-game!
> Your business is not to catch men with show,
> With homage to the perishable clay,
> But lift them over it, ignore it all,
> Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh. ("Fra Lippo Lippi" 177-82)

By detailing Fra Lippo Lippi's laments about the "devil's-game" of art-making, Browning richly traverses the social and intellectual world of high art. However, his innovative synthesis of ekphrasis and the dramatic monologue likely did more to influence Victorian magic-portrait fiction. Vernon Lee, for example, integrates the dramatic monologue to fascinating effect in her magic-portrait collection *Hauntings* (1890) and Walter Pater explicitly praises Browning's dramatic monologue alongside the novels of Hugo and Flaubert as the ideal aesthetic forms for the modern age ("Style" 11).

Published the same year as Browning's "My Last Duchess," Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1842) contributes as much to the genre's popularization and development as Balzac's, Gogol's, and Hawthorne's tales of the 1830s, in large part because Poe's fiction enjoyed a popular resurgence in late-Victorian England. Like his counterparts represented in this study, Poe was well versed in the German Romanticism

of Goethe and Hoffmann as well as the later, Hoffmanesque tradition in *Blackwood's*.[17]

In fact, Poe so frequently fielded accusations that he copied German "phantasy pieces" that he explicitly contradicted the claim in his Preface to *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*:

> The truth is that, with a single exception, there is no one of these stories in which the scholar should recognize the distinctive features of that species of pseudo-horror which we are taught to call Germanic, for no better reason than that some of the secondary names of German literature have been identified with its folly. (Poe *Works* 151)

In an 1842 review of *Twice-Told Tales*, however, Poe praises his national contemporaries: "We have very few American tales of real merit—we may say, indeed, none, with the exception of 'The Tales of a Traveller' of Washington Irving, and these 'Twice-Told Tales' of Mr. Hawthorne" (Poe *Works* 199).[18] Of course, these two volumes contain early magic-portrait stories discussed here and in Chapter One. Following Hawthorne's lead, "The Oval Portrait" focuses not on the adventurous artist-hero, but rather on the dangerously egocentric artist who sacrifices a woman's life for the sake of a masterful portrait.[19]

Originally titled "Life in Death," "The Oval Portrait" narrates a theoretical definition of male artistic creation as a violent social act that becomes possible in its

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[17] See, for example, Margaret Alterton's *Origins of Poe's Critical Theory* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965) and Pfordresher's "Dante Gabriel Rossetti's 'Hand and Soul': Sources and Significance" (*Studies in Short Fiction*, 19:2, Spring 1982, 103-32). According to Pfordresher, Poe accessed Hoffmann's tales through French translations. More importantly, Poe was familiar with Walter Scott's prominent critical essay on Hoffmann (Pfordresher 124).

[18] See Poe, Edgar Allan. "Nathaniel Hawthorne." *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe in Four Volumes, Vol. III*. New York: W. J. Middleton, 1849: 188-202.

[19] Like Hawthorne, Poe wrote other stories that overlap with magic-portrait fiction. Poe's "William Wilson" (1839), a magic-mirror story of sorts about a man with a second self, shares central concerns with the genre and is often considered a source for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

greatest form only through the death of a woman.[20] Poe tells a short tale-within-a-tale about an ambitious young artist who kills his bride in the act of painting her portrait. In the frame story that introduces this event, an injured traveler discovers the surviving portrait in a quintessentially gothic mansion where he seeks refuge. It is this painting that thrusts the ambiguously dying narrator back to life. After gazing at the portrait for an hour, he grows "satisfied with the true secret of its effect": "I had found the spell of the picture in an absolute *life-likeness* of expression, which at first startling, finally confounded, subdued and appalled me" (Poe 482, emphasis original). Eager to learn more, the enlivening traveler, like Hardman's Colonna, locates a book containing a history of the painting. This record concludes thus: While the artist "'yet gazed [at his masterpiece], he grew tremulous and very pallid, and aghast, and crying with a loud voice 'This is indeed *Life* itself!' turned suddenly to regard his beloved:—*She was dead*'" (484). "The Oval Portrait" echoes Balzac's stories in its insistence that great art depends upon suffering and death, but for Poe, death is at its most artful when the body is a woman's. Significantly, the narrative never returns to its "frame" and thus refuses to enact the violence of completion, just as Hawthorne's painter resists his picture's consummation by preventing Elinor's murder. Poe's narrator instead leaves us with three unsettling gazes at the same ekphrastic image—the painter's, the narrator's, and our own. But is the image we "see" that of a beautiful bride or a dead woman? That of "'*Life* itself!'" or of death—the material and abstract sourceblood of aesthetic beauty?

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[20] See Elisabeth Bronfen's Freudian reading of Poe in *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

III. Rendering the Popular Aesthetic: Rossetti's "Hand and Soul"

In "Hand and Soul" (1850), Dante Gabriel Rossetti uses the magic-portrait genre to articulate the countercultural aesthetic principles of the newly formed Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, commonly interpreted as the incipient arts of the Aesthetic Movement. As this reading will show, Pre-Raphaelite writers and painters led by Rossetti enacted these principles in their artistic and commercial practices.[21] "Hand and Soul" thus constitutes a classic example of life imitating art, for Rossetti brought into Victorian cultural practice many of the interests, ambitions, techniques, and values fictionalized in the first wave of magic-portrait fiction. In doing so, he helped transport literary forms once associated with popular prose fiction into the realm of avant-garde high art. The magic-portrait tradition of mixing high and low forms—especially philosophy and fiction, art criticism and sexual drama, masculinized word and feminized image—is especially pronounced in Rossetti's manifesto. The high and low mixture inherent in the genre will endure in subsequent magic-portrait stories in large part because of Rossetti's influence on the culture of aestheticism.

Published in the first issue of the short-lived Pre-Praphaelite journal *The Germ*, "Hand and Soul" follows the model of "Colonna the Painter" in that Rossetti tells the story-within-a-story of a medieval Italian painter named Chiaro dell' Erma, whose portrait of a woman is discovered by a modern-day museumgoer. Like Colonna, Chiaro represents a self-centered artist hero who habitually isolates himself in order to perfect his paintings. Chiaro struggles not with rival artists—for he sees himself as a master superior to his contemporaries—but rather, with the motives and purposes of great art. He

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[21] Note that the biographical element of this argument will be overhauled in the revision of this chapter.

realizes in a moment of personal crisis that the drives of fame and faith have both failed him. Depressed and alone in his studio, he receives a visit from an angelic woman who, we are told, embodies his Soul: "'I am an image, Chiaro,'" she says, "'of thine own soul within thee. See me, and know me as I am" (392). The Soul gives several lengthy speeches, which constitute an epiphany; she advises him to find faith in himself, to "possess thy love in sufficiency: assuredly this is faith, for the heart must believe first" (393). Rossetti balances the concrete and the magical: he describes Chiaro's encounter with his Soul's speaking female "image" as a supernatural, yet physical one: "She did not move closer towards him, but he felt her to be as much with him as his breath…As the woman stood, her speech was with Chiaro: not, as it were, from her mouth or in his ears; but distinctly between them" (392). This scene represents Rossetti's complex attempt to suture (male) self and (female) other, soul and body, art and thought, in such a way as to create an intersubjective male self. This attempt at suturing a divided male subject is the project Pater will carry on, though with political ambitions, in his male homoerotic study of aesthetic *Bildung*, "Winckelmann" (1867), and, as we will see in Chapter Five, in his *Imaginary Portraits*, especially "Dennis L'Auxerrois" (1887).

Chiaro's epiphany, voiced by his own feminized Soul, ends with a sexually charged climax: she orders him to paint her portrait. "'Chiaro, servant of God,'" she says, "'take now thine Art unto thee, and paint me thus, as I am, to know me: weak, as I am, and in the weeds of this time…Do this; so shall thy soul stand before thee always, and perplex thee no more'" (395). After painting this portrait of her/himself, Chiaro collapses as if out of post-coital exhaustion. We see no more of him and, instead, return to the frame story narrated by a male art connoisseur of sorts, who has been traveling

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throughout Italy in search of Chiaro's neglected works.[22] In the Pitti Gallery in Florence

during the Spring of 1847, the narrator finds the painting of Chiaro's Soul marked with

the words "*Manus Animam pinxit*" and the date 1239. The "picture I speak of," he

explains, "is a small one, and represents merely the figure of a woman."[23] The narrator's

personal reaction to the portrait proves far more interesting than his ekphrasis of it: "As

soon as I saw the figure, it drew an awe upon me, like water in shadow. I shall not

attempt to describe it more than I have already done; for the most absorbing wonder of it

was its literality. You knew that figure, when painted, had been seen; yet it was not a

thing to be seen of men" (396). Rossetti's contradiction—the "literality" of a "figure" that

nevertheless "was not a thing to be seen of men"—exploits ekphrasis as a refusal, rather

than an exposure, of visual signs in order to toy with the boundaries between materiality

and immateriality, male self and female body. We saw a similar set of binary tensions in

previous stories, such as Vien's portrait copied from Sarrasine's sculpture, Frenhofer's

"unknown masterpiece," and the taunting likeness of Gogol's "Asiatic old man." Yet, the

stakes of ekphrastic portraiture are somewhat higher for Rossetti in that he uses this story

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[22] The frame story, observes John Pfordresher, conveys one of the characteristic assumptions held by the PRB: "that there can be a secret and mysterious kinship between the modern man and his ancient brother/artist; that, in fact, he is pursuing a pre-existent double" (Pfordresher 107). This fact adds another dimension to the tale's narcissism in that the narrator legitimizes his own aesthetic judgment through identification with a long-lost male artist, just as Chiaro legitimizes his own art through identification with a supernatural image of his own soul. There is, in fact, ample evidence for the role of narcissism in the PRB's nascent aestheticism: "In his prefatory sonnet William Michael Rossetti stresses the independence of the artist, who should 'plainly think the thought which is in him…' (line 2), while John L. Tupper argues (in *Germ* No. 1) that 'the artist does not work by the instrumentality of rule and science, but mainly by instructive impulse'" (Pfordresher 117-8). As we'll see in the next chapter, Pater modifies the PRB school of thought and renders the kinship between present and past artists more intersubjective and social.

[23] The narrator's ekphrasis of this painting appears thus: "The picture I speak of is a small one, and represents merely the figure of a woman, clad to the hands and feet with a green and grey raiment, chaste and early in its fashion, but exceedingly simple. She is standing: her hands are held together lightly, and her eyes set earnestly open" (Rossetti 396).

to promote the tenets of a school of art.

The members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood intended for the first issue of *The Germ* to articulate the group's ideas, through which they scandalously set out to transform the Victorian art world. Scholars since have called "Hand and Soul" "an aesthetic theory disguised as autobiographical fiction," as Brian and Judy Dobbs put it.[24] Publishing in 1906, A. C. Benson writes this of Rossetti's story: there exists "no document more vital to the true understanding of the principles on which Rossetti worked, and the lofty conception of art thus formed" (Benson 157). The framed *Künstlerroman* formula established by Hardman enabled the group's mission of conveying their principles through example, as it were, for Chiaro models the acts of critical evaluation and cultural rebellion the Pre-Raphaelites waged against England's current "master," Joshua Reynolds. Chiaro searches for masters among the renowned painters of his day, but upon gazing at the famous Giunta Pisano's "lifeless and incomplete" pictures, "a sudden exultation possessed him as he said within himself, 'I am the master of this man'" (385).[25] Just as Rossetti insinuated his own superiority over "Sir Sloshua" Reynolds, so Chiaro perceives his superiority over Pisano.

Rossetti's narrator also symbolizes the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of the artist as

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[24] Brian and Judy Dobbs, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: An Alien Victorian* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1977). See also Pfordresher, 105.

[25] J. B. Morse argues for connections between Giunta Pisano, Chiaro's failed mentor, and Ford Madox Brown, under whom Rossetti voluntarily studied for several months in 1848 (Morse 334). Rossetti sent Brown a formal, laudatory letter requesting his mentorship, which Brown originally thought was a joke. Disappointed with the experience of working under him, Rossetti quickly left Brown's studio to share a studio with William Holman Hunt. Morse's research also shows that, while some critics contend that no such painting as the story's "figura mistica" exists, Rossetti did paint a picture "in body-colour bearing a great resemblance to the one described in 'Hand and Soul'" (336). According to Morse's research, the "woman in the painting represents an auburn-haired young woman standing with joined hands in the posture described by Rossetti in 'Hand and Soul'" (336).

critic/antiquarian, who rebelliously resurrects and reauthorizes forgotten masters, or alternatively, rejects previous masters (Raphael) and present masters (Reynolds). Rossetti himself enacted this principle in famously rediscovering a manuscript of poems and drawings by William Blake, which ignited a major revival of Blake during the Victorian *fin de siècle*.[26] Rossetti kept up this taste-making practice when he "discovered" the anonymously published English translation of ancient Persian hedonistic poems, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, by Edward Fitzgerald, which similarly achieved popularity during the end of the century. The Pre-Raphaelites made very clear their intentions to revise the canon by producing a list of "Immortals," which included, along with Shakespeare and Tennyson, Homer, Dante, Chaucer, Keats, Shelley, and Robert Browning. Paradoxically, then, in order to create a new and different style of art (with the help of their renowned mentor, John Ruskin), the Pre-Raphaelites advocated revalidating unknown and famous-but-out-of-favor artists from the Pre-Raphael past. And, as the revival of Blake and the popularity of Fitzgerald's collection suggest, they did so with remarkably successful results.

At the same time, "Hand and Soul" articulates a misogynistic philosophy of aesthetic practice that Pre-Raphaelite painters exercised in their studios and captured in their canvases and their poetry. The story's instructive, strangely moralistic allegory theorizes the process of artistic production as a man's narcissistic auto/heterosexual

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[26] As Karl Beckson explains, the "rediscovery of William Blake's visionary poems and drawings inspired the Pre-Raphaelites, particularly the two Rossetti brothers, William Michael (the editor of Blake's works in 1874) and Dante Gabriel (the owner of Blake's manuscript notebook), as well as Swinburne (author of an influential study of Blake in 1868)" (Beckson 236-7). Swinburne wrote about Blake in large part because Blake was in vogue among the Pre-Raphaelites at the time. Notably, Rossetti may have been successful in popularizing Blake as a forgotten master, but his attempts to do so with Charles Jeremiah Wells and Ebenezer Jones proved less successful.

conquest of self/woman.[27] Through Chiaro's triumphant act of portraiture Rossetti suggests that the social and psychological problems suffered by aspiring male artists can be solved through the dream-enhanced painting of a beautiful woman, preferably an angelic, vaguely maternal one who will order the artist to paint her. In the eyes of Rossetti's idealized male master, to paint the image/woman/body/soul, "weak, as [she is], and in the weeds of this time," is at once to possess a woman sexually and to realize himself as an artist. Seeing her image means seeing his own self-image. Chiaro's masturbatory scene of art making relishes in the tensions between worldly and otherworldly registers, self and other, erotic and religious energy—tensions that elide Rossetti's aggressive erasure of the woman as a woman. Her "name" is Chiaro's Soul, but what exactly is she? A ghost? An angel? A projection of Chiaro's distressed imagination? Rossetti valorizes what Balzac critiques: a formalist aesthetic that depends on an oppressive gender ideology according to which ideal art comes from dead, dying, or unreal women. At the same time, however, the misogyny of this scene is undermined by the identificatory and androgynous aspects of Chiaro's self-realization.

The story's last lines function as a statement of purpose for Pre-Raphaelite artists: "You knew that figure, when painted, had been seen; yet it was not a thing to be seen of men" (396). True to their word, the PRB's seemingly countless portraits of *femmes fatales* evoke stilled eroticism, deathliness, and otherworldliness. While meticulously

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[27] As we'll see in Chapter Five, Oscar Wilde makes Rosetti's principle of artistic production as an erotic act even more explicit in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—stripped as Wilde's novel is of Rossetti's favored medieval and religious contexts—when Basil laments the fact that he has put too much of himself into his portrait of Dorian. Interestingly, just before his Soul appears, Chiaro asks himself, ''May one be a devil and not know it?'' (Rossetti 391). If read alongside Wilde's novel, Chiaro functions at once as the hero and the Faustus of Rossetti's story, just as Dorian can be read as both hero-victim and Faustian anti-hero.

detailed in their physical "literality," Rossetti's painted "stunners" appear sickly, stylized, and formulaic. Thus, while the group advocated the Ruskinian objective of "truth to nature," their portraits of women were, as Emily Orlando puts it, "waxen, over-the-top, and far from realistic."[28] This preoccupation extended into Pre-Raphaelite literature. Rossetti's focus on portraits of women as a medium for male self-development continues throughout his career. His most famous poem "Jenny" (1870) takes as its subject the sleeping beauty of a prostitute, through which the speaking male subject, a desirous voyeur, articulates his self-identification. Published the same year, Rossetti's poem "The Portrait" (1870) opens with lines that recall Browning's "My Last Duchess": "This is her picture as she was: / It seems a thing to wonder on, / As though mine image in the glass / Should tarry when myself am gone" (I.1-4). Rossetti writes: "In painting her, I shrin'd her face / Mid mystic trees, where light falls in / Hardly at all" (III.19-21); and again, "A deep dim wood; and there she stands / As in that wood that day" (IV.28-9). Similarly, the first issue of *The Germ* contains two poems—Thomas Woolner's "My Beautiful Lady" and "Of My Lady in Death"—that sanctify Dante Alighieri's *dolce stil nuovo*, or the "sweet new style" of religious inspiration produced through the death of the male poet's adored lady. However, this motif is not isolated to Dante Alighieri's literature, as Jerome

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[28] In her recent article "'That I May Not Faint, or Die, or Swoon': Reviving Pre-Raphaelite Women" (*Women's Studies* 38:6, 2009), Emily Orlando draws on Bullen's and Casteras's scholarship on Pre-Raphaelite art to give a helpful explanation of the increasing contradictions in PRB artworks: "Although 'truth to nature' was supposed to be a guiding principle for the young artists…, fidelity to nature was eventually abandoned in favor of a pursuit of a highly unnatural ideal. For all the Pre-Raphaelites' talk of breaking free of convention, the movement proved, in many ways, to be backward-looking rather than forward-thinking (Bullen 217). It is pointedly ironic that, while the PRB set out to right the wrongs of those they considered to be the stilted academic painters—and particularly their ways of representing women—they ultimately committed the very sins they so vehemently protested. In the end, those elements of academic art that made the Pre-Raphaelites cringe paradoxically reared their unwelcome heads in their own work: 'repetitive formulas, frivolous representations of women, reductive attitudes and a certain overall slickness' (Casteras 145)" (Orlando 618).

McGann's focus on Alighieri might suggest, for this is the motif used by Romantic

authors of magic-portrait fiction. Perhaps most famously, Poe asserts in both his criticism

and his art that the death of a woman is the most poetical of all themes.

The aesthetic practice advertised in "Hand and Soul" literally brings to life

elements of the first wave of magic-portrait fiction. Pre-Raphaelite painters craved what

the fictional artists in these stories crave: lifelikeness, the italicized word at the center of

Poe's "The Oval Portrait" (1842). William Michael Rossetti explains this practical

objective in an essay called "Dante Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal," published in *The*

Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs (May 1903):

> A leading doctrine with the Præraphaelites (and I think a very sound one) was that
> it is highly inexpedient for a painter, occupied with an ideal or poetical subject, to
> portray his personages from the ordinary hired models; and that on the contrary he
> ought to look out for living people who, by refinement of character and aspect,
> may be supposed to have some affinity with those personages…This plan would
> secure (1) some general conformity between the painter's idea of his personages
> and the individuals from whom he pictures them; and (2) *a lifelike treatment of a*
> *living countenance*, with its precious personal vitality, and nuances of mould and
> character… (W. M. Rossetti 274, emphasis added)

This "leading doctrine" dictated the methods of the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers, each of

whom, as historian Lucinda Hawksley explains, "wanted to discover his own, even more

beautiful stunner"; the men busily "approach[ed] suitable-looking women and

[eventually] had quite a variety of models at their disposal" (Hawksley *Lizzie Siddal* 45).

After seeing how successfully Elizabeth ("Lizzie") Siddall[29] modeled for John Everett

Millais and Walter Howell Deverell, who had discovered Siddall in a milliner's

workshop, Rossetti quickly romanced her and requested that she model for no one but

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[29] Rossetti recommended that his mistress change the spelling of her name from "Sidall" to
"Sidal," which he thought appeared more properly English. In the spirit of feminist resurrection, I
will use the original spelling.

him. Like the beautiful, "weak," spirit-like female figure depicted in Chiaro's portrait, Siddall was praised for looking—as Ford Madox Brown puts it in 1854—"thinner and more deathlike and more beautiful and more ragged than ever" (Quoted in Orlando 613). After the torment of Rossetti's decade-long refusal to marry her, the birth of a stillborn child, and years of suffering from what scholars believe to be anorexia and depression, Siddall committed suicide through an overdose of laudanum in 1862 at age 32.

In "Hand and Soul" we also find a fictionalization of Pre-Raphaelite practices of production and exchange between men.[30] Because Pre-Raphaelitism was so controversial, its practitioners—despite having the help of Ruskin's initial patronage—had to cultivate what we might call non-institutional means of marketing and selling their arts. As Elizabeth Helsinger has shown, Rossetti and his coterie established careers by deploying art as a mediator of two highly desirable forms of intimacy: sexual intimacy with women (e.g. models who could become wives or mistresses) and homoerotic intimacy with male friends (e.g. men who bought and shared art objects).[31] In fact, this brotherly intimacy is what, among other things, attracted Ruskin to the group, which afforded him the pleasure of conceiving himself a "brother-in-arms" (Helsinger 95-6). Embodying the intersections among commercial, sexual, and fraternal relations, the Brothers sketched each other often; they made furniture, wall hangings, and dishes as gifts for each other; they searched for models together; they even swapped or competed for the women entangled in their increasingly profitable social web. Rossetti, as Helsinger explains, "learnt too

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[30] "All the details of Chiaro's daily life," argues Pfordresher, "constitute an autobiographical sketch of the lives and times of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood: the long hours at the easel, the old and inadequate teachers, the rivalry with contemporaries," and so on (Pfordresher 109).

[31] See Helsinger's "Pre-Raphaelite Intimacies: Ruskin and Rossetti" in *Ruskin's Artists: Studies in the Victorian Visual Economy* (Ed. Robert Hewison. Brookfield, CT: Ashgate, 2000).

well the lesson Ruskin never meant to teach: that it is possible [for white, heterosexual men] to construct an alternative, counter-economy for risky art within the larger market, by marking it as an art of intimate pleasures to be acquired through networks of friendship and contemplated in the private spaces of an un-Victorian domesticity" (Helsinger 102). In yet another instance of life imitating art, Ruskin lost both a wife and a friend in Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais through a sequence of events that rings eerily like the exchange of a picture for a woman. During a trip to Scotland, Millais painted the portraits of Ruskin and his wife Effie; shortly thereafter, Millais won Effie as his wife, along with a fee for Ruskin's portrait.

As these contextual details suggest, "Hand and Soul" articulated lofty, seemingly contradictory goals for its followers, who were encouraged to at once resurrect forgotten masters, produce supernaturally beautiful art, come closer to the truth of nature and everyday life, and to do so using ghostly, imaginary, or dead women. But, if the magic-portrait story that presented this philosophy sanctioned a set of practical impossibilities for the Victorians who sought to reform the conservative art world of the Royal Academy, those practical impossibilities mattered very little as far as Rossetti's professional aspirations were concerned. For "Hand and Soul"—and the rest of Rossetti's *femme-fatale*-filled oeuvre—succeeded in making art sexy in ways that intoxicated British writers and readers well into the twentieth century. Perhaps the most amusing testimony of Rossetti's lasting influence over British culture—an influence that was lauded as much as it was lamented—appears in Max Beerbohm's volume of caricatures, *Rossetti and His Circle* (1922). Here Beerbohm lyricizes about the Victorian artist thus: "In London, in the great days of a deep, smug, thick, rich, drab, industrial complacency,

Rossetti shone, for the men and women who knew him, with the ambiguous light of a red torch somewhere in a dense fog. And so he still shines for me." Paradoxically, however, Rossetti's artistic innovations, and their flare for shining the "light of a red torch somewhere in a dense fog" even into the early twentieth century, resulted in large part from taking up a distinctly Romantic torch.

Rossetti's taste-making renovation of the Victorian art scene relied on older, Romantic themes and forms, especially the seductive portrait premise first popularized by Lewis and Hoffmann. Evidence abounds that Rossetti's influences constitute the body of early magic-portrait fiction traced in the previous chapter and in this chapter's first two sections. Pfordresher has established these connections, while never naming the magic-portrait genre; he rightly claims that "Hand and Soul" represents "a synthesis of what [Rossetti] had been seeing, reading, and thinking during the later 1840's" (Pfordresher 105). Building on his detailed investigation, the following analysis enumerates Rossetti's sources and examines how his aesthetic ideals and artistic practices dictated aspects of his personal life in an influential mixture of the private and the professional, and how "Hand and Soul" helped spark a magic-portrait trend in the late-Victorian literature of aestheticism.

"Hand and Soul" synthesizes the following sources: gothic romances, primarily magic-portrait stories and related poems; the life and works of Dante Alighieri, especially his autobiography the *Vita Nuova* (1295); Vasari's *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* (1550); and the pseudo-science of mesmerism.[32] Alongside Alighieri,

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[32] The pseudo-science of mesmerism, which emerged in the 1840s and 1850s, played an important role in the development of magic-portrait fiction, focused as many stories are on the dialectic of influence between people and art objects, and the thin line between science and the supernatural. Later magic-portrait stories that use mesmerism as a central theme include Edward

Rossetti's principal inspirations included Charles Maturin (*Melmoth the Wanderer*), E. T. A. Hoffmann ("Rat Crespel," "Die Fermanta," and "Die Bergwerke zu Fallen" among others), Joseph Hardman ("Colonna the Painter"), Edgar Allan Poe ("Ulalume," "The Raven," "The Oval Portrait" among others), and Robert Browning ("Pauline" and "My Last Duchess" among others). The other magic-portrait story Rossetti penned but abandoned during this period—"St. Agnes of Intercession" (1849-50)—exhibits the influences of Novalis's and Nerval's magic-portrait stories. Rossetti also admired the destructive goddess of Prosper Mérimée's "La Venus d'Ille," which he called "'unutterably fine'" (Quoted in Pfordresher 124). In Browning's "Pauline" (1833), as I have mentioned, Rossetti discovered a variation on one of his favorite motifs: the artist's soul embodied as a woman. Most likely as part of his drive to valorize neglected talent, Rossetti found and transcribed this anonymously published poem in the reading room of the British Museum, then wrote to Browning to verify his authorship. As McGann has observed, both Browning and Poe were among the authors Rossetti sought to bring to the public's attention. Fascinated by tales and poems about moments of revelation, Rossetti praised Poe's "Ulalume" and "The Raven," and, in 1847, sketched ink drawings inspired by lyrics from these works. Later, he would acknowledge "The Raven" as the inspiration for his famous gothic-revival poem "The Blessed Damozel," yet another variation on the theme of a romantic epiphany—albeit one undermined by doubt—that depends on an erotic yet remote female muse.[33]

Bulwer-Lytton's "The House and the Brain" (1859), "The Strange Case of Muriel Grey" (1891), and George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894).

[33] As with Poe's literature, Pfordresher explains, "Hoffmann's tales feature a series of feminine figures who articulate [a] truth to the male characters who search for it. Sometimes, as in 'Rat Crespel,' the woman is as beautiful and frail as Dante's Beatrice—a pure incarnation of the

The critical record suggests that Rossetti was inspired as much by the female muses portrayed in the works of Poe, Browning, and Hoffmann as he was by the life of his namesake, Dante Alighieri. Alighieri's legendary love for Beatrice supplied aesthetic ideals that helped dictate Rossetti's professional and personal relationship with his model-wife, Elizabeth Siddall. Rossetti sought a woman who could be for him what Beatrice was for Alighieri: a beautiful, but distant muse and unrequited lover who motivated nearly all of Alighieri's works. Siddall, in no uncertain terms, served as Rossetti's Beatrice. Significantly, he fell in love with her in the winter of 1849 and composed "Hand and Soul" during the early morning hours of December 21, 1849.[34] Later, along with countless other acts of Dante-inspired devotion, he memorialized Siddall as a Beatrice figure in his painting *Beata Beatrix* (1872, reproduced below), which gives a sense of the kind of erotic-religious portrait he imagined for Chiaro's portrait of his Soul.

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angelic…In 'Die Fermanta' an enthusiastic young musician falls in love with a girl who 'with mystic power, kindled the music within him.' The narrator asks, 'What is she but his highest ideal, reflected from him onto herself?'…In 'Die Bergwerke zu Fallen' a young man becomes divided between his love for a simple girl, and his obsession with a goddess-queen of the underworld, whose 'terrible face' seems to be 'looking out of his heart.' He feels 'divided into two halves' each represented by one of the contending feminine figures" (Pfordresher 124).

[34] When writing "Hand and Soul" Rossetti, Pfordresher observes, "had just recently finished an important Dantean drawing, *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice*. A crowd of friends interrupts Dante as he, like Chiaro, draws the image of an angel. In the appended text from the *Vita Nuova*, Dante says to them, 'Another was with me'" (126-7).

These links among Rossetti's love life, his aesthetic philosophy, and his body of art illuminate the ways he influenced late Victorian writers, for the philosophy distilled in "Hand and Soul" carried over into his other artworks and into the legends about his life that Beerbohm captures in 1922.

Rossetti's synthesis of magic-portrait fiction, gothic poetry, and Dante's *Vita Nuova* in "Hand and Soul" was exceeded in its scope by the text's cultural legacy. "Hand and Soul" and "The Blessed Damozel" were, as Karl Beckson observes, "sacred texts for the fin-de-siècle Aesthetes and Decadents, who acknowledged their indebtedness to Pre-Raphaelitism" (Beckson 237). By situating his story in an exclusive periodical that implicitly attacked the principles of the British Royal Academy, Rossetti imported a genre of popular fiction into the sphere of high art. In doing so, he provoked an enduring intermingling of low and high culture and a call for Victorian aesthetes to produce variations on the form as a kind of declaration of his or her participation in the "art for art's sake" project. A slew of magic-portrait stories by self-fashioned aesthetes appeared during

the end of the century, beginning with Ouida's proto-feminist periodical stories of the early

1860s, analyzed in Chapter Four. Later works include James's "The Story of a

Masterpiece" (1868) and "The Liar" (1889), Pater's first reinvention of the genre with "A

Child in the House" (1878) and his subsequent *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), Ouida's late-

century return to the genre with *Frescoes* (1883) and "The Adder" (1888), Wilde's "The

Portrait of Mr W H" (1889) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), and Vernon Lee's

Hauntings (1890), followed by her magic-portrait memorial to Wilde, "Prince Alberic and

the Snake Lady" (1896).[35] As Wendell Harris has shown, "Hand and Soul" also influenced

Jewish Pre-Raphaelite artist Simeon Solomon, who drew heavily on it his pseudo-magic-

portrait allegory, *Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1871).[36]

     Addressing the vehicle through which Rossetti launched "Hand and Soul" also

helps us understand its impact on late-Victorian culture. With the January 1850 issue of

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[35] Wendell Harris argues that "Hand and Soul" "had its most immediate effect on William Morris, who discovered it in *The Germ* in 1855 and, according to William Sharp, was very much impressed with it. The first tale Morris contributed to the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, 'The Story of the Unknown Church' (1856), exemplifies the mingling of physical skill and mental impulse, the translation of dream into physical form…Thus Ruskin's conception of the meaning of work in the Middle Ages is expressed by Morris in the narrative form developed by Rossetti" (Harris 73-4). Notably, Browning's painter poems—"Andrea del Sarto" and "Fra Lippo Lippi"—were also published in 1855 and reviewed by Morris in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* in March of 1856 (Harris 74).

[36] Garnering significant reviews by Swinburne, Sidney Colvin, and John Addington Symonds, Solomon's controversial text constituted the expanded version of his privately printed prose poem, *A Mystery of Love in Sleep: An Allegory*. Rossetti and Morris may also have influenced R. L. Stevenson: Wendell Harris argues, "Stevenson's earliest extant fictional piece is 'When the Devil Was Well,' written, according to the evidence of one of his letters, in 1874-5. Set 400 years earlier, it tells of Sanozarro the sculptor and a duchess. For all the signs of its being unfinished, the style, the setting, and the total treatment place it with the earlier Aesthetic fiction. So also does such a passage as 'A man should die, when he has saved a life, or finished a great work, or set the first kiss upon his lady's lips'" (Harris 75). In Stevenson's first published story, "A Lodging for the Night," which appeared in *Temple Bar* in October 1877, "the choice of central figure, the atmosphere, and the setting are quite akin to those in Morris and Rossetti" (Harris 76). See also Stevenson's "The Story of a Lie" (*New Quarterly Magazine*, October 1879) for links to aesthetic fiction.

The Germ, edited by W. M. Rossetti, D. G. Rossetti *et al.* invented the concept and the

practice of the avant-garde aesthetic periodical, which became a commonplace among early

twentieth-century artists, who used the forum to publish manifestoes declaring the advent

of a new artistic movement. As if to cement the text's affiliation with the aesthetic

periodical, editor Ernest J. Oldmeadow republished "Hand and Soul" in the January 1900

issue of the *Dome*, another such journal that published works by Arthur Symons, female

aesthete Alice Meynell, Roger Fry, and William Butler Yeats. After the demise of *The*

Germ with its fourth issue, however, not a single aesthetic periodical appeared in London

until April 1884, when Arthur Mackmurdo (an Arts and Crafts Movement designer) put out

the first issue of the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, the organ of the Century Guild of

Artists.[37] The first round of British modernists, following *fin-de-siècle* aesthetes and

designers such as Mackmurdo, looked to *The Germ* as the model—in form if not in

content—for their acts of artistic rebellion and recanonization. While modernists favored

the bold manifesto, notoriously exemplified by that of the Vorticists in *Blast!* (1914-15),

over the magic-portrait story as the mouthpiece for their philosophies, their periodicals

suffered the same fate as *The Germ*: a short lifespan in print, but a long lifespan in high-art

and academic discourses.

     The thirty-year absence of aesthetic periodicals during the very years when the

Aesthetic Movement developed in England signifies a striking presence: that of a literary

market characterized by deeply intertwined high and low arts. Pater published most of his

works in mainstream magazines, such as *Macmillan's*, *Harper's*, the *Fortnightly*, and the

New Review, and the most famous, if technically peripheral Victorian aesthetes—including

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[37] See Karl Beckson's helpful history of aesthetic periodicals in Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), 237.

Ouida then, and Henry James now—claimed fame precisely because they found ways to speak to multiple audiences.[38] One of the ways Victorian aesthetes achieved this feat was by doing what dozens of popular middlebrow writers did at the turn of the century: to write a magic-portrait story.

Yet, as we saw in Chapter One, Pater's Shaftesburyian objectives for revalidating the low form of prose fiction were political—a term that resonates nowhere in Rossetti's "Hand and Soul." Rossetti's use of the magic-portrait genre in *The Germ* begins as an effort to change the role of art in Victorian society, but in what ways and to what degree did he succeed or fail? If the dialogue between Pater and Schiller best explains Pater's political aesthetics, the relationship between Rossetti and Ruskin best explains the Pre-Raphaelite reform project. For over a decade, the talented young artists benefited from the patronage of the most famous art critic in Victorian England, John Ruskin, who ambitiously courted their energies for his own reform agenda. Hoping to combat an art world increasingly ruled by market forces, Ruskin attempted to institute an educational and governmental support system that would transform the place of art in Britain's political and moral economies. But, with the exception of William Morris, the writers and painters associated with Pre-Raphaelitism were never committed to the kinds of change Ruskin sought. Moreover, like the twentieth-century avant-garde artists who heeded their example, the Pre-Raphaelites cultivated "difficulty and exclusivity" in ways that made direct political and social reform impossible: theirs was an art, as Elizabeth Helsinger summarizes it, of "limited production by a small circle of friends; expensive, time-consuming methods; styles, subjects, and

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[38] According to Karl Beckson, *Macmillan's Magazine*, where Pater worked as a constant contributor, as well as such journals as *Cornhill* and the *Strand* were "widely read publications" that "appealed to a large new readership, the result of the Education Act of 1870" (Beckson 235).

meanings initially positioned against popular taste and academic practice and hence difficult to understand; [and] a pattern of largely private ownership and contemplation" (Helsinger 97). Given these characteristics, it seems surprising that they had any effect at all.

Rather than facilitating a national reform movement targeting governmental and economic infrastructures, the PRB wielded the greatest influence on commercial culture. "Hand and Soul" valorizes a particular social/aesthetic form that will endlessly tantalize Victorian readers: erotic images of women's bodies that viscerally affect the men who gaze at them. The commercial success of verbal and visual representations of "women in white," beginning with the spread of sensation culture in the 1860s, gives a sense of this aspect of late-Victorian literary and visual culture. Beyond "Hand and Soul," Rossetti would increase the appeal of "women in white" through his portraits of *femmes fatales*. As we will see in the next chapter, the cultural terrain of the painted or ekphrastic portrait of a beautiful woman crossed the categories of popular realist fiction and highbrow art writing. It is this ambivalently high and low trope through which Rossetti, in the act of heeding the "lessons" of Hoffmann's, Hardman's, Balzac's, and Poe's magic-portrait stories, would wield an enormous influence on his contemporaries and successors—dismaying as that influence was to Ruskin.

Ironically, the success of the Pre-Raphaelite enterprise to reconfigure the canon of Western art is precisely the reason why we must resurrect the magic-portrait stories hiding in plain sight, such as Hoffmann's and Hardman's, and the corollary texts forgotten along with them, such as Elizabeth Siddall's paintings and poetry. In other words, because the Pre-Raphaelite art of unearthing neglected masters privileged such figures as Blake,

Browning, and Poe, the group helped marginalize women writers and erase the lines of influence that link Romantic literary innovators to the female and male artists who carried on the neo-Romanticist aesthetic projects of the Victorian *fin de siècle*. In the next two chapters, I continue the recuperative process of recanonization, ironically akin to the Pre-Raphaelite practice, by exploring the works of understudied authors Charles Reade and Ouida, as well as texts by obscure authors Mary Desmond and Frances Forbes-Robertson, alongside the novels of canonical writers Charles Dickens, George Du Maurier, and George Eliot. As we will see, the magic-portrait fiction produced between 1830 and 1850 established a set of cultural codes about male artistic mastery—about the authoritative or anxiety-ridden male artist and the tragic female sitter who suffers from his objectification— and these codes set the stage for late Victorian culture wars about which kinds of social subjects could be artists and what powers those artists would have to restore or destroy the fabric of Victorian society. The anti-aestheticist stories examined in Chapter Three and the feminist stories examined in Chapter Four show how certain Victorian writers waged gender battles against the tantalizing portraits valorized by the founders of the magic-portrait story.

CHAPTER III

POPULAR PORTRAITS:
EKPHRASTIC REFORM, ANTI-AESTHETICISM, AND BEAUTIFULLY DEAD WOMEN
IN DICKENS, READE, AND DU MAURIER

> *For some time past two very favourite theatres have been drawing large audiences to witness, in the one case a comic opera, in the other a comedy, written with the avowed purpose of ridiculing a certain school, known as the Æsthetic…But of all the thousands who have crowded to see* Patience *and* The Colonel*, how few there are who have carried away any distinct idea of the actual meaning of the satires they contain; or who could form any clear opinion as to whether the class of persons therein held up to ridicule were actually existing literary and artistic men, or simply the creations of the fertile pens of a couple of dramatists.*
> ~ Walter Hamilton, *The Aesthetic Movement in England*

So begins the first critical study of the Aesthetic Movement, published in 1882.

Walter Hamilton's introductory complaint gives a sense of the complex intermingling of

aesthetic culture and *parodies* of aesthetic culture that characterizes the 1880s and early

1890s, an ambiguity Oscar Wilde famously courted.[1] During this period, Victorian

aesthetes were busily criticizing bourgeois morality at the same time as bourgeois

dramatists, novelists, and cartoonists were busily lampooning Victorian aesthetes.

Perhaps most famously, Robert Buchanan mounted a scathing attack against Rossetti in

his article "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti" (1871), in which Buchanan

condemns the Pre-Raphaelite artist for spearheading a "Fleshly" school of art devoted to

erotic, "nasty" "trash" and for "parad[ing] his private sensations before a coarse public"

(Buchanan 338, 339). Strikingly, however, in order to wage battles against the Aesthetic

Movement, some dissenters used the very form through which leading aesthetes

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[1] Wilde lectured across America as a real-life Bunthorne, the lead character in Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera, *Patience; or, Bunthorne's Bride* (1881).

articulated their philosophies: the magic-portrait story. Anti-aestheticist magic-portrait fiction testifies at once to the wide-ranging cultural force of the genre and to its complex amalgamation of high and low forms.

This chapter analyzes works by popular bourgeois novelists, known for advancing the schools of realist and sensation fiction, who condemned aestheticism using the very genre employed by their purported opposition. I have selected works published during the "before," "during," and "after" phases of the Aesthetic Movement: Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), Charles Reade's "The Picture" (1884), and George Du Maurier's *Trilby* (1894). These works represent a social reform novel, a now-obscure magic-portrait story, and a best-selling magic-portrait novel, and they appeared during turning points in the overlapping histories of the genre and the Aesthetic Movement. Dickens published his novel shortly after the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood publicly emerged as a controversial cultural presence; Reade published his story during the height of the Aesthetic Movement; and Du Maurier published his record-breakingly successful novel during the height of the popular backlash against aestheticism and mere months before Oscar Wilde's criminal trials. All three texts share a strategic choice: they critique aestheticism, whether in its nascent stage or in its full-blown dominance of the cultural scene, and they do so through ekphrastic portraits of beautiful women.

As we saw in Chapter Two, the ekphrastic portrait of a beautiful woman increasingly operates at the center of magic-portrait fiction, causing triumph or trauma for the male artist protagonist, resulting in the death of the female sitter, and, in many cases, undermining the narrative focus on male self-development. My analysis focuses on this fundamental trope in part because the popular magic-portrait stories published during

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the genre's boom period often represent multifarious works, which, as we might say today, can be "cross-listed" across different genres.[2] That is, Dickens's realist social reform novel exhibits a remarkable affinity with the genre, but it is not a magic-portrait story, and Reade's and Du Maurier's magic-portrait stories can also be categorized as sensation stories, which, in turn, raise formal questions about satire and, in Du Maurier's case, the historical romance. Narrowing our focus from the larger genre to the ekphrastic portraiture at its center illuminates how and why the same trope functions as the primary site for *competing* aesthetic projects, composed by apparently antithetical authors, who promoted different methods for navigating high and low cultures and, most importantly, different ambitions for social change. The ekphrastic portrait of a beautiful woman is the *topos* where Rossetti and Dickens, Pater and Reade, Wilde and Du Maurier at once meet and diverge.

Analyzing the shared literary terrain of elite art critics and bourgeois popular novelists, whose works rarely appear in the same critical study, reveals that members of both camps produced literature that synthesizes strategies we typically perceive as contradictory: social reform and formalism. Social reform is commonly tied to popular prose fiction and serves as a primary source of the Victorian novel's denigration as "vulgar" and "facile," to use Pierre Bourdieu's words for the denounced half of the cultural divide (Bourdieu *Distinction* 486). In contrast, formalism, defined as a self-conscious attention to literary form, is commonly tied to avant-garde experimental literature, especially poetry, and serves as the primary source of its glorification and association with aestheticism and modernism. Yet, modes of social reform and formalism

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[2] For example, "The Strange Case of Muriel Grey" (1891) by R. G. Dering may also be defined as a sensation story and "Jotchie: A Sketch" (1895) by Frances Forbes-Robertson may be categorized under the label of New Woman fiction.

play equally significant roles in magic-portrait fiction produced across the cultural divide. To illustrate this argument, I will focus on one formalist practice employed by both anti-realist aesthetes and realist reform novelists—ekphrasis—and, more specifically, ekphrasis *as a method of reform*. Because the overt assertion of social reform was anathema to most Victorian aesthetes, the term "ekphrastic reform" better illuminates the shared source rival authors found in the ekphrasis of a female body. Rather than identifying similarities between these cultural factions, however, the following readings enumerate the competing critical and social ends to which popular novelists manipulated the same trope.

W. J. T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory* (1994) gives us a language through which to distinguish the ekphrastic portraiture practiced by Dickens, Reade, and Du Maurier, in contrast to that of writers such as Rossetti and Pater.[3] Mitchell coins the term "ekphrastic hope" to signify "the phase when the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor, when we discover a 'sense' in which language can do what so many writers have wanted it to do: 'to make us see'" (Mitchell 152). Once embraced in this way, ekphrasis renders "the possibilities and the hopes for verbal representation of visual representation…practically endless" (Mitchell 153). Generally, ekphrastic hope is the formalist mode we find in the magic-portrait literature of Victorian aesthetes. It is the mode that makes it possible for Pater's Mona Lisa to "stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea" (Pater 80). It is the boundlessly optimistic mode that allows Chiaro's ekphrasis of his feminized Soul in Rossetti's "Hand and Soul" to

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[3] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

articulate and emblematize an entire school of art—even a lifestyle for those artists who would enact the Pre-Raphaelite way.

For less hopeful authors, Mitchell coins the term "ekphrastic fear." "This," he explains, "is the moment of resistance or counterdesire" (154); "It is the moment in aesthetics,

> when the difference between verbal and visual mediation becomes a moral, aesthetic imperative rather than (as in the first, 'indifferent' phase of ekphrasis) a natural fact that can be relied on. The classic expression of ekphrastic fear occurs in Lessing's *Laocoon*, where it is 'prescribed as a law to all poets' that 'they should not regard the limitations of painting as beauties in their own art.' (Mitchell 154-5)

G. E. Lessing's notorious attempt to police the boundaries between painting and poetry exemplifies a pattern in Western literary history of writers asserting the problematic competition between word and image and attempting to regulate the different social and bodily senses engendered by each. The works of Dickens, Reade, and Du Maurier challenge the word-image regulations found in the literature of aestheticism: the misogynistic aesthetic ideology whereby women serve as images objectified by murderous male painters or spectators. In this way, Dickens, Reade, and Du Maurier practice ekphrastic fear—or, more precisely, ekphrastic *frustration*—in constructing formally complex critiques of aestheticism's gender politics. In these narratives, as we'll see, criticism plays a different role: whereas Hoffmann, Hardman, and Rossetti weave art criticism into their magic-portrait stories through authoritative male artist characters, Dickens, Reade, and Du Maurier challenge the very efficacy of art criticism as a means of affecting social change. Instead, they transform ekphrastic scenes into moments of social tragedy or opportunities for satire. Their portraits of beautiful, dying, or dead

women serve as vehicles for exposing a social problem, not for obliquely advocating a new socioartistic realm.

One of the primary formal strategies these authors use to critique aestheticism is to transform characters into embodied human portraits. While in *Bleak House* Lady Dedlock and her husband's evil lawyer Mr. Tulkinghorn "look at each other like two pictures," Du Maurier's demonic music master Svengali uses hypnosis to transform Trilby into a singing portrait (Dickens 653). These formalist narrative strategies argue for the social violence of portraiture, which, in the case of *Trilby*, Du Maurier overtly ties to the culture of aestheticism. The formalist difference between highbrow and middlebrow magic portraits does not, therefore, hinge exclusively on ekphrastic hope versus ekphrastic frustration, but also on the portrayal of art objects versus human bodies. "Hand and Soul" and *Trilby* usefully represent extremes in the methods by which they envision pictorialized women: whereas Rossetti's portrait of Chiaro's Soul mediates the otherness of femininity through both a painting and its subject's ambiguous existence as a spirit, Du Maurier repeatedly depicts Trilby's body in the moment when a male artists paints, inspects, or abuses it.

My analysis of these popular portraits joins recent research by Noel Jackson, Nicholas Daly, Talia Schaffer, and Rachel Teukolsky, whose works expand our understanding of the ambiguities that characterize the cultural divide in late-Victorian England.[4] Introducing the history of magic-portrait fiction into this conversation offers a

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[4] See Noel B. Jackson's "Rethinking the Cultural Divide: Walter Pater, Wilkie Collins, and the Legacies of Wordsworthian Aesthetics" (*Modern Philology* 102:1, 2004); Nicholas Daly's *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Talia Schaffer's *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); and Rachel Teukolsky's "White Girls: Avant-Gardism and Advertising after 1860" (*Victorian Studies* 51:3, Spring 2009).

new genealogy of texts through which to perceive the relationship between highbrow and middlebrow literature. This genealogy neither reconfirms fundamental distinctions between these groups nor insists on their similarities. Rather, my analysis details how and why writers from competing camps use the *same* trope toward *different* ends. Together, these texts illuminate an ekphrastic aesthetics of reform through which popular novelists satirize high-art practices for their reliance on a misogynistic aesthetic ideology; and yet, ultimately, we will see that these critiques are not easily identifiable as feminist, for they ambivalently luxuriate in the very practices they purport to condemn.

The vehicle of ekphrastic reform shared by highbrow and middlebrow writers reveals the centrality of the beautiful pictured woman in Victorian culture and the gendered power structures that underpin even contrasting social reform projects. The problem of women's bodies—especially when public, naked, sexual, or sick—plagued Victorian society. Literary critics typically associate the "woman problem" with the social reform novelists who diversely navigated it, as opposed to the male aesthetes who seemingly removed themselves to a "higher" realm. Yet, Victorian aesthetes did not escape the problem; for example, as Alison Smith shows in "The 'British Matron' and the Body Beautiful: The Nude Debate of 1885," the naked body of a female model was a major source of controversy in art circles during the height of the Aesthetic Movement.[5] Understanding the "social purposes" motivating texts as distinct as Rossetti's "Hand and Soul" and Dickens's *Bleak House* requires understanding how both writers portray the pictorialized woman's body. The history of magic-portrait fiction shows that writers, both male and female, canonical and obscure, "high" and "low," used the ekphrastic portrait of

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[5] See Alison Smith's chapter in *After the Pre-Raphaelites: Art and Aestheticism in Victorian England*, Ed. Elizabeth Prettejohn (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 217-39.

a beautiful woman to explore social problems, and their attempts diversely question, reconfirm, and assail the degraded role of woman in/as culture.[6]

I. Painted, Photographic, and Disfigured Faces: *Bleak House*

Shortly after Rossetti's "Hand and Soul" appeared in *The Germ* and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood emerged before the public eye, Dickens published a notoriously scathing review of Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849-50). Titled "Old Lamps for New Ones," Dickens's review excoriates Millais for producing a painting that is far from innovative—as the Pre-Raphaelite Brothers no doubt believed it was—but rather, hideously "retrogressive."[7] Over the course of the next three years, Dickens devoted himself to two monumental artistic projects designed to encourage *pro*gressive change in the art world: he started and managed The Guild of Literature and Art, and he published *Bleak House*, one of his most topical social reform novels. Yet, when critics list Chancery court reform and "telescopic philanthropy" as the novel's primary social concerns they neglect the category central to Dickens's topical project: visual art.[8] One

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[6] Important studies of the manipulation and significance of women's bodies in aesthetic literature include Elisabeth Bronfen's *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) and Kathy Alexis Psomiades's *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997). As I argue in Chapter Four, women writers aligned with aestheticism, particularly Ouida and Vernon Lee, used the magic-portrait genre to narrate feminist revisions of the heterosexist Hardman/Rossetti paradigm of artistic reproduction. During the same period, women writers outside of—and even hostile to—aestheticism, such as Mary Penn and George Eliot, deployed the genre's formal strategies in their proto-feminist fictions.

[7] Charles Dickens, "Old Lamps for New Ones" in *Household Words* 12 (15 Jun. 1850), 12-14.

[8] Before Dickens began writing *Bleak House* in 1851, England witnessed two other major historical events in the realm of the arts: the 1839 invention and subsequent rise of photography and the Great Exhibition of 1851. These events, like the rise of Rossettian Pre-Raphaelitism, represent fraught intersections between aesthetics and social change, and Dickens played an active role in both: he recorded his ambivalence about the materialistic yet progressive Great

likely reason why Dickens did not sanction the subversions of the Pre-Raphaelite

Brotherhood is because he was busy forming his own group of reformist artists: in 1851,

along with John Forster and Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Dickens founded The Guild of

Literature and Art in an elaborate scheme to provide financial support to struggling

artists. The goal was to revalidate their own art—fiction writing—by associating it with

the visual arts, perennially perceived as superior to the novel. By capitalizing on the

popular mantra of the "Sister Arts," they hoped to at once elevate and professionalize

novel writing. Dickens planned to build houses for the Guild's literary men on the

Knebworth estate, which would serve as a domestic sanctuary. The group's

institutionalizing aims required a painstakingly slow battle with parliamentary law: the

Guild's legal incorporation required a bill for which Dickens fought (unsuccessfully)

throughout the early 1850s. At the same time, the charity-based financial structure of the

Guild—labeled a "literary soup kitchen" by one detractor—demanded a delicate

rhetorical defense, both in the press and in *Bleak House*, against accusations of crude

philanthropy.[9] The Guild's history therefore sheds new light on the novel's thematic

investments in philanthropy and deadly Chancery court delays positioned against

peaceful domestic worlds.

By 1854, the overambitious Guild collapsed, its existence lasting only just beyond

the novel's serial publication. With a eulogistic tone Dickens dedicates *Bleak House* to

the struggling corporation: "AS A REMEMBRANCE OF OUR FRIENDLY UNION, / TO

Exhibition and, in 1852, he began his own longtime professional use of the marketable art of
photographic portraiture, studied in detail by Gerard Curtis in his recent *Visual Words: Art and
the Material Book in Victorian England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).

[9] Daniel Hack, "Literary Paupers and Professional Authors: The Guild of Literature and Art" in
SEL 39:4 (Autumn 1999), 708.

MY COMPANIONS / IN THE / GUILD OF LITERATURE AND ART" (4). This dedication emblematizes the central role the Sister Arts play in the novel's social reform project, but that role is a less than "friendly" one. The narrative thinks in literalized aesthetic forms, primarily the painted portrait, which functions as a metaphor for social stasis. Rather than depicting unities between word and image, then, the novel's implicit aesthetic ideology condemns the destructive powers of images in favor of the salvific possibilities of linguistic storytelling. Moving from "Hand and Soul" to *Bleak House* means moving from the ekphrastic hope engendered by an artist's own portrait, painted in his own house, to ekphrastic frustration at the portraits wielding deadly influences outside the art studio and inside "bleak houses." Dickens articulates his social critique of law, charity, and, more subtly, his own profession through characters embodied as portraits and metaphorically imagined as agents of decay or progress. And, in contrast to Rossetti, Dickens portrays reform not through the spiritual doubling of a male artist and his feminized soul, but through the fatal splitting of a mother and her daughter.

The story's central conflict relies on a theme common across magic-portrait stories: the threat of detection made possible by a portrait. Sir Leicester's lawyer Mr. Tulkinghorn penetrates into Lady Dedlock's past, seeking out knowledge of her pre-marital affair and child with Captain Hawdon. Lady Dedlock flees in fear and disgrace, only to be suspected in her absence of murdering Tulkinghorn, who was in fact killed by her French maid Hortense. The story's heroine, Esther Summerson, thrives only after suffering effacement through a disfiguring disease, which prevents her detection as Lady Dedlock's bastard daughter. Detection, and thus exposure of her mother's scandalous sexual history, would otherwise prove easy because Lady Dedlock's photographic

Gallery portrait circulates widely throughout the city. Several scenes ominously foreshadow the explosive identification, as in the moment when bumbling law clerk Mr. Guppy discovers in Lady Dedlock's painted portrait a resemblance between the aristocratic woman and the apparently orphaned Esther Summerson. Ultimately, the dread of inevitable detection becomes too much for Lady Dedlock to bear: she kills herself and, in doing so, secures her daughter's relief from the stigma of illegitimacy. Inspector Bucket, the detective assigned by Sir Leicester to search for his beloved wife, finds her dead body in the polluted cemetery where Hawdon's body is buried.

This plot pivots on embodied aesthetic forms—on people figured as speaking or silent images of themselves. In Chadband, for example, Dickens comically literalizes the metaphor of oil painting by rendering him an oil factory personified: "in beginning to eat and drink, he may be described as always becoming a kind of considerable Oil Mills, or other large factory for the production of that article on a wholesale scale" (307).[10] Dickens indicts characters who behave like painted portraits, which symbolize paralyzing aristocratic traditions that resist change—resist even life itself. In distinct ways he depicts Sir Leicester, Lady Dedlock, Tulkinghorn, Turveydrop, Chadband, and Harold Skimpole as exemplars of conservatism or exploitation best imagined through the metaphor of the portrait. Helping structure the plot's investment in self-serving, unwavering, slow-moving, even backward-moving social stalwarts, these figures play living, breathing

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[10] Dickens's association between social ills and portrait-like impenetrability appears even in the despicable philanthropist, Mrs. Jellyby, whose facial expression stagnates in her unseeing deflection of her daughter's cares. Of her upcoming wedding Caddy Jellyby complains to Esther, "'It's impossible to say whether [Mrs. Jellyby] knows it or not. She has been told it often enough; and when she *is* told it, she only gives me a placid look, as if I was I don't know what—a steeple in the distance'" (475). For his part, poor Mr. Jellyby could himself be described as an unspeaking portrait on a wall: he "frequently open[ed] his mouth after dinner without saying anything," opting instead to lay his silent head against the wall (481).

portraits who must break—or be broken—from their frames in order to engender

narrative or social change.

Early in the story, the omniscient narrator describes the "Dandyism" practiced by

the Dedlock social circle in a passage that doubles as a definition of the social disservices

rendered by the subjects of "Fancy-dress" portraiture. These figures

> have agreed to put a smooth glaze on the world, and to keep down all its realities.
> For whom everything must be languid and pretty. Who have found out the
> perpetual stoppage. Who are to rejoice at nothing, and be sorry for nothing. Who
> are not to be disturbed by ideas. On whom even the Fine Arts, attending in
> powder and walking backward like the Lord Chamberlain, must array themselves
> in the milliners' and tailors' patterns of past generations, and be particularly
> careful not to be in earnest, or to receive any impress from the moving age. (189)

Static figures whose "smooth glaze" and "languid" "prett[iness]" entice onlookers

violently retain the costumes of past generations while resisting "any impress from the

moving age."[11] The lives and personalities of the Dedlock ancestors memorialized in

Chesney Wold's gallery disappear beneath layers of antiquated myth and "milliners' and

tailors' patterns." "There was a Sir Somebody Dedlock," for example, "with a battle, a

spring-mine, volumes of smoke, flashes of lightning, a town on fire, and a stormed fort,

all in full action between his horse's two hind legs: showing…how little a Dedlock made

of such trifles" (532). According to the rhetorical trappings of the painted aristocratic

subject, truth is irrelevant, the past is paramount, and change is dangerous. Even the

portraits decorating the middle-class Badgers's household indicate the retrograde

function of the painted portrait: the Badgers cannot find anything to discuss but Mrs.

Bayham Badger's late husbands, whose sacred likenesses line the drawing room and

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[11] See also Teukolsky's "Pictures in Bleak Houses: Slavery and the Aesthetics of Transatlantic
Reform" (*ELH* 76:2, Summer 2009, 496-7).

whose visually evoked triumphs and deaths virtually displace Mr. Bayham Badger himself.

While Dickens's portrait-like characters advance his argument against aristocratic institutions whose corruption derives from their retrogressive exclusivity, he was writing during a period when the rise of photography rendered both painted and photographic portraits more accessible to middle-class households.[12] Dickens addresses this shift in part by setting the novel (rather ambiguously) in the 1830s, and thus before photography became a middle-class pastime and painted portraiture began its slow decline as a sign of aristocratic privilege. At the same time, Dickens addresses contemporary shifts in visual technology by incorporating Lady Dedlock's Gallery portrait, a "photoengraving," or early form of photograph. Yet, this image is associated with her character's tragedy, not with the democratizing potential of mechanical reproduction. The novel's combination of painted and photographic portraits supports its overarching critique of the visual relative to the literary—a critique that assails class hierarchies, but that extends beyond the question of technology. Dickens satirizes both the middle-class Bayham Badgers for their foolish obsession with Fancy-dress portraits *and* the torment Lady Dedlock suffers from the spectatorship ramified by her circulating image.

Ceaselessly treated as an image of aristocratic beauty, Lady Dedlock is portrayed more than any other character through the language of ekphrastic frustration. She acts as if she were an embodied wall-hanging, barely speaking or moving when indoors, clinging to her seat perched by the window or fire, her features controlled in perpetual, transfixing

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[12] The social problems engendered by visual culture, including the failure of any picture to portray a reality that accounts for a changing environment, were ramified, Dickens saw, by the circulation of mass-media images. See Regina B. Oost's "'More Like Than Life': Painting, Photography, and Dickens's *Bleak House*" in *Dickens Studies Annual* (Vol. 30 2001, 141-58).

beauty. She appears variously as herself, as the product of a social code, and as a portrait of what that code does to women. Her emotions are disguised beneath the false sign of what our knowing narrator calls "the desolation of Boredom" (182). When face-to-face with her daughter, she names the "reality" behind her "mask": "'If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered,'" she tells Esther, "'think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask! Think that the reality is in her suffering'" (582). Lady Dedlock's face and representations of it become nearly interchangeable; characters and narrators alike treat her as a static image onto which admiring onlookers project fantastical gossip about her privileged life.

Lady Dedlock's portrait alternately imprisons and empowers her as the epistemological distance between her self and her social image widens. For example, in Guppy's presence, as in Esther's, she both allures and repels: intoxicated "by the splendour and beauty of her appearance," Guppy "not only feels conscious that he has no guide, in the least perception of what is really the complexion of her thoughts; but also that he is being every moment, as it were, removed further and further from her. She will not speak, it is plain. So he must…" (534). Lady Dedlock's portrait-like stature at once exposes and conceals information, engendering the desire her image purports to satisfy, yet insistently fails to fulfill. Weevle's ritualistic worship of her photographic Gallery picture—the rationale for which he cannot explain—signifies the semantic excess generated by her self-breeding image, which Londoners like Weevle carry around everywhere with them. In fact, the dialectic between Lady Dedlock's self-defensive impenetrability and the public's fetishistic hunger for sight of her becomes the central force against which social reform must contend, for it is the gravitational pull of the

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aristocratic arts and the ritual-inducing female beauty distilled in her likeness that attracts attention *away* from the social ills consuming the city like a toxic fog.

Trapped by the relentless gaze of suspicious male authorities—Tulkinghorn, Sir Leicester, Inspector Bucket—searching out her secret, Lady Dedlock must choose, as she sees it, between two options: revealing her sexual history at the risk of shame and banishment, or apologizing before running away from her soon-to-be shattered life. The person who controls her fate more than any other single character is Tulkinghorn, who personifies the inhumane, corrupt, hegemonic force of England's legal system. In Tulkinghorn, whose "countenance [is] as imperturbable as Death," Dickens sketches the most reprehensible of all of the novel's portrait-like characters (552). He embodies evil in the form of reticent, unreadable, morbidly unmovable power. As with the lavish, superficial, yet influential costumes worn by the subjects of the Dedlock family portraits, Tulkinghorn's plain black clothes signify as much or as little as he seeks to signify: "Mute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light, his dress is like himself" (23). Enticingly visible yet resistant to accurate interpretation, he "wears his usual expressionless mask— if it be a mask—and carries family secrets in every limb of his body, and every crease of his dress" (192). By drawing our interpretive eye to Tulkinghorn's dress, Dickens's ekphrastic description at once refuses access beneath the "expressionless" surface and asserts the power of Tulkinghorn's self-reduction to his visual appearance, which, in turn, signifies almost nothing beyond his mode of social and institutional authority: The Law.

When they finally meet alone, face-to-face, Lady Dedlock and her husband's lawyer "look at each other like two pictures" (653). The questions that render this scene so climactic become: Which "picture" will concede to the other? How will the figure so

compromised adjust or displace the other's image? Which will "crack" first? As if resulting from the explosive collision of two aestheticized bodies, both suffer deaths characterized by symbolic deferrals and projections of their own image-signs. Whereas the narrative defers Lady Dedlock's self/image variously to her portrait, to Hortense, to Esther, and even to Jenny, with whom she changes clothes, Tulkinghorn often defers to the figure of "Roman Allegory" painted on the ceiling of his office. If Dickens's formalism turns Lady Dedlock and Tulkinghorn into portraits, it also turns "Roman Allegory" into a veritable character himself. Spectators of Tulkinghorn's dead body beg this question of the Roman figure: "'If he could only tell what he saw!'" (750). Their query emphasizes the portrait's *resistance* to "tell" anything and, as such, names the dominant feature of Tulkinghorn's character.

In this scene of discovered death, the narrator goes on to offer an ekphrasis of "the Roman" as his personified portrait relates to the room in which a viewer sees it:

> He is pointing at an empty chair, and at a stain upon the ground before it that might be almost covered with a hand. These objects lie directly within his range. An excited imagination might suppose that there was something in them so terrific as to drive the rest of the composition, not only the attendant big-legged boys, but the clouds and flowers and pillars too—in short, the very body and soul of Allegory, and all the brains it has—stark mad. It happens surely, that every one who comes into the darkened room and looks at these things, looks up at the Roman, and that he is invested in all eyes with mystery and awe, as if he were a paralysed dumb witness. (750-2)

Here Dickens immerses the reader in a fantasy of projection whereby viewers who see The Roman on the wall instinctively imagine that he is in fact "pointing at an empty chair"—that Allegory itself could go "stark mad" from helplessly staring at the inexplicable remains of a murder. Ultimately, just as Tulkinghorn must die, so must Krook, whose illiteracy manifests itself in scribbles on the rag-and-bone shop's wall that

render linguistic signs into failed pictures—pictures that, like that of the Roman, convey only the paralysis of a "dumb witness" to chaos and death. Memorably, Krook spontaneously combusts in a fiercely literal shattering of the boundaries among words, images, and bodies.[13] Thus, over the course of the novel Dickens synecdochally represents the Court of Chancery in statically ekphrastic male figures, from the Roman to Tulkinghorn to Krook—all of which the text must undermine or destroy in order to reach its reformist ideals.

For her part, Esther Summerson personifies a very different ekphrastic ideology, one closer to what Mitchell calls "ekphrastic hope." As Carolyn Dever has argued, Esther can only achieve self-identification through the displacement of a textual or rhetorical body—her mother's.[14] According to the language of portraiture that underpins the narrative, Esther's self-development through displacement corresponds to a symbolic transformation from one aestheticized social body to another: from her mother's fatally pictorialized, silenced self (a visual image) to Esther's faceless, speaking, authorial self (a narrator who uses ekphrasis). Esther's view of the landscape outside her window in a moment of solitary reflection exemplifies this aesthetic ideology and its complex reliance on ekphrasis. I quote at length in order to show Dickens's refusal throughout this long paragraph to give his readers an actual image: Esther gazes outside to see

> all beyond still enshrouded in the indistinctness of last night, to watch how it turned out when the day came on. As the prospect gradually revealed itself, and

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[13] See Daniel Hack's chapter "Reading Matter in *Bleak House* and the 'Bleak House Advertiser'" in his book, *The Material Interests of the Victorian Novel* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, 37-61) for an acute reading of the relationship between matter and representation in the novel.

[14] See Dever's chapter "Broken Mirror, Broken Words: *Bleak House*" in *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 81-106.

disclosed the scene over which the wind had wandered in the dark, like my memory over my life, I had a pleasure in discovering the unknown objects that had been around me in my sleep. At first they were faintly discernible in the mist, and above them the later stars still glimmered. That pale interval over, the *picture* began to enlarge and fill up so fast, that, at every new peep, I could have found enough to look at for an hour. Imperceptibly, my candles became the only incongruous part of the morning, the dark places in my room all melted away, and the day shone bright upon a cheerful landscape, prominent in which the old Abbey Church, with its massive tower, threw a softer train of shadow on the view than seemed compatible with its rugged character. But so from rough outsides (I hope I have learnt), serene and gentle influences often proceed. (114-5, emphasis mine)

If there were an aesthetic antithesis to pictorial portraiture, Esther's psychological ekphrasis of the visual scene she beholds fulfills it. The "picture" she describes, which "enlarge[s] and fill[s] up" with objects of interest, contains no objects and no persons discernible to the reader. Stripped as much as possible of pictorial "content," Esther's formalist vision names only conceptual frames for imagistic material. When her gaze finally alights upon a definitive object, the architecturally "rugged" Abbey Church, Esther identifies her own by-now "rough outsides," which similarly boast of "serene and gentle influences." In such passages as these, Esther helps idealize the narrator who can perceive not just beautiful appearances, but also relationships between human subjects and the natural, architectural, and institutional environments in which they live, change, and die.

Esther further establishes her position as an authoritative/authorial figure, whose voice in the final chapter displaces that of the competing omniscient narrator, by imagining other people—even seeming to materialize them in her presence. Esther explains, for example, that she "saw before me, as if she had started into bodily shape from my remembrance, Mrs. Rachael of my godmother's house" (398). Later, when Esther keeps herself busy by "looking at the Ghost's Walk lying in a deep shade of

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masonry afar off, and picturing to myself the female shape that was said to haunt it,…I became aware of a figure approaching through the wood" (576). Slowly, the figure reveals itself to be Lady Dedlock, whose "picture" Esther had been conjuring. In the unforgettable Mirror Stage moment when Esther catches sight of her mother's face for the first time, she wonders why it "should be, in a confused way, like a broken glass to me, in which I saw scraps of old remembrances," including images of herself (292). Hiding from a rainstorm in a nearby lodge, Esther encounters her mother and "[a]gain, in a moment, there arose before my mind innumerable pictures of myself" (296).

These two visions of her mother narrate a dangerous daydream: rather than seeing her own body, Esther sees "pictures" of herself, which function as alienating mediations that destabilize her sense of identity. Dickens thus reinforces the association of Lady Dedlock with uncontrollable fetish-portraits and Esther with the noble and authorial, yet traumatic burden of *controlling by breaking* from those portraits. This act of self-narration can only be achieved and symbolized through ekphrasis. As for her changed face, Esther describes herself as the very sign and body of representational indeterminacy. She is an imageless image: "It was not like what I had expected; but I had expected nothing definite, and I dare say anything definite would have surprised me" (572). Her face becomes a kind of anti-portrait, indefinite so as to change according to the viewer, the time, the place, the future.

Beyond Esther's characterization and narration, Dickens's literary tool belt for articulating the ideological ideal of anti-portraiture relies heavily on depictions of fire, light, and shadow. Sunlight and fire draw attention to the destructive social force of visually conceived bodies and the requirement of defacement for social progress. These

moments range from the "sinister" sunlight bent upon Lady Dedlock's portrait to the

"shadow" cast across Gridley's life to the factory fire that disfigures Phil's face to the

"unearthly fire, gleaming on all the unseen buildings of the city, and on all the faces of its

many thousands of wondering inhabitants" that signals Esther's defacement (182, 403,

488). The most villainous of portrait-like characters habitually stand with their backs to

fires, including Skimpole (96, 98), Turveydrop (225), and Tulkinghorn, who "tak[es] care

to stand with his own back to the light, and to have the other with his face towards it"

(438, 551). In contrast, Lady Dedlock often keeps her longing "eyes…on the fire" (457).

Dickens repeatedly constructs encounters between static pictures and moving light, which

reinforce the boundary between pictorial art and social reality as a site of conflict. One

such instance foreshadows Lady Dedlock's death. In this scene the sun

> looks in at the window, and touches the ancestral portraits with bars and patches
> of brightness, *never contemplated by the painters*. Athwart the picture of my
> Lady, over the great chimney-piece, it throws a broad bend-sinister of light that
> strikes down crookedly into the hearth, and seems to rend it. (182, emphasis mine)

No image is static, suggests Dickens's ghostly narrator. The narrator's rare mention of

the artists who painted the Dedlocks' family portraits highlights the impossibility of

portraying in an image any reality that accounts for a changing environment.

    Bleak House's call for reform relies formally and thematically on bodies imagined

as agents of decay or progress through the metaphor of portraiture. The novel's formalist

aesthetic may thus be understood as one of ekphrastic reform—of turning pictorialized

bodies into linguistic narrative bodies—and thus rupturing the deadly stasis symbolized

by the painted portrait.[15] If the narrative traces Esther's self-revelatory displacement of

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[15] If *Bleak House*, in J. Hillis Miller's foundational reading, is "a document about the
interpretation of documents," the trope of interpretation to which Dickens persistently invites his
readers relies on the interpretation of aesthetic forms, particularly as the boundaries between them

her mother, that displacement authorizes the rejection of pictorial portraiture, whether

painted or photographic, in favor of faceless narrative portraits wrought out of layers of

ekphrasis.[16] Esther's disfigurement seems to reinstate a different form of misogyny: why

must the story's resolution require the death or disfigurement of its female characters?

Yet, her unfathomable face embodies Dickens's passionately reformist aesthetic ideal: an

ekphrastic narrative form that rejects the material and ideological threats posed by visual

culture, both as a general historical trend toward *le culte des images* and as a set of

aestheticizing practices that will come to define aestheticism.[17] In Skimpole Dickens

more directly satirizes these latter practices, for he callously aestheticizes his daughters,

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solidify or disappear (See Miller, "Interpretation in *Bleak House*" in *New Casebooks: Bleak House*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, 29-53). The aesthetics of the un-sisterly Sister Arts serves Dickens not as a productive *conflation*, as Gerard Curtis terms it, but as a *competition* internal to the logic of ekphrasis that underwrites the novel.

[16] In her reading of *Bleak House* in *Fiction in the Age of Photography* (1999) Nancy Armstrong argues that, "[a]s the mantle of heroine shifts from mother to daughter, the novel also records and authorizes the displacement of portrait painting…by mechanical reproduction…Why must the novel labor to perform this inversion of mother and daughter, if doing so is simply a matter of exchanging the one kind of image for the other? I think it is because the rhetoric of realism requires just this kind of layering to thicken the type and lend it something that passes for the substantiality of flesh" (Armstrong 158). However, Armstrong's reading neglects to account for the novel's antagonism toward both painted and mechanically reproduced images; Esther's self-representation meticulously *resists* the technological form through which her mother's portrait circulates among all the characters like a commodity fetish.

[17] See Peter Smith's "The Aestheticist Argument of *Our Mutual Friend* (*The Cambridge Quarterly* 18:4 1989, 362-82) for an analysis of how Dickens's 1865 novel engages the early culture of aestheticism—in this case, in a more favorable way. Smith argues for intellectual affinities between Dickens's novel about money and Pater's essays about the Renaissance, suggesting that both writers perceived the importance of beauty for understanding historical change: "Only two years after the appearance of *Our Mutual Friend* Walter Pater published the essay on Winckelmann which proved to be the germ of the eventual *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873). The fact that the Boffins' faith and honour can dominate the grossest form of matter anticipates precisely the implication of Pater's book with regard to the power of ideas in history; and both authors are moreover in complete agreement about what constitutes one of life's most important ideas. Beauty is the theme of Dickens's last completed work, and only when we have understood what that means will it be possible to go back and fit all the rest—the dirt, the greed, the Poor Law…—into its proper, subordinate place" (Smith 364).

Arethusa, Laura, and Kitty, naming them "Beauty," "Sentiment," and "Comedy" respectively.

Yet, Dickens's anti-aestheticism *avant la lettre* primarily focuses on what we might think of as a socially destructive cultural favoritism for images over words.[18] By sanctioning narrative storytelling over static visual arts, Esther's story exposes Dickens's anxiety about the cultural authority of his own profession in relation to art forms privileged above the novel. If, as we saw in Chapter Two, Rossetti uses portraits of women—and real-life female models—to authorize the philosophy of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Dickens uses ekphrastic portraits of female and male characters to authorize the philosophy of the Guild of Literature and Art. Dickens's aesthetic philosophy, however, evokes frustration rather than hope: to the extent that *Bleak House* illuminates his struggle to keep the Guild alive, it exposes the Guild's agenda as one oriented less toward a happy union of the Sister Arts and more toward a battle in which word beats image, novelists beat painters.

Esther speaks the story's last lines, which aspire to secure the power of ekphrastic indeterminacy championed by the novel's complex aesthetic ideology. When asked whether she knows "'that you are prettier than you ever were?'" Esther responds,

> 'I did not know that; I am not certain that I know it now. But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen; and that they can very well do without much beauty in me—even supposing—' (989)

For Dickens—as for Hoffmann, Hawthorne, Poe, and the other magic-portrait story authors explored in Chapters One and Two—the question of a woman's pretty face lies at

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[18] *Bleak House* is, of course, an illustrated novel. So while the narrative diversely assails portraits and portrait-like characters, the book capitalizes on the popularity of the illustrated periodical.

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the heart of literary form and its ability to resolve social dramas, or to leave them hanging in the air as an unfinished clause.

II. White-Hot and Dead: Charles Reade's Magic-Portrait Experiment

The pertinent cultural history we skip when we jump thirty years from *Bleak House* to "The Picture" (1884) is a history of images akin to Lady Dedlock's fetishistic portrait. I am speaking of the sensational pictures of "women in white" that proliferated in British paintings, poems, novels, and advertisements beginning in the 1860s. Victorians produced and consumed such discursively overlapping images as the iconic Anne Catherick of Collins's sensation novel *The Woman in White* (1859-60), Du Maurier's illustrated *Punch* parody "Mokeanna, or The White Witness" (1863), and J. A. M. Whistler's *Symphony in White No. I: The White Girl* (1861-2)—one of the first self-consciously aestheticist artworks to appear before the public's eye. Londoners also saw elaborately garbed, if not always white-robed, *femmes fatales* in Pre-Raphaelite paintings, such as Edward Burne-Jones's 1860 portrait of Sidonia von Borcke (reproduced below).[19]

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[19] Burne-Jones painted another mischievous seductress in *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1877) and other painters portrayed *femmes fatales* in the Pre-Raphaelite style, as in *Love's Shadow* by Frederick Sandys, who produced this 1867 portrait of Mary Emma Jones (his future lover) while living with D. G. Rossetti. See Patrick Bade's *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* (New York: Mayflower Books, 1979) for discussions of these and other instances of the *femme fatale* in Victorian culture.

This portrait illuminates connections between the *femmes fatales* of Victorian visual culture and those portrayed in magic-portrait fiction, for Burne-Jones and fellow Pre-Raphaelite Brothers of the group's second wave derived this image from Wilhelm Meinhold's magic-portrait novel, *Sidonia the Sorceress* (1848).[20] Fictionalizing the life of the Pomeranian noblewoman Sidonia von Borcke, who was executed for witchcraft in 1620, Meinhold's novel produces from her biography a kind of myth of fatally seductive

[20] According to Kerry Powell, "Meinhold's *Sidonia the Sorceress*, translated by Wilde's mother, describes the portrait of a young and innocent Sidonia which is altered years later when a second image, representing her 'hideous old age,' is painted into the background of the canvas" (Powell, "Tom, Dick, and Dorian Gray: Magic-Picture Mania in Late Victorian Fiction" in *Philological Quarterly* 62:2 Spring 1983, 159).

female beauty akin to that depicted in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*.[21] This fantasy of femininity pervaded the strain of Pre-Raphaelitism and, later, aestheticism critiqued by many Victorian writers, including Charles Reade.

Connections between verbal and visual Victorian culture, such as those exemplified by Burne-Jones's *Sidonia von Borcke*, set the stage for the beautiful pictured woman at the center of Reade's "The Picture," but the historical background preceding his 1884 story includes earlier critiques worth recounting here. In one of the most prominent examples, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's sensation novel *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) explicitly addresses the Pre-Raphaelite art of the *femme fatale*, or "stunner." Braddon's narrator describes the protagonist's likeness thus:

> Yes, the painter must have been a pre-Raphaelite. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have painted, hair by hair, those feathery masses of ringlets, with every glimmer of gold, and every shadow of pale brown. No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid brightness to the blonde complexion, and a strange, sinister light to the deep blue eyes. No one but a pre-Raphaelite could have given to that pretty pouting mouth the hard and almost wicked look it had in the portrait. (Braddon 70)

Braddon's description of Lucy Audley's "almost wicked look" evokes the expressions portrayed in visual and verbal representations of Medusa-like seductresses, such as Meinhold's and Burne-Jones's Sidonias. Yet, the anaphoric sentences insist upon the agency of the Pre-Raphaelite artist to distort Lucy's image: "No one but a pre-Raphaelite would have so exaggerated every attribute of that delicate face as to give a lurid brightness." Braddon mingles the sensational effects of a painstakingly detailed, "lurid," and "sinister" image with a somewhat bitter critique of Pre-Raphaelite style. But if her

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[21] In 1893, William Morris published an elaborate edition of Lady Jane Wilde's English translation of Meinhold's novel through the Kelmscott Press, and Pre-Raphaelite artists other than Burne-Jones painted Sidonia's portrait, including Rossetti, who apparently referred incessantly to the story and the image.

critique of Pre-Raphaelitism, isolated to this single passage, seems subtle and ambivalent, the critiques wielded by writers in the 1880s and 1890s grew tenfold in their intensity. The ekphrastic woman in Reade's story exemplifies this shift and its complexity in popular magic-portrait fiction of the *fin de siècle*.

"The Picture," most likely titled so as to ensure its association with the genre, appeared in *Harper's New Monthly* in two installments during March and April of 1884, the very month of Reade's death on April 11, 1884. This reading recovers Reade's nail-biting magic-portrait story, which has not yet received critical attention, most likely due to the continued neglect of Reade's fiction in general. A close friend of Dickens and Collins, Reade is rarely discussed today, despite being one of the most prominent and prolific authors of the Victorian period.[22] As Mary Poovey has recently shown, Reade was systematically excluded from the literary canon when the hierarchies that structure the discipline were being secured at century's end.[23] These hierarchies derive from the same categorical distinctions that restrict readers from discerning the genre of magic-portrait fiction and its culturally divided livelihood across the nineteenth century. Perhaps above all, Reade's vilification by turn-of-the-century critics resulted from his explicit devotion to social activism through popular fiction and melodramatic plays, which he

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[22] Charles Reade (1814-1884), who began his career as a dramatist, acquired fame with his 1856 novel *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*, followed in 1861 by the novel sometimes considered his masterpiece, *The Cloister and the Hearth*. As Richard Fantina observes, "Henry James compared him to Shakespeare and Swinburne felt that his work should 'live as long as the English language'" (Fantina, "'Chafing at the Social Cobwebs': Gender and Transgender in the Work of Charles Reade" in *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre*, 126). Walter Besant even claimed that "of all living men who write novels…he is the most widely known, the most read, and the most admired" (Quoted in Poovey "Forgotten Writers" 435).

[23] Mary Poovey, "Forgotten Writers, Neglected Histories: Charles Reade and the Nineteenth-Century Transformation of the British Literary Field" (*ELH* Vol. 71, 2004).

marshaled in support of prison reform, asylum reform, and women's rights. Reade even subtitled five of his novels "A Matter-of-Fact Romance" in order to underscore his methods of writing, which entailed integrating non-fictional records and visiting sites of social injustice (Poovey 434-5). But Reade inspired the ire of discipline-forming critics for other reasons as well: his works often condemn the frivolities of high-art culture and they support controversial, even blatantly feminist causes. One of the causes Reade advocated was a woman's right to enter the medical profession, which he explores in *Hard Cash* (1863), *A Woman-Hater* (1877), and, more indirectly, "The Picture" (1884).[24] The following interpretation of this forgotten story shows how Reade used the magic-portrait genre—and more specifically, the literary practice of ekphrastic reform it fostered—to campaign for women's rights and, or rather *by*, satirizing aestheticism's misogyny. The result is a metamorphosed portrait that defies the stultifying "stunner" model discussed above.

"The Picture" addresses the fatal objectification of women by male artists and spectators whose fetishism prohibits, in this case, the mysterious female protagonist from accessing medical care and from voicing her own life story, acts which would save her life. Reade addresses these interrelated reform targets through a satirical construction of framed stories. So, whereas Dickens focuses on embodied human portraits, Reade focuses on obsessive male storytelling, provoked by the tantalizing portrait of a beautiful woman. "The Picture" unfurls a Russian nesting doll formation of stories within stories of the kind seen in Gogol's "The Portrait" (1834, trans. 1847). Multiple male narrators share

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[24] See Richard Fantina, "Sex and Sexuality, Gender and Transgender" in Fantina, *Victorian Sensational Fiction: The Daring Work of Charles Reade* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), especially 109-115.

with one another the historical, social, and psychological experiences engendered in the course of a single portrait's lifespan. The portrait is that of a beautiful Frenchwoman named Irène De Groucy and the outermost frame story's narrator, the now-elderly Frédéric, recalls how he discovered Irène's identity when he was a teenager. Irène's life is reconstructed through the various retellings of four male characters: the young Frédéric, Frédéric's uncle, *another* Frédéric (a.k.a. the Vicomte De Pontarlais), and a clerical medic. Together, these men stare at Irène's likeness, fetishize her image, languish in its spellbinding beauty, try to reproduce it, confess stories through and about it, and generally do all manner of things other than act on behalf of the woman it portrays. However, the narrative's formal complexity—the very substance of its ekphrastic attack on aestheticism's abuses against women—makes it difficult to summarize. In retelling it here, I will attempt clarity by working my way from the innermost story toward the outermost frame.

The story of Irène is that of an aristocratic beauty of the French Revolution era who loves a local peasant, the hulking, red-haired sports champion named Michel Flaubert—Reade's unambiguous allusion to Gustave Flaubert's 1869 novel, *L'Éducation Sentimental* (the protagonist of which bears the very name overused in this story: Frédéric). Irène's political views, drawn from her avid reading of Rousseau and Voltaire, sharply contrast her father's traditionalism. She supports social change and class equality, but the Marquis De Groucy extols patriarchal class hierarchy and condemns peasant "weasels" as "preachers of anarchy" (630). Irène defies both her father and the young man he has chosen for her to marry—Frédéric, the Vicomte De Pontarlais—by declaring

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that she loves Michel. In the aristocratic De Pontarlais's desperate attempt to win his

peasant-loving fiancée's affection, he decides to paint her portrait:

> 'I foresaw, as a lover, many advantages to be gained…The belighted room for the
> purpose proved to be Irène's boudoir; so I was introduced into that sanctum, and
> for some hours every day had all the delight of a painter in love. I directed her
> superb poses; I had the right to gaze at her and enjoy all her prismatic changes…'
> (632)

Here Reade satirizes the definition of portraiture Rossetti sanctions: portrait painting as a

means of sexual conquest. However, unlike the successful, if masturbatory, artist-hero in

Rossetti's "Hand and Soul," De Pontarlais's scheme fails. Upon seeing his masterful

painting, Irène does not change her mind and instead maintains her love for Michel.

Following a long line of magic-portrait stories that challenge the violence of

portraiture, Reade renders Irène's fate no less morbid. In a climactic moment when the

Marquis discovers Michel standing in his daughter's bedroom, the Marquis shoots—but

does not kill—Michel, and Irène attempts to verbally defend her love against the cruelty

of arranged marriage. Her father instantly disowns her, telling her to "'marry your

peasant, and live on his dunghill with him'" (680). Years later, Irène lives in a small

house with her husband and the rest of the Flaubert family, who hate her. Just as Irène

has never been trained for domestic labor and thus contributes little to the household, so

Michel knows next to nothing beyond sports, gambling, and drinking. The sports

champion squanders all of the money he and his wife had planned to use to establish their

own farmhouse. Devastated at this loss, Irène calls Michel a "'vile prodigal and

madman'" (685). At this remark, he strikes her in the face. She storms out of the house

and, when Michel overtakes her and drags her back, she tries to break free from his grasp,

hitting him in the chest with her embroidery pin still in her hand. Shortly thereafter, the

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fierce giant dies from the wound incurred by the tiny embroidery pin. As with the

fictionalized life of Sidonia von Borcke and Collins's *The Woman in White*, Irène's

struggle culminates in a legal battle: she is tried at Marseilles, found guilty of murder,

and sentenced to death.

The story recounted above emerges through a sequence of suspense-inducing

stories contained within the central narrative of Frédéric, who once lived in the house

where Irène's portrait hung—i.e. the place where he received his "sentimental education"

in how *not* to respond to the portrait of a beautiful woman. As Frédéric's reflection on his

youth begins, the newly self-critical narrator tells us that as a listless teenager he was sent

by his mother to live with his uncle and, at his uncle's gorgeous French villa, he

encountered a romantic predicament: "I was a poet, and aimed high. Accordingly I fell in

love—with a picture" (625). Frédéric gives the following ekphrasis:

> The picture was a portrait (life size) of a young lady resplendent with youth and
> beauty…the liquid gray eyes full of languor above and fire below, that arrested
> and enchanted. The dress had no doubt been selected for pictorial effect; for the
> waist was long and of a natural size, and the noble bare arms adorned only with
> dark blue velvet bands, which set off the satin skin. (Reade 625)

The adornment of "dark blue velvet" may be designed to recall Millais's *Mariana* (1851,

reproduced below), just as later descriptions of Irène's tower-top bedroom in her father's

castle invoke Tennyson's *The Lady of Shalott* (1833, 1842) and the numerous Pre-

Raphaelite paintings that reanimate the poem.[25]

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[25] Irène's "'bedroom was in a large tower looking down upon the parterre, which was, like the hanging garden of Babylon, full thirty feet above the plain the castle stood on; for, indeed, it was a castle rather than a château'" (635). This image recalls Tennyson's *Lady of Shalott*, an often-illustrated poem, especially by Pre-Raphaelite painters. Like the Lady of Shalott, Irène symbolizes a woman desperate to engage with the world, and to meet her Lancelot, outside her tower's confines.
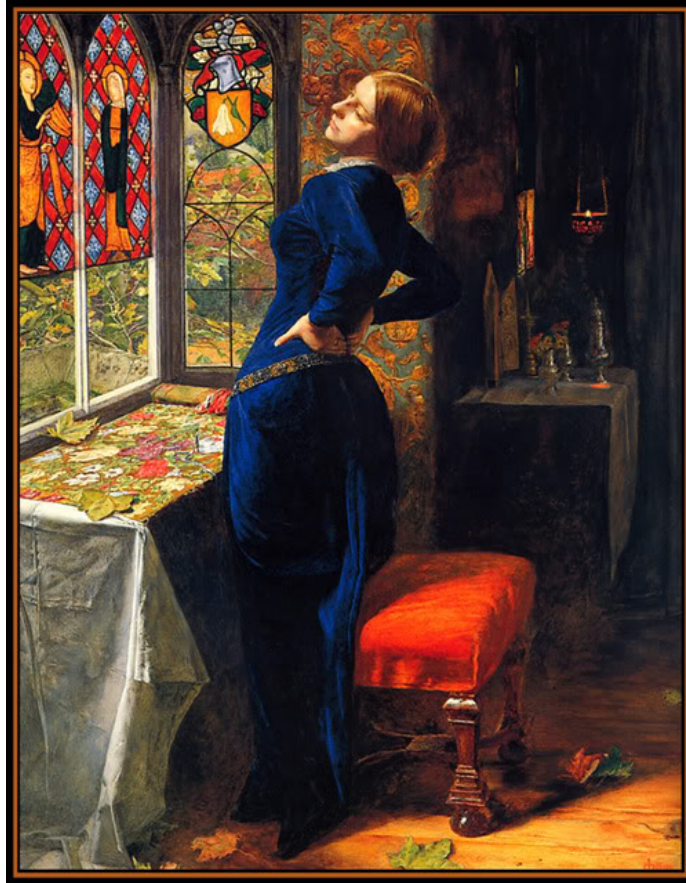
Oblivious to the possibility of entrapment, suffering, or longing on the part of this unknown pictured lover, however, Frédéric projects a quixotic fantasy of noble identity onto her portrait, then recalls his erotic response to it: "Soft sensations and vague desires thrilled me as I gazed on this enchanting picture, and I longed and sighed for the original" (626). While the aspiring poet idealizes his noble "goddess" and asks where he can find her, his haughty but friendly uncle—a heavily satirized bric-à-brac enthusiast—explains that he has no idea because "'I bought her for the frame, you may be sure: it is what the fools call rococo; *that* means admirable'" (626). Reade uses the younger Frédéric and his rich uncle to parody aesthetic judgments that slip into haughty dilettantism. Through drawing-room conversations about the mysterious portrait, Reade takes up the very art-critical acts valorized in aesthetic narratives, such as "Hand and Soul," in order to assert

the absurdity of aestheticism's glorification of dehumanizing spectatorship. Whereas Rossetti describes his male hero's gaze as a profound act of creation, Reade satirizes the destructive passivity of male artist-spectators and the ignorant, self-indulgent stories that result from their fixed gazes.

The uncle's female servants expand Reade's critique of aesthetic objectification. The two servants—ugly old Catherine and lovely young Suzon—distract Frédéric from his romantic reveries, for Catherine insists upon standing in front of the portrait and ruining Frédéric's view of it. Like the painting's female subject, both servants become entangled in the uncle's indifference and his nephew's fantastical visions, which similarly cast the women as art objects: Catherine "resembled antique mugs, etc., whereas little Suzon was more like modern porcelain, Provence roses, and such like ephemeral things" (625). Desperate to locate his new beloved, Frédéric copies the portrait himself and plans to publish "her features from Havre to Marseilles" (627). While he busies himself with the task of reproduction, Catherine looks at the picture and asks whether his efforts may be wasted, given the artwork's fifty-year-old vintage. "'I mean,' said she, 'that we do not need another picture of *her*'" (627). Catherine's emphasis on the word "*her*"—an odd source of passion for the maid to divulge—highlights the fact that, while Frédéric seems irretrievably committed to this woman, we don't yet know who she is. Ignorance, Reade suggests, is the result of portraits used only for male fantasies about female subjects masked in identity-concealing beauty.

When we finally learn the history of the portrait's subject, her identity transforms from an erotic "woman in white" to a "white hot" revolutionary to a "white-robed saint." Reade's critique unfolds in the following sequence: Catherine becomes deathly ill and the

foreign ambassador De Pontarlais pays a visit to his old friend, Frédéric's uncle. Shocked at the sight of the portrait he painted forty years ago, De Pontarlais begins to disclose the story (retold above) of his erstwhile fiancée, Irène. His narrative portrait steadily alters our understanding of Frédéric's provocative goddess. De Pontarlais remembers his bride-to-be as an "inflammable" "glacier"—ice cold, but hot with rage when provoked (630). When defending her political position—"'Nothing,'" she would say, "'will stop the march of free opinion in France'"—Irène would become *white-hot* with rage. Her very name is wrought out of the word "ire," which De Pontarlais uses to describe her pallid anger:

> 'White? She was ghastly. I looked at her with surprise, and with a certain chill foreboding. I had seen red anger and black anger, but this white-hot ire, never… Looking at her pallid ire, and the white of her eye, which seemed to enlarge as she turned her head away from the Marquis…[I thought,] this fair creature will perhaps kill me some day.' (631)

As her picture changes through De Pontarlais's storytelling, Reade lends new meaning to the Victorian cultural code of the "woman in white" and its typological kin, the Pre-Raphaelite stunner. While Burne-Jones's *Sidonia von Borcke* emphasizes its mythologized subject's sidelong, sexual expression, Whistler's *White Girl* (reproduced below) deliberately evacuates its female subject of identity, giving her instead famously vacant eyes.

In contrast, Reade's changing image of Irène exposes her "white-hot ire" for, of all

things, her father's patriarchal orthodoxy—an emotional register that at once reflects a

sense of identity and underscores her intellect, as opposed to her sexuality.

At the same time, by changing the valence of "white-hot" from sex appeal to rage,

Reade points up the absurdity of De Pontarlais's fears that this "fair creature will perhaps

kill me some day." Far from killing her hopeful suitor, Irène suffers her father's

banishment and De Pontarlais never learns what became of her. After decades of

mystery, her "ghastly" anger and the love he felt for her haunt him into his "decline of

life" (681). In *this* Frédéric, then, Reade suggests that a painter's "sentimental education"

in romanticizing a living woman can have long-lasting, psychological ramifications. Other ramifications include the unnecessary death that takes place in the very house where all this storytelling is happening. Only after this death do we see the next metamorphosis in Irène's image.

In the middle of De Pontarlais's story, the medical cleric comes into the house, dripping from the rain, to help the ailing Catherine. Rather than going upstairs to see her, however, he joins the group of men, only too happy to hear a good story. Surprisingly, he pipes up to reveal that he knows what became of Mademoiselle De Groucy because he helped her family during the months prior to her murder trial. In fact, the cleric observes, few French citizens could forget that sensational trial. The cleric explains that the accused murderess spoke a few unforgettable words at the end of her trial. Her speech—quoted by the cleric—constitutes her own account of her husband's death. It ends thus:

> 'I believe that when the weak are attacked with overpowering strength they are permitted to make matters equal with some weapon. But can you call that puny instrument of woman's art a weapon? Was ever a strong man slain with such a thing before? My husband died by the finger of God; I was the unhappy instrument; and I am his truest mourner, and shall mourn him when all else have forgotten him. Even his mother has another son, but he was my all in this world. I say these things because they are the truth, not to avert punishment. How can you punish me? Imprisonment can not add to my misery, and death would end it. Therefore I ask no mercy: be just.' (687)

Irène's self-told story turns out to be the most powerful story of all, for her words influence the law: "'Before these words, and their sad and noble delivery,'" explains the cleric, "'the charge of willful homicide dissolved away. The prisoner was condemned to two years' seclusion in a religious house'" (687). Following her seclusion, Irène fell under the direction of the cleric, who sentenced her to "obscurity" (682). This silenced "'criminal,'" he adds, "'has long been a truly pious woman, humble, industrious, faithful,

self-denying, and full of Christian charity'" (687). Satisfied that they know the story of the mysterious beauty immortalized in the portrait, the group retires to bed. In the morning they learn that Catherine is dead. When the cleric signs the papers, the other men read the following inscription: "Died, the 10th day of July, 1821, of general prostration, Irène de Groucy, widow of Michel Flaubert" (687). Catherine the servant, it turns out, was Irène. Now in his own "decline of life" Frédéric remarks: "I think sometimes of poor Catherine viewing her own picture with such grace, dignity, and pious humility; and I expect to find that white-robed saint more beautiful by far than the picture which so fascinated me" (687). And so Reade offers yet another alteration to the changing image of the white girl who metamorphoses from erotic goddess to "white-hot" political romantic to invisibly dying housemaid to "white-robed saint."

"The Picture" is a story about storytelling, which, as in *Bleak House*, wields life-or-death stakes when pictures of pretty girls are involved. Yet, the recorded death of Irène/Catherine by "general prostration"—a cause and effect recorded with about the same sense of security as the empty record of Sir Percival's parents' marriage in *The Woman in White*—leaves questions unanswered. Did the portrait's imminent unveiling help kill Irène, who falls ill right after Frédéric copies her portrait? Or did the men so thoroughly engrossed in narrating and listening to her story kill her through neglect? However we interpret her death, Reade's intricate plotting emphasizes the mortal stakes of storytelling. More precisely, his logorrheic male characters satirize the murderously aestheticizing spectatorship of men who fetishize images of beautiful women. "The Picture" proposes two positive forces capable of counteracting the male aestheticist gaze: male self-reflection (the elderly Frédéric's) and women's storytelling (Irène's). By the

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time we read Irène's speech—voiced only through the cleric—we wish we could have heard more. We can't help but think: Why didn't you four men go upstairs and let the woman speak before she died? "The Picture" shows that intricate formal experimentation was not exclusive to England's high arts, for Irène's changing image synthesizes the suspense-inducing plotting of a sensation novel with the experimental formalism of an avant-garde magic-portrait story in an ekphrastic reform project that calls for a woman's right to narrate her own life. Reade's male-dominated story functions as a powerful call for women's voices, yet one that nevertheless exploits the sensational possibilities of a pictorialized female character. "The Picture" ends only to make us hungry for Irène's story to go on—no matter how and no matter the author. In this way, Reade encourages the very tantalizing tactics he ostensibly critiques.

III. The Singing Portrait: The Ambivalent Aesthetics of *Trilby*

In a sense, we come full circle by ending with George Du Maurier's 1894 novel because the story of Trilby O'Ferrall reimagines Du Maurier's experiences with fellow male artists in Bohemian Paris of the 1850s and 1860s. Some of these artists would go on to comprise the circle of Victorian aesthetes, including one of the movement's most famous painters, J. A. M. Whistler. So, whereas Dickens published a scathing review of Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics in 1850, Du Maurier published in *Trilby* what some critics interpret as a scathing critique of Whistler's aestheticism, as Du Maurier himself witnessed it during the middle of the century. Du Maurier's very life exemplifies the crisscrossings explored in this chapter between high and low culture, word and image, aestheticism and social reform, aesthetes and non-aesthetes: he was once a friend to

Whistler and later a closer friend to Henry James; he created both visual and literary art; and he built his career out of parodying aesthetic culture in *Punch* magazine.[26] In *Trilby* he combines a nostalgic foray into the adventures of a male artist, nicknamed Little Billie, who lives in an intimate brotherhood of painters, and a sensationalistic story of a woman abused and murdered by the evil music master who turns her body into a singing portrait. Whereas The-Law-as-Tulkinghorn speaks through Lady Dedlock's suffering and death, and four different men speak of and for Irène De Groucy right up until her death, the music master Svengali sings through Trilby's violently fetishized and hypnotized body. Du Maurier thus uses hypnosis to literalize the violence of portraiture, rendering his female protagonist's body a singing still-life portrait, which serves Svengali's artistic self-expression and sexual appetite while erasing her own self-development and sucking the very life out of her body.

Recently, Nicholas Daly has argued that Du Maurier's anti-aestheticism is personified in the character of Svengali, whose treatment of Trilby evokes Whistler's abuse of his model Jo Hiffernan, who posed for *The White Girl* (reproduced above). Du Maurier's primary target was, in Daly's reading, "his former friend Whistler, and his ambitious aesthetic programme of turning women into symphonies" (99).[27] The text and its history offer convincing evidence to support Daly's argument, since the connection to Whistlerian aestheticism was so evident that Whistler sued Du Maurier for depicting him

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[26] Henry James wrote this of his friend Du Maurier's works: "'George *lived* his trio of novels rather than wrote them, and thus gave others the rare and charming sense of their being more lived than read!'" (Quoted in Peter Alexander, *Svengali: George Du Maurier's* Trilby, London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1982, 12).

[27] See Nicholas Daly's chapter "The White Girl: Aestheticism as Mesmerism" in *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 81-108.

in a negative light through the character of Joe Sibley. In his earlier analysis, Jonathan

Grossman sees in Svengali the figure of Oscar Wilde, and his notorious model of

menacingly life-sucking aestheticism, which was then being castigated during Wilde's

contemporaneous criminal trials.[28] These compelling readings represent a trend in

scholarship on *Trilby*, whereby critics seeking to illuminate the novel's anti-aestheticism

focus almost exclusively on Svengali, and the historical figures with which his treachery

was probably associated, leaving Trilby herself and the adoring young Billie unstudied.

By recognizing *Trilby* as a magic-portrait novel and contextualizing it within the

genre's history, this analysis shows that Du Maurier's condemnation of aestheticism was

less monolithic, and less dependent on its evocations of historical figures, than Daly's

and Grossman's readings would have us believe. Du Maurier's diverse uses of magic-

portrait tropes throughout the narrative, which contains portraits of both Trilby and

Svengali, generate a complex, ambivalent vision of aestheticism's pleasures and perils.

When linking Svengali to Whister, Daly discovers connections between Svengali's

seeming rape of Trilby and the contemporary male artists who painted erotic portraits of

Jo Hiffernan's body: Whistler, Khalil Bey, and Gustave Courbet. Yet, when we read the

novel as a magic-portrait story, we discover Du Maurier's variegated manipulation of the

ekphrastic portrait to depict Trilby's body when it is either joyfully life-giving or

beautifully half dead, as opposed to merely sexual. The beautiful, tall, somewhat

androgynous laundress and model Trilby alternately brings bliss to Little Billie and his

brother artists, for whom she sits for multiple portraits, and serves as the hypnotized art

object for a music master seeking artistic fame.

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[28] Jonathan Grossman, "The Mythic Svengali: Anti-Aestheticism in *Trilby*" in *Studies in the Novel* 28:4, Winter 1996.

To examine Trilby's role as the central embodied portrait in a magic-portrait

novel, let's first take a look at the scandalous portrait of sorts Daly identifies as the image

evoked by Du Maurier's reanimation of Whistler and Hiffernan. As Daly observes,

Trilby's aestheticization is one of fetishization, perhaps best exemplified by the artists'

fascination with her beautiful foot, enshrined in a painting Little Billie creates just after

meeting her. For Daly, Trilby's fetishization has its historical coordinate in the infamous

L'Origine du monde (1866) by Gustave Courbet (reproduced below).

In Daly's analysis, this notorious painting—something of an "open secret"—would, for

knowing readers, "illuminate the sexualized 'morcellization' of Trilby…, her alternating

presentation as a foot or a cavernous mouth, and indeed the suggestion of her becoming

the abused private possession of a lecherous foreigner" (Daly 107). Trilby's body is

certainly fetishized, with special focus on her foot and her mouth, and she even confesses

to having modeled "in the altogether," much to Little Billie's dismay. But, the

biographical reading that links Trilby to Jo Hiffernan as the model for Courbet's

L'Origine du monde seems to reduce her function in Du Maurier's critique to a sexual

one, as if the shadow of rape lurking behind Svengali's hypnosis were the primary source

of aestheticism's villainy. The art created from her body throughout the story is not

exclusively sexualized in the way that, for example, Reade's De Pontarlais erotically

paints Irène De Groucy's portrait in her bedroom in his efforts to woo her. Ultimately, I

think, to perceive in Trilby an allusion to *L'Origine du monde* is to participate in the very

fetishization Du Maurier combats, however partially, by invoking the trauma of the

magic-portrait premise.

Perhaps the most important link to magic-portrait history comes in the form of

Svengali's reanimation of E. T. A. Hoffmann's famous artist-devil, the titular character in

his tale "Councillor Krespel" (1818). Krespel is a cruel, ambiguously insane music

master who, after attempting to murder his opera-singing wife for breaking his violin,

meticulously controls the life of his daughter Antonia. Born with her mother's beautiful

voice, Antonia, was also born with an ambiguous medical condition according to which

overexerting her transcendent lungs will threaten her life. Having devoted himself to

managing his daughter's body and her art, Krespel wakes one morning to find her dead—

she having chosen to sing to her death the night before. Following Hoffmann, Du Maurier

gives Svengali power over Trilby's body and a Mephistopheles-like role in her death. It is

the threat of sexualized violence and death that appears more frequently than female

sexuality as the target of Du Maurier's anti-aestheticism. Yet, whereas music is the

primary aesthetic form wielded by Councillor Krespel, portraiture is the dominant mode

in *Trilby*. Indeed, like *Bleak House*, *Trilby* contains painted portraits, a photographic

portrait, and illustrations (by Du Maurier himself), such as the following sketch of Svengali conducting Trilby.[29]

Along with its illustrations, *Trilby* is filled with ekphrastic portraits, but more often than not, the portraits are left undescribed in favor of episodic tales about the process of portrait painting—or singing, in the case of Svengali. This is the brand of "ekphrastic frustration" Du Maurier practices. The reader moves through the narrative as if watching a single woman experience an entire life of being scrutinized, painted, and forced to perform on stage. But, whereas Reade, like most magic-portrait authors, focuses on the act viewing a finished portrait, Du Maurier focuses on the act of sitting for one, the

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[29] The connection to Dickens's novel is not a haphazard one since critics, such as Richard Kelly, have identified a source for Du Maurier's uses of mesmerism and portraits in Dickens's last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). In Dickens's dark, unfinished narrative, the character of Rosa suffers from the ambiguous mesmerism of John Jasper: "He has made a slave of me with his looks," Rosa laments; "He has forced me to understand him, without saying a word" (Dickens qutd. in Richard Kelly, *George Du Maurier*, Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1983, 92).

pleasures of dashing one off, and the afterlife of the portraits thus produced. Early on, for example, the narrator describes a typical sitting thus:

> [Trilby] knew when to talk and when to laugh and when to hold her tongue; and the sight of her sitting cross-legged on the model-throne darning the Laird's socks or sewing buttons on his shirts or repairing the smoke-holes in his trousers was so pleasant that it was painted by all three. One of these sketches (in water-colour by Little Billee) sold the other day at Christie's for a sum so large that I hardly dare to mention it. It was done in an afternoon. (Du Maurier 72)

In this passage, Trilby's appeal as a friendly personality—friendly enough to repair the men's clothes and cook their meals—purportedly drives their art, but that same appeal slips into a kind of domestic eroticism, heightened rather than diminished by their constant group activities.

Generally, however, the narrative shifts from gleeful descriptions of Trilby's and Little Billie's days in the Paris studio to the slow change Trilby's body suffers after constant hypnosis. These shifts expose the deep ambivalence of Du Maurier's anti-aestheticism, for all of the male characters eventually participate in the fetishization of her body and the judgment that its beauty increases as she grows thinner and closer to

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death. In one scene, Svengali verbally torments his instrument for failing to listen to him and, in so doing, he concocts an elaborate vision of her death:

> one fine day you shall lie asleep on one of those slabs…and all day long and all night the cold water shall trickle, trickle, trickle all the way down your beautiful white body to your beautiful white feet till they turn green, and your poor, damp, draggled, muddy rags will hang above you from the ceiling for your friends to know you by. (Du Maurier 86)

That Trilby actually becomes sick during this speech reinforces Svengali's villainy, wrought, in this case, out of a verbal portrait spoken to a living, breathing one. Even Little Billie, Taffy, and Sandy begin to praise her appearance as she grows weaker and sicker: she becomes "more beautiful in their eyes, in spite of her increasing pallor and emaciation—her skin was so pure and delicate, and the bones of her face so admirable" (#). Later, they appreciate that "she grew thinner, especially in the face, where the bones of her cheeks and jaws began to show themselves, and these bones were constructed on such right principles…that the improvement was astonishing, almost inexplicable" (101). Read within the context of magic-portrait culture, such gazes as these take us back to the fantasies of the multiple Frédérics in Reade's tale, where appreciating an aestheticized woman's beauty turns out to be a life-threatening act of medical neglect, of abject male aggression.

Of all the ekphrastic portraits in the narrative, it is the solitary photographic portrait that leads to Trilby's death in a kind of new-media twist on a quintessentially magic-portrait moment of aesthetic influence. Having opened a mysteriously packaged piece of mail, Trilby lays her eyes on a portrait of Svengali: "It was a splendid photograph, by a Viennese photographer, and a most speaking likeness; and Svengali looked truly fine—all made up of importance and authority, and his big black eyes were

full of stern command" (Du Maurier 288). In this instant—in a kind of reverse embodiment of art according to which Svengali comes back to "speaking" life through his hyper-realistic likeness—the aestheticized conductor wields such a powerful influence that Trilby dies right then and there. Thus, if Svengali injures Trilby by turning her body into a portrait that sings, he finally kills her by turning *himself* into a portrait. Together, the various portraits in Du Maurier's novel critique images that dehumanize living subjects in such a way as to harm and sometimes kill them.

In *Trilby* we can find all of the following: an adaptation of Hoffmann's Councillor Krespel; the nostalgia for an artist-hero's past, found in such stories as Hardman's "Colonna the Painter" and Rossetti's "Hand and Soul"; the male homoerotic culture of artistic production seen throughout this sub-category of the genre; a critique of aestheticism akin to those waged in earlier works, such as Reade's "The Picture"; and, finally, an evocation of the magic-portrait stories that similarly revolve around mesmerism—the most famous of this sub-category being Edward Bulwer-Lytton's "The House and the Brain" (1859).[30] Du Maurier's text does what *The Picture of Dorian Gray* had done a few years earlier: it synthesizes and critiques elements of magic-portrait cultural history, which includes novels and tales as well as the Aesthetic Movement itself. Yet, Du Maurier uses the genre to critique aestheticizing practices while revealing a persistent investment in those practices, for his nostalgic retelling of his own past luxuriates in the delights of the aesthete at the same time as it condemns the suffering

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[30]Another important magic-portrait story that revolves around mesmerism is R. G. Dering's "The Strange Case of Muriel Grey" (1891) published in *Temple Bar*. In her reading of *Trilby*, Pamela Thurschwell observes that, by century's end, mesmerism had reached a fever pitch of popularity, cropping up in such works as H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1888), Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), and Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897). See Thurschwell's chapter "Wilde, Hypnotic Aesthetes and the 1890s" in *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

caused by a Whisterlian artist-devil. *Trilby*, I think, owes its record-breaking success among American and British readers to the fact that the story luxuriates in both "high" and "low" cultural pleasures, both ekphrastic fear and ekphrastic hope—competing registers of desire made possible by the same genre.

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Bleak House represents an early example of a paradigmatic strain in late-Victorian literature: the possibility of social change—of social influence, reform, or stasis—was frequently articulated through portraits of women's unreal, erotic, sick, or dead bodies. The tropes of the ekphrastic portrait and the embodied portrait functioned as powerful rhetorical vehicles for writers of competing cultural camps, who used these tropes to wage discursive battles about social problems. Dickens, Reade, and Du Maurier differently perceive in the painted portrait a source of social stasis and unnecessary death, problems that can be addressed if we alter the way we make and perceive images of human beings. At once the most critical of *and* the most complicit in aestheticizing practices, Du Maurier's *Trilby* represents one of the most ambivalent of all the culturally divided magic-portrait stories produced during the turn of the century, perhaps second only to Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray*. Du Maurier's cultural divisions show just how ambiguous the lines between "high" and "low" culture had become by the 1890s.

CHAPTER VI

OSCAR WILDE'S MAGIC-PORTRAIT MASHUP:
"THE DECAY OF LYING" AND *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

Victorian aesthetes who produced magic-portrait fiction after Walter Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* (1887) encountered a genre whose critical component had been transformed by the rise of the Aesthetic Movement. The proliferation of new schools, such as Symbolism and Decadence, meant that there was not only art criticism and aesthetic philosophy to be articulated through the prose fictional form, but also an abundance of existing and emergent critical and philosophical ideas to address or ignore. In England, at the same time as aestheticism seemingly bred more and more bodies of thought about art, periodicals and publishing houses exhibited a "mania" for magic-portrait fiction. Given these intertwined cultural developments, *fin-de-siècle* aesthetes seeking to use the genre to express their own ideas faced questions that did not exist for Hoffmann in the 1810s, Rossetti in the 1850s, and Pater in the 1870s: Should one engage or disregard existing theories? Could one forge a new set of ideas or necessarily rewrite those embodied in earlier works?

The two principal Victorian aesthetes who continue the high-art strain of magic-portrait fiction were Pater's protégés: Vernon Lee and Oscar Wilde. Whereas Lee, as we saw in the last chapter, opts largely to rewrite Pater's aestheticism through her feminist magic-portrait collection *Hauntings* (1890), Wilde chooses in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) to embrace the magic-portrait genre's popularity in middlebrow periodical culture, while simultaneously enacting in fictional form the anti-realist philosophy he proposes in "The Decay of Lying" (1889). Famously, Wilde also interweaves principles

from Pater's *The Renaissance* (1873), French Symbolism, and Decadence throughout his novel. Paradoxically, Wilde becomes—as Pater puts it in his review of *Dorian Gray*—"all but unique" through acts of fictional, literary critical, and philosophical synthesis.

Wilde was likely more familiar with the contemporary cultural craze for magic-portrait fiction than any other writer of the period. As Joseph Bristow has observed, he sought to overturn the social and sexual conventions of his middle-class Victorian readers, while garnering and requiring their support.[1] His satirical, yet dependent embrace of English culture helps explain his diverse engagement with "magic-picture mania": he published two magic-portrait stories; he reviewed Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* and female-authored magic-portrait fiction for *The Woman's World*; and he even published articles about painted portraiture and London models. First appearing in 1890, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* reached audiences during the zenith of England's fascination with the multifariously highbrow and middlebrow genre. This fact establishes a radically different provenance for the text than those recited by scholars since its publication, focused as these studies are on Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and works by

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[1] See, for example, Bristow's *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 11. The question of Wilde's allegiances and motives has been a constant source of critical debate. Stefano Evangelista recently observed that for Theodor Adorno, "the motto 'art for art's sake' was a cover for its opposite…: Wilde's aestheticism was actually in alliance with the commercial culture it purported to despise (Adorno 2003, 355)…To modernist critics like Adorno, Wilde's writings appeared kitsch, sentimental, decorative and, above all, politically suspect…The ideological critique advanced by Adorno was of course exacerbated in the contexts of the East European countries under communist rule" (Evangelista, Ed. *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe*, New York: continuum, 2010, 15). The complexly high and low, or aestheticist and popular commercial, history of magic-portrait fiction reveals that what Adorno saw as a stealthy endorsement of commercialism had more to do with larger cultural and economic paradigms than with Wilde's own political alliances.

Suetonius, Disraeli, Bulwer-Lytton, Radcliffe, Gautier, and others.[2] The only study to associate Wilde's borrowings with the history of magic-portrait fiction is Kerry Powell's pair of articles, which draw attention to the popularity of the "magic-picture" story at the *fin de siècle* and trace connections between *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and magic-portrait stories by Hawthorne and Arlo Bates.[3] This reading builds on Powell's research by addressing the full scope of Wilde's reanimation of magic-portrait fiction, which I contextualize within a long cultural history that, as we've seen, constitutively embroiled philosophy and/in fiction.

The following analysis argues that the plot of the richly composite *Picture of Dorian Gray* synthesizes the plots of popular magic-portrait stories published before it. The reason scholars have so much trouble pinning down the story's seemingly endless number of sources is because Wilde deliberately drew from a wide swathe of high and low literature to construct his decadently satirical, self-conscious study in synthesis. In the first section of this chapter, I show how the novel fuses the elements of well-known nineteenth-century magic-portrait stories. In particular, *Dorian Gray* reinvents the magic-portrait tradition of devil stories inaugurated by Goethe and Hoffmann, the anti-*künstlerroman* tradition begun by Gogol, Hawthorne's influential trope of the "prophetic picture," as well as recognizable storylines and stylistic methods borrowed from the

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[2] See a longer list of authors and associations in Jerusha McCormack's "Wilde's Fiction(s)" in *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde*, edited by Peter Raby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 110-11.

[3] For the former, see "Tom, Dick, and Dorian Gray: Magic-Picture Mania in Late Victorian Fiction" (*Philological Quarterly*, Vol. 62 No. 2, Spring 1983, 147-70). For the latter, see "Hawthorne, Arlo Bates, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (*Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol. 16, 1980, 403-16).

magic-portrait stories of Balzac, Ouida, and a host of late-Victorian periodical authors. As this reading illustrates, Wilde was deeply original *because* he was deeply derivative.

The chapter's second section analyzes how *The Picture of Dorian Gray* enacts Wilde's critical argument against literary realism in "The Decay of Lying." Like Rossetti, Pater, and Lee, as we saw in Chapters One, Two, and Five, Wilde uses the magic-portrait story form to engage and test aesthetic philosophies. In *Dorian Gray*, Wilde pushes this strategy even further by choreographing explosive collisions between competing literary critical philosophies: realism and romanticism. At the same time, the novel constitutes a radical generic confrontation between two strains of the same form. That is, Wilde saw the coexistence of two sub-categories of magic-portrait fiction—the popular and the high-art—which only rarely overtly commingled. In contrast to Lee, who was far less concerned with popular periodical culture, Wilde manifestly experiments with the formal, philosophical, and satirical possibilities of synthesizing the highbrow and the middlebrow magic portrait. In the chapter's final section, I examine how the collision course Wilde constructs between popular fiction and anti-realist philosophy transforms our understanding of the notorious sexual politics defining the story's sacrificial beauty, Dorian Gray. By situating the language of Pater's aestheticism and that of his own anti-realist philosophy within the bourgeois narrative body of a magic-portrait story, Wilde "outed" unsavory connections between upper-class and middle-class Victorian culture, art criticism and popular fiction, folkloric Western myth and topical cultural craze, and perhaps above all, heteronormative literary codes and male homoerotic ideals.

<u>I. The Composite *Picture of Dorian Gray*</u>

By 1890, Wilde's contribution to magic-portrait fiction seemed almost inevitable. His writings during the years immediately prior to the novel's publication suggest that he was busily laying the groundwork for his "mashup" of magic-portrait fiction. In January 1889 Wilde published an article about "London Models" in *The English Illustrated Magazine*, which catalogues different species of male and female models. Wilde dissects the "professional poser" and the "posers of the Row" as if to school his readers in a realm of Victorian society with which all ought to be familiar (Wilde 313, 318). The very same month Wilde's dialogic anti-realist manifesto "The Decay of Lying" first appeared in the *Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review* (Jan. 1889), and in July of the same year Wilde aired his first magic-portrait story, "The Portrait of Mr. W H" (1889) in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*. This story narrates the proposal, retraction, and reassertion of a theory that Shakespeare's sonnets were composed out of his love for a boy actor named "Willie Hughes"—a theory alternately bolstered and questioned by a portrait of Hughes pressing his hand against a book inscribed with the sonnet dedication.

As editor of *The Woman's World* in the late 1880s, Wilde focused many of his reviews on recently published magic-portrait stories by women writers whose works were appearing across London magazines. For example, he reviewed Alice Corkran's *Margery Merton's Girlhood* (1887), Amy Levy's *The Romance of a Shop* (1888), and the Countess of Munster's *Dorinda* (1889). In his appraisal of *Margery Merton's Girlhood*, Wilde explicitly aligns Corkran's story with "the art-literature" of male members of England's cultural elite: John Ruskin and Robert Browning. "The whole account of the gradual development of the conception in the girl's mind," Wilde writes,

and the various attempts she makes to give her dream its perfect form [in her prize-winning picture], is extremely interesting, and, indeed, the book deserves a place among what Sir George Trevelyan has happily termed 'the art-literature' of our day. Mr. Ruskin in prose, and Mr. Browning in poetry, were the first who drew for us the workings of the artist [sic] soul, the first who led us from the painting or statue to the hand that fashioned it, and the brain that gave it life…Theirs was the seed of this new literature, and theirs, too, is its flower; but it is pleasant to note their influence on Miss Corkran's little story.[4]

This passage emblematizes Wilde's enduring interest in unexpected and unsanctioned connections across factions of English culture, which, as we've seen, the magic-portrait genre supplied in abundance. The year prior to reviewing Corkran's story, Wilde reviewed English painter John Collier's *A Manual of Oil Painting* (1886) in a January 1887 *Pall Mall Gazette* article that mercilessly parodies Collier's claims about portrait painting: "Portrait painting, Mr. Collier tells us, 'makes no demands on the imagination.' As is the sitter, so is the work of art. If the sitter be commonplace, for instance, it would be 'contrary to the fundamental principles of portraiture to make the picture other than commonplace'" (Wilde *Pall Mall* 1887). Wilde's own writings of this period, both of and about the magic-portrait form, explore every possible *alternative* to the "commonplace" portrait that obviates imagination.

The profusion of magic-portrait stories published during the late 1880s suggests that *Dorian Gray* was not only somewhat predictable, given Wilde's intellectual and cultural investments during the years prior to its publication, but even rather belated. The following works, alongside at least five others, appeared in the year 1889 alone: "Ashes of the Future (A Study of Mere Human Nature): The Suicide of Sylvester Gray" (1889) by Wilde's friend Edward Heron-Allen, *His Other Self* by Edward J. Goodman (1889),

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[4] Wilde, "Literary and Other Notes" (*Woman's World* Jan. 1888). *The First Collected Edition of the Works of Oscar Wilde*. Ed. Robert Ross. London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969: 264-65.

"A Problem in Portraiture" (Nov. 1889) by Arlo Bates, and "The Liar" (1889) and *The Tragic Muse* (1889-90) by Henry James.[5] These stories carry on the Victorian pattern of testing—and often shattering—the idealist models of male aesthetic *Bildung* which sparked the genre's Romantic origin stories. In these works of development or degeneration, male characters kill themselves, nearly kill themselves, or save themselves from ruin. Wilde famously engages the topical interest in degeneration, but he widens his novel's network of allusions to entail features of the first wave of magic-portrait fiction.

Let us begin with the tropes, characters, and plot points Wilde borrows from tales by Hawthorne, Balzac, and Poe, examined in Chapter One. As Powell has illustrated, *Dorian Gray* reworks Hawthorne's influential trope of the "prophetic picture," for Dorian's portrait ambiguously determines the course of his life. The trope even appears elsewhere in the narrative, as when the "poisonous" book Lord Henry gives to Dorian functions as a prophetic figuration of his own life: "The hero," Dorian thinks to himself, "the wonderful young Parisian…became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it" (108). Dorian also describes his mentor as a prophet: "Yes: there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism" (111). For his part, Lord Henry alternately invokes Hawthorne's manipulative artist in "The Prophetic Pictures" (1837) and Balzac's art-loving know-it-all, Master Frenhofer, in "The Unknown Masterpiece" (1837). Wilde integrates through Lord Henry's dialogue the very "lesson" of Balzac's story: that Master Frenhofer, whose masterful portrait turns out to be a

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[5] The following works also appeared in 1889: "The Old Portrait" by Louisa Crow (Jan. 1889 in *Quiver*); "My Portrait" by Henrietta Corkran (Dec. 1889 in *The Gentleman's Magazine*); *The Veiled Picture* by Elizabeth Lysaght; *Mike Fletcher* by George Moore; and *Dorinda* by the Countess of Munster, whose novel Wilde reviewed.

chaotic mess of paint, proves no painting master at all, but rather, an extraordinary poet best suited to speak lyrically and philosophically about the art of painting. In Lord Henry's variation on this principle, the only artists "'who are personally delightful, are bad artists…A great poet, a really great poet, is the most unpoetical of all creatures'" (50). Perhaps more importantly, just as Master Frenhofer's fantastical claims about the ideal of female beauty lead to the devastation of young Gillette, so too does Lord Henry's indoctrination of Dorian lead to Sibyl's catastrophic end.

Another Balzac tale, "Sarrasine" (1830), supplies material for Dorian's fatal love affair with Sibyl. Both "Sarrasine" and *Dorian Gray* begin with the provocative portrait of an Adonis figure.[6] Balzac's romanticizing artist Sarrasine pines after the Italian castrato La Zambinella, attending every one of his/her performances, just as Dorian goes "[n]ight after night" to see Sibyl play and to hear her beautiful voice (45). As with Sarrasine, Dorian does not meet Sibyl until the theater manager arranges their first encounter, filled with fantasies and falsities as are their few meetings until Sibyl's death. Later, the rumors circulating around London about the sins of the aristocratic Dorian Gray recall the scandalous rumors enthralling Parisian high society in "Sarrasine." Just as the secret sins hiding in the Lanty family's history intensify the meaning of the Adonis portrait (in fact sketched from La Zambinella), the uncertain crimes surrounding Dorian's social identity enhance his fascination for Wilde's London upper crust.

Dorian's death revises the suicide scenes in several stories, including Goodman's *His Other Self* (1889), Poe's "William Wilson" (1839), Heron-Allen's "The Suicide of

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[6] Lord Henry describes Dorian's portrait as that of an "Adonis" in the novel's opening chapter (Wilde 6). Again later, during Basil's confession to Dorian, Basil discusses the other portraits he sketched of the young muse before producing his masterpiece; these portraits include an "'Adonis with huntsman's cloak and polished boar-spear" (98).

Sylvester Gray" (1889), and Ouida's "The Adder" (1888). Goodman's *His Other Self*

tells the moralistic, Jekyll-and-Hyde story of a man named Albert Vane, who discovers

his "true self" in a magic mirror that produces a double of him.[7] The Double, described as

"like a painted portrait," reveals Vane's faults such that, when he desperately attempts

suicide out of horror at his "true self," his Double dies in his stead—but only after

delivering a dreadfully tedious speech in honor of his pupil. The Double's didactic self-

sacrifice allows Vane to emerge a better man when he marries his beloved in the end. The

last lines of Dorian's life, in which he fulfills the fatal exchange with his portrait/double,

at once recall and satirize Goodman's ending, for Dorian's desperate stabbing strikes a

bleak note that makes the lucky Albert Vane seem cartoonish: "Lying on the floor was a

dead man…withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not until they examined

the rings that they recognized who it was" (188). While reversing Goodman's happy

ending, Wilde's ending invokes Poe's "William Wilson" (1839), a gothic tale in which

the protagonist attempts to kill his hated other only to kill himself.

  With the possible exception of Hawthorne, however, Wilde borrows from Ouida

more than any other author.[8] Ouida, as we saw in Chapter Four, had published at least

four magic-portrait stories since 1860, but the one that seems to have struck Wilde the

most profoundly is "The Adder" (1888), which has not yet received any scholarly

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[7] Wilde also incorporates a mirror into *Dorian Gray* in the form of a gift from Lord Henry; Dorian uses this mirror to compare his face to the portrait. Wilde also references "magical mirrors" in a reflective passage in which Dorian thinks "there would be real pleasure in watching [the changing portrait]. He would be able to follow his mind into its secret places. This portrait would be to him the most magical of mirrors" (91).

[8] As Joseph Bristow observes in the explanatory notes to the Oxford edition, Wilde borrows one of Ouida's aphorisms in Chapter 18: "'You would sacrifice anybody, Harry, for the sake of an epigram'" Dorian says (172). This line appears in Ouida's three-volume *Othmar* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1885, Vol. 1, 63).

attention, likely due to the continually slow resurrection of her works within the Victorian canon.[9] The story of Sibyl Vane, framed by that of Dorian and his Faustian bargain, reworks the tale of Ouida's aristocratic Parisian artist Claude Dorat and the Venetian peasant girl, Veronica Venier, whom Dorat fatally romances. Like Sibyl, Veronica is a local, lower class beauty and, like Sibyl's brother James, her husband is a poor sailor. In stark contrast, Dorat lives in Venice on a hedonist's errand for an adventure away from Paris. Only in Venice can Dorat realize his "vision of languor, and beauty and rest, with the white wings of sea-birds…and the glories of sunsets aflame behind the Euganean hills" (242). In the first fateful scene, Dorat has fallen asleep in the garden of a cloister where he had been painting, and Veronica saves his life by killing a deadly adder about to bite him. To repay her for her kindness, Dorat purchases a symbolic "gold serpent so flexible that it curled like a living snake and seemed almost imbued with life as its emerald eyes sparkled in the dark" (249). When Veronica refuses the beautiful necklace, for which she fears her husband might abuse her, Dorat tells her that she can safely earn it by posing for a portrait.

Soon Dorat, like Lord Henry, reveals himself to be a self-interested hedonist who achieves his desires (and artistic ambitions) at the expense of women, whom he regularly

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[9] While criticism on Ouida's works is not in as sorry a state as that of Charles Reade's fiction, she has not yet received the kind of resurgence Vernon Lee is currently enjoying in Victorian studies. As with scholarship on Reade, scholarship on Ouida focuses overwhelmingly on her novels—especially *Under Two Flags*—as opposed to her short fiction. The few book-length studies about Ouida include Natalie Schroeder's *Ouida the Phenomenon: Evolving Social, Political, and Gender Concerns in Her Fiction* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008) and three early to mid twentieth-century works focused on her biography, rather than her art: Elizabeth Lee's *Ouida: A Memoir* (New York: Duffield, 1914), Yvonne Ffrench's *Ouida, A Study in Ostentation* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1938), and Monica Stirling's *The Fine and the Wicked: The Life and Times of Ouida* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1958).

denigrates.[10] Ouida's narrator characterizes Dorat thus: "it was not the picture that he

most wanted, but the woman; he was an artist indeed, but he was beyond all a

voluptuary" (255). His first sight of Veronica depends on a fantasy of ideal female

beauty, just as does Dorian's initial vision of Sibyl: "'Santa Barbara!' he murmured; for

the woman who stood above him resembled that picture which he loved, and which he

had gazed on that morning for the hundredth time where it hangs in the shadow of the

side altar in the church of Santa Maria Formosa" (246). In this ekphrastic story filled with

allusions to Shakespeare, Giorgione, Titian, and other Italian Renaissance masters, Dorat

conceives of Veronica as "His Barbara, his Europa" (249), as his "Desdemona" (258),

and as "a Clytemnestra or a Medea" (268). Similarly, Sibyl serves as Dorian's own

personal Rosalind, Imogen, and Juliet. Both Dorat and Dorian perceive in their peasant

maidens a superior artistic temperament: the former watches Veronica's "superb walk as

she passed through the garden with that mingling of poetic analysis and of sensual desire

which, together and inseparable, characterise every artistic temperament" (248).[11] And

for such talents both male characters declare their ambitions to make the women

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[10] Just as Lord Henry gives voice to misogynistic generalizations, Dorat repeatedly denigrates women: he misinterprets Veronica's errand to return the necklace, assuming that she is "offer[ing] herself" to him like a prostitute (251); "he believed," our narrator tells us, "but very little in the words of women" (252); when Veronica reflects that she does not know why she married her brutish husband, Dorat says, "'I will tell you…you were a girl and girls are always curious, and vain, and inquisitive, and the first man who comes, is welcome'" (256); later, he universalizes about women thus: "A daughter of the gods, a sister of the saints…and yet won by a little gold…They are all like that; all; the *cabotine* sleeps in every madonna of them all" (258).

[11] Even the language Dorat uses to describe Veronica's beauty finds echoes in Dorian's reverie about Sibyl, for both describe the beauties they love as "flower-like" (Ouida 252, Wilde 45) and incomparable: "all women that I have ever possessed are as nothing now that I have seen you" Dorat insists (252). Interestingly, Dorat also uses language to woo Veronica that reappears in Wilde's Basil, for Veronica is Dorat's muse, just as Dorian is Basil's: the Italian poet "'Ariosto,'" Dorat tells her, once "'met a woman wearing a robe embroidered with golden branches of palm; and that palm-bearer changed the ways of his life for him; so you have changed mine'" (260).

famous—Sibyl for her superb acting and Veronica for Dorat's own masterful portrait of her. Perhaps most importantly, Sibyl and Veronica are attractive only to the extent that they remain utterly ignorant. Dorat explains as much to Veronica: "'You do not understand? Of course you do not. That is what is so divine in you. You might be Eve or Lilith living in a virgin world'" (257). Sibyl similarly knows nothing beyond the world she plays out on stage.

Dorat's completion of his masterpiece comes at the cost of corrupting both Veronica and himself. He adores the portrait, but "he had given a high price for it. He had created a passion in another over which he had no control" (264). This "passion"—for the jewels, for art, for sex—seems to seep into his own life, just as Dorian's portrait wields an incalculable influence throughout his social universe. Whereas Dorian's portrait allegorizes his degeneration, Veronica's devilish snake necklace symbolizes the deadly influence that dictates Dorat's and Veronica's lives: "Sometimes he felt as if the adder she had killed had taken resurrection in her, and clasped him and curled round him and drew away his very life-blood till he swooned" (264). Ultimately, just as Dorian callously casts Sibyl away, Dorat suddenly stops loving Veronica. Sibyl's failure on stage echoes Veronica's failure once Dorat finishes painting her and sleeping with her. At this point, he loves only the portrait: "'All of her that I care to keep is here,' he thought as he looked at the picture, 'and what can I do with the living woman?'" (265). Veronica is worth nothing beyond the art he can make out of her, just as Sibyl is nothing for Dorian without her theatrical arts.

In the end, as Veronica's husband sails into port and she begs Dorat to take her away with him, he refuses, insisting that she stay with her husband and lie to him about

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their affair. Her life now "hateful to her," Veronica walks out of Dorat's quarters and

drowns herself (272). The closing image in Dorian's life, for whom it "was not until they

had examined the rings that they recognized who it was" (188), recalls that of Veronica,

for she is found dead "with the green weeds of the canal caught in her clenched hands,

and the little golden adder clasped about her throat" (272). As if to confirm the links

between his novel and Ouida's recently published story, Wilde also incorporates telling

uses of the word adder (114 and 155) and treasured jewels for Dorian, who reads stories

about serpents with eyes of jacinth (115).

As for Wilde's broader generic borrowings, we can perhaps best grasp the many

sources for his novel using the format of a chart:

Characteristics of *Dorian Gray*	Sources in Magic-Portrait Fiction[12]
A Faustian plot or devil story conveyed through a painted portrait	Maturin (*Melmoth the Wanderer*), Hoffmann (*The Devil's Elixirs* etc.), Nerval ("The Devil's Portrait"), Anton Guilio Barrili (*The Devil's Portrait*)
A portrait that captures a person's soul	Balzac ("The Unknown Masterpiece"), Hawthorne ("The Prophetic Pictures"), Rossetti ("Hand and Soul")
A portrait concealed with a veil and hidden from public view	Gogol ("The Portrait"), Hawthorne ("The Prophetic Pictures"), James M'Govan ("The Veiled Portrait"), Elizabeth Lysaght (*The Veiled Picture*), James Grant ("The Veiled Portrait"), and two anonymous authors who similarly titled their stories "The Veiled Portrait" (1857 in *Reynold's Miscellany* and 1864 in *Once a Week*)
A portrait with disturbingly lifelike eyes (122, 133)	Gogol ("The Portrait"), Balzac ("The Unknown Masterpiece"), Hawthorne ("The Prophetic Pictures"; "Edward Randolph's Portrait"), Poe ("The Oval Portrait"); R. L. Stevenson ("Olalla")
A portrait considered to be the artist's masterpiece (5, 12, 24, 25)	Balzac ("Sarrasine"; "The Unknown Masterpiece"), Hawthorne ("The Prophetic Pictures"), Poe ("The Oval Portrait"), Émile Zola (*The Masterpiece*), Ouida ("The Adder")

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[12] Note that the right-hand column of this chart remains incomplete; it offers a selection of representative texts, rather than a full record of possible sources.

A character haunted by uncontrollable visions or memories of a portrait or face (124, 137-8, 141, 158, 168, 170)	Gogol ("The Portrait")
Degeneration symbolized by a portrait	R. L. Stevenson ("Olalla")
The exploration of male development or degeneration through a portrait	Hardman ("Colonna the Painter"), Balzac ("Sarrasine"; "The Unknown Masterpiece"); Bates ("A Problem in Portraiture")
The infusion of art criticism through dialogue and commentary about or beyond the limits of the portrait	Hardman ("Colonna the Painter"), Balzac ("Sarrasine"; "The Unknown Masterpiece"), Rossetti ("Hand and Soul"; "St. Agnes of Intercession"), Pater (*Imaginary Portraits*)
A portrait that presages a character's life, or what Hawthorne calls a "prophetic picture" (108)	Novalis (*Heinrich von Ofterdingen*), de Nerval ("The Devil's Portrait"), Hawthorne ("The Prophetic Pictures"), Rossetti ("St. Agnes of Intercession"), Arlo Bates ("A Problem in Portraiture"), Savile Clarke ("The Portrait's Warning")
A portrait artist who searches for or discusses the discovery of an "ideal" of beauty (97)	"Luca Morato, the Majolica Painter of Urbino" (1869 in *Temple Bar*); Balzac ("Sarrasine"; "The Unknown Masterpiece")
A portrait that reflects the artist as much as, or more than, its subject (8)	Gogol ("The Portrait"), Hawthorne ("The Prophetic Pictures")
Discussion of what Hawthorne calls art's "earthly immortality"—i.e., the fact that art, unlike human bodies, can live forever (26, 101)	Hawthorne ("The Prophetic Pictures")
Violence against the portrait (187)	Gogol ("The Portrait"), Bates ("A Problem in Portraiture")
The return of an artist who seeks to review his masterpiece and possibly reverse the moral degradation he has engendered through his art (95-6)	Hawthorne ("The Prophetic Pictures"); Bates ("A Problem in Portraiture")
The surname "Vane" (Sibyl Vane)	Hawthorne (Alice Vane in "Edward Randolph's Portrait"); Goodman (Albert Vane in *His Other Self*)[13]
The surname "Gray" (Dorian Gray)	Heron-Allen ("The Suicide of Sylvester Gray")
Dorian Gray's suicide scene (187-8)	Ouida ("The Adder"), Heron-Allen ("The Suicide of Sylvester Gray"), Goodman (*His Other Self*), Poe ("William Wilson")

[13] See Kerry Powell's detailed comparison of Alice and Sibyl in "Hawthorne, Arlo Bates, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (*Papers on Language and Literature*, Vol. 16, 1980), 407.

Wilde may not have been familiar with every one of the sources listed above, but the breadth of connections evoked by his narrative choices suggests that he deliberately synthesized recognizable features of the booming genre.

One of the most striking revelations exposed by this neglected provenance is the fact that, when we look to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as a primary source for Wilde's story, we are looking at the wrong work of R. L. Stevenson's. What we should be discussing is the magic-portrait story Stevenson republished in *The Merry Men and Other Tales and Fables* the following year—"Olalla" (1887)—a tale of atavistic degeneration revealed through a painted portrait. Like Dorian's identity, the identity of the beautiful young Olalla is divided by a portrait, which, in her case, depicts a long-dead female ancestor whom she seems to embody, and whose horrifying condition Olalla is fated to replicate. When the male narrator discovers the portrait, he struggles with unrelenting fascination to grasp the meaning of this uncanny resemblance—"Perhaps an actual link subsisted" he thinks (Stevenson 71)—just as Dorian famously stares at his own image, wondering how it could reflect changes in his living body. If Dorian's self-love underwrites his Faustian bargain with his own portrait, Stevenson's narrator makes a similar bargain upon first viewing the ancestral portrait: "while I knew that to love such a woman were to sign and seal one's degeneration, I still knew that, if she were alive, I should love her" (69). These prophetic words foreshadow his love for the beautiful woman who lives the life captured in the image of her dead maternal ancestral. And this too represents a link to Dorian's degeneration, for as we learn in Chapter 11, Dorian follows in the ancestral line of his dead mother: when gazing at her portrait, Dorian reflects that "he knew what he had gotten from her. He had got from her his beauty, and his passion for the beauty of others"

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(Wilde 122). An intoxicating beauty keeps Stevenson's narrator enthralled with Olalla, until finally she herself points to the portrait on the wall and unveils for him the links between her encroaching atavism and the signs of it written on the face of her ancestor.

These affinities represent stronger ties than those between *Dorian Gray* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Not only does the latter narrative contain no central portrait, but Dorian's deterioration advances more clearly as a series of art-critical discoveries than as a Jekyll-and-Hyde-like "double life." While we never witness Dorian's sins for ourselves, he does not successfully conceal them, for, as Basil sadly proclaims, they are gossiped about throughout London. Rather, Dorian's anti-heroism unfolds through a series of interpretations of his own likeness, just as the characters in "Olalla" slowly discover the family's horrifying ancestry through the painted portrait of Olalla's ancestor. The perpetual inclination to link Dorian Gray to Dr. Henry Jekyll most likely derives from the tendency among critics and readers alike to seek analogies in other male protagonists. Yet, Ouida's Veronica Venier and Stevenson's Olalla display a far more compelling resemblance to Dorian Gray.

Although we cannot know precisely which magic-portrait stories Wilde had read and which he intentionally invoked, we know that he admired authors—from Maturin and Balzac to Hawthorne and Poe to Ouida and Pater—who published influential magic-portrait stories across the nineteenth century. According to LibraryThing, Wilde's personal library contained Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), Simeon Solomon's *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1870) (Solomon's reinvention of Rossetti's "Hand and Soul"), Wilhelm Meinhold's *Sidonia the Sorceress* (1848, trans. 1894 by Lady Jane Wilde), and Thomas Hardy's *The Well-Beloved: A Sketch of a Temperament* (1897) (the

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story of a sculptor searching for the ideal woman). He also owned works by Balzac, Gautier, and Stevenson, along with an array of volumes about Dante Alighieri and about ancient Greece. As Isobel Murray has observed, Wilde admired his great-uncle Charles Maturin's masterpiece, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, which inspired Wilde's own post-prison pseudonym.[14] His favorite American novelist, according to Vincent O'Sullivan, was the author most frequently associated in the British press with magic-portrait fiction: Nathaniel Hawthorne.[15] Wilde also professed his admiration for Edgar Allan Poe in an 1886 *Pall Mall Gazette* article, "To Read or Not to Read" (Feb. 1886), in which he writes, "I am amazed to find that Edgar Allan Poe has been passed over. Surely this marvelous lord of rhythmic expression deserves a place?" (Wilde 44).

Later, in a letter to the editor of the *Scots Observer*, Wilde made explicit his reverent reinvention of literature by another author: Goethe. In the midst of his novel's scandal-clouded reception, Wilde lamented, "It takes a Goethe to see a work of art fully, completely, and perfectly, and…it is a pity that Goethe never had an opportunity of reading *Dorian Gray*. I feel quite certain that he would have been delighted by it" (Wilde *Letters* 269). Wilde's privately confessed affinity for Goethe helps us see how his own philosophical fiction fits within the larger genealogy of magic-portrait fiction, which

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[14] See Isobel Murray's 1974 Introduction to the novel, quoted in Ziolkowski, *Disenchanted Images: A Literary Iconology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 128. During his exile from England, as Bristow explains, a demoralized Wilde "mov[ed] around France and Italy under a carefully chosen incognito, 'Sebastian Melmoth,' the two parts of which allude to the early Christian martyr murdered by Diocletian, on the one hand, and the nomadic protagonist of his great-uncle's gothic romance, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), on the other hand" (Bristow *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture* ix). Like "Melmoth," the surname "Sebastian" recalls the eponymous protagonist of a magic-portrait story—in this case, one by another of Wilde's favorite authors: "Sebastian Van Storck" (1886) by Walter Pater.

[15] O'Sullivan, Vincent. *Aspects of Wilde*. New York: H. Holt & Co., 1936: 146.

begins with Goethe's and Hoffmann's experiments in aesthetic *Bildung* and in crafting

artworks conceived "fully, completely, and perfectly"—at least, in Wilde's estimation.

Dorian Gray's evocations of popular magic-portrait fiction do not diminish its

engagement with Goethe's *Faust*. What we miss, however, when we focus on the premise

Goethe borrows from Marlowe is the legacy of Goethe's formal innovations for the

intertwined histories of the genre and the Aesthetic Movement, within which Wilde self-

consciously writes. *Faust* fuses dramatic and prose fiction with art criticism and aesthetic

philosophy in a story about a man who raises the universe before him in a picture, only to

suffer tragedy and death in the process—it is an attempt to consider through fiction how

knowledge makes and unmakes the human beings who seek to master it. In the Prologue,

as Florina Tufescu observes, Goethe even announces the "artificiality and

fragmentariness" of the text that follows (Tufescu *Oscar Wilde's Plagiarism* 128). Like

Wilde after him, Goethe also strategically integrates material from other texts; Tufescu

explains this defining feature by discussing the work's critical aftermath:

> *Faust*, like *Dorian Gray*, was unusually fragmented and derivative, criticized by
> that master of collage Samuel Taylor Coleridge as lacking organic unity, as only a
> sequence of 'magic-lantern pictures'. Byron famously pointed out its indebtedness
> to Shakespeare and the Bible and the significant influence of Calderon's play *El
> Magico* was urged with such a degree of probability that G. H. Lewes found it
> necessary to dedicate several pages of his chapter on *Faust* to disproving the
> accusation. (Tufescu 128)

Wilde suffered a similar, if far more severe, backlash against his novel in that

reviewers—those who were not too busy condemning the book as "unmanly, sickening,

vicious…and tedious"—were obsessively discussing his reuse of earlier works (Qutd. in

Mason *Art and Morality* 199-200).

The novel's first reviewers detected the significance of its literary ancestors, but, like critics today, they hardly agreed upon which texts Wilde was referencing and what to make of his deliberate derivativeness. Early reviews frequently cited Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Balzac's *La peau de chagrin*, Disraeli's *Vivian Grey*, and Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (Powell "Hawthorne, Arlo Bates, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" 404). The anonymous reviewer for *Punch* detected, albeit unhappily, connections to Hawthorne's fiction: "The central idea is an excellent, if not exactly a novel, one; and a finer art, say that of Nathaniel Hawthorne, would have made a striking and satisfying story of it" (Mason 46). In one of the friendliest and acutest reviews, Hawthorne's son Julian Hawthorne observed the influence of Ouida at work in *Dorian Gray*: "Mr. Wilde's writing," J. Hawthorne writes, "has what is called 'colour,' the quality that forms the mainstay of many of Ouida's works,—and it appears in the sensuous descriptions of nature and of the decorations and environments of the artistic life" (Mason 53). Arguably the most important reviewer—Walter Pater—notes the novel's fitness within the tradition of "Edgar Poe, and…some good French work of the same kind," which Wilde "probably" used, as Pater puts it, "in more or less conscious imitation of it" (Mason 58). Pater also discerned Wilde's synthesis of fiction and aesthetic philosophy: "In 'Dorian Gray' he is true, certainly, on the whole, to the aesthetic philosophy of his *Intentions*"—that is, of Wilde's 1891 volume of critical essays, especially his dialogic essay, "The Decay of Lying" (Pater Qutd. in Mason 56). The following section examines Wilde's articulation in *Dorian Gray* of his anti-realist aesthetic philosophy and the resulting intertextual mixture of high and low forms. Fully contextualizing the most famous magic-portrait

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story within the genre's history reveals that the very philosophy Wilde fashions as "The Decay of Lying" was made possible by principles inherent in the magic-portrait genre.

II. Portraying "The Decay of Lying"

When observing the relationship between Wilde's novel and his *Intentions*, Pater praises him for "carr[ying] on, more perhaps than any other writer, the brilliant critical work of Matthew Arnold. *The Decay of Lying*, for instance, is all but unique in its half-humorous, yet wholly convinced, presentment of certain valuable truths of criticism" (Pater Qutd. in Mason 56). Rather than citing his own work, Pater aligns Wilde with the more conservative cultural critic Matthew Arnold, who had just died in 1888.[16] While associating the critical content of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with Arnold's famous campaign for "self-culture," however, Pater implicitly praises him for employing the same formal strategy Pater himself adopts in *The Renaissance* and *Imaginary Portraits*, as we saw in Chapters One and Five. Wilde, as I have argued, carries on the tradition enacted by Rossetti, Pater, and Lee of using the magic-portrait genre as a means to advance aesthetic theories within the concrete body of art. Yet, whereas the art-critical and aesthetic philosophies constructed through magic-portrait fiction by Pater and Lee generally restrict cultural allusions to those safely inside the category of high art, Wilde privileges an aesthetic philosophy that depends in great part on satirical criticisms of bad realist art. As we will see, Wilde's theory of "The Decay of Lying," thus necessarily, even happily, cultivates a detailed engagement with popular mainstream culture. While most scholars identify *The Renaissance* as the novel's primary critical intertext, this

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[16] See Lawrence Danson's helpful comparison of Arnold and Wilde in *Wilde's Intentions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 41.

reading shows that Pater's classical hedonism functions not as the novel's guiding philosophy, but rather as a set of tools strategically and unevenly deployed among the central characters, and in subordination to Wilde's overarching re-presentation of his anti-realist philosophy.

"The Decay of Lying" first appeared in the esteemed British magazine the *Nineteenth Century*, which published works by Tennyson (one of its founders), Arnold, Ruskin, Swinburne, and Morris. The essay takes the form of a dialogue between drawing-room characters named after Wilde's sons, Cyril and Vivian, the latter of which gives voice to his countercultural philosophy. Vivian's conversation with his skeptical friend unpacks a multifarious argument against literary realism and for the salvific power of the artistic imagination—or, as Vivian likes to call it, the tragically vanishing faculty of Lying. Vivian explains to Cyril that he has just composed an article about the matter—a "protest"—in which he recommends "a most salutary and valuable warning. If it is attended to," he proudly hopes, "there may be a new Renaissance of Art" (167). While one reviewer writing for the *Nation* interpreted Wilde's concept of "Lying" as a rehashing of "the old doctrine of idealism," we can perhaps more accurately understand it as a witty adaptation of Pater's aestheticism, yet one expansive enough to embrace characteristics of the older European Romanticism and the more topical Decadence. "In the dialogue," as Richard Ellmann observes, "Wilde summed up the disdain for life and nature of writers from Gautier to Mallarmé, the disdain for common morality of Poe and Baudelaire, the disdain for content of Verlaine and Whistler"—all of whom represent precursors, founders, or inheritors of aestheticism (Ellmann 302). Wilde's strategy of innovative re-presentation in "The Decay of Lying" is the same basic move he makes in

The Picture of Dorian Gray toward a paradoxically hypercritical and polemical *inclusivity* of aesthetic ideas via narrative fiction. And it is a move that insists upon a genealogy of thought stretching from late-eighteenth-century European Romanticism to the neo-Romanticism of Victorian aestheticism, as traced in Chapter One.

For Vivian, Lying means cultivating illusions, masks, and decorative surfaces, "telling beautiful untruths," and embracing a distinctly Artistic imagination, as opposed to turning toward Nature for beauty or truth. Wilde's neo-Romanticism develops negatively through Vivian's attack on Realism, which Wilde crafts out of a complex critical binary between "Art" and "Nature." These terms have an oppositional relationship that hinges on the practice of "imitation." Vivian argues that Realism falsely glorifies Nature over Art, leading only to Art that sordidly and simplistically "imitates" Nature. In contrast, the mindful Art of the Liar "never expresses anything but itself." In this theory, Nature is sordid, ugly, and chaotic because, paradoxically, it is *itself an imitation*. Nature is a repetition of someone else's lie. As Wilde uses it, the word Nature most closely names what we now call ideology and its manifestation in institutional and social practices.

Vivian's "new Renaissance of Art" calls for the heroically cultured Liar to swoop in and resurrect Art from the clutches of Nature-loving realist novelists.[17] The only way to escape the prison of Nature is to embrace Art and the untapped meanings enabled by

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[17] As Lawrence Danson observes, for many progressive turn-of-the-century writers "interested in sexual freedom for women and homosexuals [such as New Woman novelists], realism, with its attention to the grim facts of an inequable social system, was the art of the future. But to Wilde, realism is on the wrong side of a divide that separates imitation from creation, nature from form, life from art, realism from romance, and a supposedly natural sexuality from a sexuality which, like art, disdains any attempt to dictate limits" (Danson *Wilde's Intentions: The Artist in His Criticism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, 54).

art's special form of referentiality, or what Julia Kristeva has called intertextuality. Vivian's misleadingly ahistorical notion that "Art never expresses anything but itself" is perhaps best captured in his comical complaint that the typical Victorian novelist "has not even the courage of other people's ideas, but insists on going directly to life for everything" (168). What Wilde means here is that great artists—who are great Liars— construct great Art out of the material of *other* arts, as opposed to the paradoxically *derivative* material of Nature.

The alternately playful and acerbic dialogue concludes with Vivian's overview of his four proposed doctrines: 1) "Art never expresses anything but itself"; 2) "All bad art comes from returning to Life and Nature, and elevating them into ideals"; 3) "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life"; and 4) "Lying, the telling of beautiful untrue things, is the proper aim of Art" (194-5). The verbs Vivian's principles rely upon—*expressing*, *elevating*, *imitating*—personify Art and Nature, rendering them cultural rivals: Realist and Romantic artists. Whereas Realist novelists mindlessly repeat boring imitations, Romantic "liars" produce critical thought in the act of telling tales about beautiful things. This thoughtful, literary critical mode of storytelling renders Romanticists superior to Realists, what with their destructively disordered simplicity. Significantly, Wilde's glorification of the presumptively male, Romantic artist reinforces the fitness of his theory within the Whig aesthetic tradition Wilde learned from Pater, whereby the Shaftesburyian artist subject is conceived as a privileged white male. While his philosophy falls in line with a patriarchal tradition, however, his art synthesizes both male-authored and female-authored works, embodying literary criticism through richly allusive syntheses—the achievement he reaches in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

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It is through the literary critical principle of intertextuality that "The Decay of Lying" and the genre of magic-portrait fiction merge in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Diligently practicing what Vivian preaches, Wilde renders his novel a diverse synthesis of previous artworks in order that it may express Art far more than Nature. On the level of shameless self-plugs, he does not fail to seize the opportunity to use his characters as mouthpieces for the philosophy espoused in "The Decay of Lying." Lord Henry, for example, declares: "'I hate vulgar realism in literature. The man who could call a spade a spade should be compelled to use one. It is the only thing he is fit for'" (163). During another dinner-table conversation, he dashes off a line to Mr. Erskine in which he voices claims that could just as well appear in "The Decay of Lying":

> 'I should like to write a novel certainly, a novel that would be as lovely as a Persian carpet and as unreal. But there is no literary public in England for anything except newspapers, primers, and encyclopædias. Of all people in the world the English have the least sense of the beauty of literature.' (39)

Of course, Lord Henry's words metacritically describe the novel in which he exists, and his praise of a hypothetical novel "'as lovely as a Persian carpet and as unreal'" reiterates Wilde's point in "The Decay of Lying" that the "only real people are the people who never existed"—that is, the people who only exist in fictional artworks (172). Indeed, on the more complex levels of form and theme, Wilde's characters and plot twists are, as we've seen, made up of the characters and plot twists of earlier magic-portrait fiction. The extraordinary intertextuality of Dorian, Lord Henry, and Sibyl Vane renders the novel deeply referential of Art above Nature, tending toward Vivian's goal of Art that "never expresses anything but itself."

On the levels of literary history and abstract formal structures, the genre of magic-portrait fiction itself anticipates and enables Wilde's anti-realist philosophy, intricately

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restaged in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The subjective and social relations of influence between art and life, especially as explored in a *Künstlerroman*, names the fundamental theme of magic-portrait fiction, beginning with its earliest instances in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Wilde refashions the magic-portrait tradition of aesthetic "influence" through Vivian's claims about "imitation," a subtle word change that embraces the prior tradition even more than it revises that tradition. In the novel that enacts Vivian's philosophy, the reanimated concept of imitation structures the plot, whereby a young man's life seems to unfold according to a lived imitation of the aestheticized universe around him.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Wilde theorizes the trauma of influence by depicting the power of Dorian's portrait as deriving from anything and everythig *but* its objective, physical qualities. Famously, Dorian's ceaseless beauty lies neither in his innate "Nature," nor in the painted portrait veiled and locked away for most of the story, but rather in the minds of Dorian's spectators and in Dorian's personal embodiment of/as art. Wilde conveys the premise of this pattern in one of the best-known aphorisms in the novel's Preface: "*It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors*" (3). Wilde thus attempts to have it both ways: to insist through the Faustian bargain that the portrait lies at the root of Dorian's social degeneration *and* to insist throughout the narrative that this influence originates and takes place elsewhere—in spectators' minds, in Dorian's body, in Lord Henry's words, and so on. To call the portrait "supernatural" is to miss the point of Wilde's critical treatment of art objects throughout the text. Kerry Powell and others use this term as part of a larger interpretation of the novel, and Dorian's Faustian bargain in particular, as a derivative remnant of the Gothic house of horrors. Yet, such a reading

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reduces the portrait's complexity, which Wilde choreographs in great part by borrowing from "The Decay of Lying."

One of the primary ways Wilde distinguishes his novel from the magic-portrait stories written into its fabric, while at the same time advancing his anti-realist philosophy, is by expanding the role of death—decadently artful death—in the life of the portrait. The key term repeatedly assigned to Dorian's likeness is "fatal," which appears at least eight times in connection with it.[18] A troubled Dorian says, for example, "'I can't explain it to you, Basil, but I must never sit to you again. There is something fatal about a portrait. It has a life of its own'" (100). Through such uses of the phrase "fatal portrait" Wilde recalls the magic-portrait paradigm whereby a painted portrait uncontrollably leads to some form of death, usually of the sitter.[19] The "fatality" of Dorian's portrait at once signposts the novel as a magic-portrait story, suggests a literal, causal relationship between art and death, and speaks metaphorically to the power of art to affect social, material, and psychological change. So long as Dorian lives, his likeness becomes, we are led to believe, wildly fatal: Sibyl commits suicide; Dorian brutally stabs Basil; James Vane is accidentally shot by a hunter; Alan Campbell kills himself after being blackmailed by Dorian into chemically erasing Basil's dead body; and finally, of course,

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[18] See pages 100, 104, 135, 146, and 185. Related uses of the term "fatal" or "fatality" occur on pages 7, 127. By story's end, Dorian's own "living death" haunts him more than any murder or suicide: "Nor, indeed, was it the death of Basil Hallward that weighed most upon his mind. It was the living death of his own soul that troubled him" (185).

[19] When they are not described as "fatal," art objects and aestheticized characters in *Dorian Gray* are described as "romantic." This is especially the case with respect to Basil and Sibyl. "Poor Sibyl!" Dorian thinks to himself, "what a romance it had all been!" (90). And to Basil, he says: "'It is one of the great romantic tragedies of the age…She lived her finest tragedy. She was always a heroine'" (93). Wilde uses the term so frequently that he practically articulates a revised definition of "romance" over the course of the narrative.

Dorian stabs his portrait only to kill himself. And these are just the physical deaths. The fact that upon Dorian's death the portrait appears exactly as it had when Basil first finished it ought to function as the most direct sign of all that its powers were never "supernatural." Basil's masterful portrait was simply the best of all the Liars in the story.

Wilde makes another generic innovation in *Dorian Gray* by rendering narrative fiction and critical argumentation, literature and literary criticism, nearly indistinguishable.[20] Most magic-portrait stories contain easily identifiable moments of art criticism, usually reserved for the artist characters, as opposed to the sitters or spectators. We saw this pattern in the tales of Hoffmann, Hardman, and Balzac, for example, wherein the characters of Reinhold in Hoffmann's "Meister Martin," Colonna in Hardman's "Colonna the Painter," and Master Frenhofer in Balzac's "The Unknown Masterpiece" voice nearly all of the ekphrastic reflections on art objects. Wilde, however, uses third-person narration and free indirect discourse to ambiguously infuse his own critical voice into those of the narrator, Lord Henry, and Dorian Gray, in particular. Often Lord Henry retells stories and analyzes them in the process. In fact, rarely do we experience an event for ourselves; most scenes progress according to conversations about events that have already happened. This technique makes the dialogues vaguely critical, such as when gossip slips into social criticism, which slips into art criticism, given the

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[20] As with *Dorian Gray*, the form of "The Decay of Lying" exemplifies its argument for the synthesis of thought and/through art. In a fictional dialogue Wilde houses criticism (Vivian's "Protest") within criticism (Wilde's own "Decay of Lying"). The text slips between being a philosophically rigorous Platonic dialogue and a satirical society-comedy conversation. Importantly, Wilde joins not only philosophy and fiction, but also literary criticism; the essay's thesis is its attack on literary realism. As Vivian says to Cyril, "'Lying and poetry are arts—arts, as Plato saw, not unconnected with each other'" (168-9). In order for great Liars to do their ameliorative sociocultural work, they must be at once literary artists and literary critics, taletellers and philosophers. See also Danson's observations about Wilde's fraught use of the Platonic dialogue in *Wilde's Intentions* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1997, 36-59).

ubiquitous treatment of people and things as *objets d'art*. In one passage, set in Lord

Henry's mind, Wilde does more to interpret the novel he is writing than to advance the

plot of that novel. Harry, the narrator says,

> was conscious—and the thought brought a gleam of pleasure into his brown agate eyes—that it was through certain words of his, musical words said with musical utterance, that Dorian Gray's soul had turned to this white girl and bowed in worship before her. To a large extent the lad was his own creation. (51)

Privately boasting of his own "musical utterance," Lord Henry interprets Dorian Gray's

artful actions as a result of his own charm and the young man's development as "his own

creation." In turn, these lines operate as a critical appraisal of the novel and an intimation

of how Wilde wants his readers to understand it.

When interpreted alongside "The Decay of Lying," the novel articulates more

explicitly than most magic-portrait stories the genre's heavy favoritism for painted as

opposed to photographic portraits. This preference supports Wilde's anti-realist

philosophy, for while photography was associated with realism, information-gathering,

and naturalistic detail, painting was associated with romanticism, literary

experimentation, and the authoritative imagination of characters who could double as art

critics. Wilde previews this preference through Vivian's praise of anachronism and attack

on "[p]ure modernity of form," which, he complains, "is always somewhat vulgarising"

(174). Photography ranks among the purely modern modes that, in Wilde's view, realist

writers fetishize, as they do all things representative of the present historical moment. As

for *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, not only does the narrative pivot on a painted portrait,

but photography gets only one brief, inconsequential mention, mostly designed for

comedic effect. When Lady Victoria Wotton enters her husband's library to find Dorian

sitting there, she references Harry's photographs in order to explain how she recognizes

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him: "'I know you quite well by your photographs. I think my husband has got seventeen of them'" (40). Wilde thus implies that the only function—at least, in literature—of photography is to facilitate recognition. However, even that function is questionable, for Lady Wotton adds: "'And I saw you with him the other night at the Opera'' (41).

Wilde uses the genre's fundamental trope—ekphrasis—to align his work with the anti-realist movement he would eagerly engage in the early 1890s: French Symbolism. Before reviewing the novel's symbolist ekphrases of Dorian's image, however, let us first look to the explanation of Symbolism Wilde folds into the narrative, as if to educate unknowing readers. When engrossed in his reverie about the "yellow book" that "poisoned" him, Dorian reflects thus:

> The style in which [the book] was written was that curious jeweled style, vivid and obscure at once, full of *argot* and of archaisms, of technical expressions and of elaborate paraphrases, that characterizes the work of some of the finest artists of the French school of *Symbolistes*. There were in it metaphors as monstrous as orchids and as subtle in colour. (107)

This passage functions in at least three different ways: as a boastful metacritique of the novel in which it appears, as a review of the novel on which it is based, J. K. Huysmans's aptly titled *A Rebours* (*Against Nature*), and as a sign of Dorian's development into a prototype of Lord Henry, his literary-critical mentor. What Wilde calls "metaphors as monstrous as orchids," which characterize Symbolist art, also characterize the metaphorical language Wilde uses in place of naturalistic details to portray art objects and aestheticized bodies. The first (pseudo-)ekphrasis of Dorian's portrait, for example, takes a Symbolist approach to description: "'this young Adonis,'" Lord Henry exclaims, "'looks as if he was made out of ivory and rose-leaves'" (6). Lord Henry's portrayal pivots on a simile that conveys almost nothing about Dorian's appearance except that he

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has white (or perhaps pink) skin. Other Symbolist similes test the boundaries of sense and imagery: Sibyl has "'eyes that were violet wells of passion'" (45) and her "'hair clustered around her face,'" Dorian lyricizes to Basil, "'like dark leaves round a pale rose'" (66).

Passages such as these are a far cry from literary realism, but they even mark a distance from ekphrastic moments in earlier magic-portrait stories, such as the first one in Stevenson's "Olalla" when the narrator's eyes alight upon the intoxicating portrait: "Her figure was very slim and strong, and of a just proportion; red tresses like a crown over her brow; her eyes, of a very golden brown, held mine with a look" (Stevenson 69). In contrast to Olalla's "slim and strong" body and her "red tresses," we view the unviewable Dorian, whose "wounds are like red roses" (51). Through nods to Symbolism such as these, Wilde experiments with meanings realizable only through synthesizing and recontextualizing highly symbolic generic and discursive codes. Let's see what these syntheses signify with respect to the character for whom there is no "real" description.

III. Queerly Tragic Sitter: Reinterpreting Dorian Gray

In his review of the novel, Julian Hawthorne writes this of Wilde's protagonist: "Dorian Gray himself is as nearly a new idea in fiction as one has now-a-days a right to expect" (Qutd. in Mason 53). J. Hawthorne was quite right to call Dorian an "idea" and to deem him a "new" one in nineteenth-century fiction, for it is through Dorian that Wilde makes the single most radical alteration to the magic-portrait genre: he renders the subject sacrificed for the sake of a masterful portrait a man, not a woman. Dorian's painting notoriously emerges out of Basil's passionate love for his male model, and much scholarship has focused on this motif. The prevailing concentration on the text's

homoeroticism makes sense, given the brutal homophobic backlash against the novel in the press, the use of passages during Wilde's trials to confirm the charge of sodomy, and the devastating end to Wilde's life. Yet, arguments about the novel's homoeroticism are haunted by these historical and biographical dramas, which form the starting point for literary analysis. In the most prominent examples, Regenia Gagnier argues that the novel must be understood through the lens of contemporary reviews, which illuminate its refusal to capitulate to the heteronormative image of the English gentleman; Joseph Bristow locates the novel at the starting point of a tradition of male homoerotic writing; and Ed Cohen frames his analysis with the question of homosexuality, asking, "What if someone wrote a novel about homosexuality and no body came? To what extent is *The Picture of Dorian Gray* this book?" (Cohen 75).[21]

But is the book, absent its horrific aftermath, really "*about* homosexuality"? Answering this question requires dealing not only with the history of magic-portrait fiction, but also with the contemporary notion of the sexual invert. In late Victorian England the word "inversion" was being used for the first time to define a specific kind of deviant sexuality; pseudoscientific discourses were categorizing sodomy as a disease of inversion (Dollimore 59). The currency of the word "inversion" is crucial for interpretations of the novel's reception, its legacy, Wilde's trial, and his tragic demise, but not, I don't think, for the text itself. Pathologizing constructions of homosexuality as a perverse inversion of heterosexuality were exactly what Wilde satirized and unsettled throughout his critical fictions and essays. Vivian's playful binary doctrines about Art

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[21] See Gagnier's *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987, 51-99), Bristow's *Effeminate England: Homoerotic Writing after 1885* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), and Cohen's article "Writing Gone Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation" republished in *Critical Essays on Wilde*, ed. Regenia Gagner (New York: Macmillan, 1991, 68-87).

versus Nature mock discourses of degeneration premised upon inversion and, rather than reinscribing yet another inversion model, Vivian's Protest depends on a third term—imitation—to articulate a complex philosophy. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* Wilde uses intertextuality via the magic-portrait form to complicate the binary social subject. Let's explore this latter argument more fully by returning to Ed Cohen's analysis.

Cohen argues that Dorian, Basil, and Lord Henry are "inhabitants of a subculture" forced to "use a public language that has no explicit forms to represent" their relationships; "hence, they must produce new discursive strategies to express concerns unvoiced within the dominant culture" (Cohen 76). Cohen is both right and wrong: yes, there was not yet a public discourse for homosexual desire and Wilde helped fashion that discourse; however, there *were* preexisting "discursive strategies" that enabled him to narrate counter-hegemonic relationships and desires: the magic-portrait story. In synthesizing magic-portrait plots, Wilde draws upon a deeply heteronormative formula in order to verbalize and complicate the circuits of homoerotic desire among his male characters. Wilde explores homoerotic desire in and through the very fabric of heterosexual cultural conventions. The result is a model of anti-realist sexual and gender multiplicity, not one of inversion or reinscription, and not one that builds toward an exclusively homoerotic aesthetic. So, rather than creating a new language for homoerotic desire sublimated through the language of the aesthetic *writ large*, which is what Cohen claims, Wilde creates homoerotic possibilities through his reworking of an already well established, highly conventional, and heteronormative genre.

As we've seen, the genre's development during the second half of the nineteenth century is characterized by a shift from the *Künstlerroman* of a masterful male artist to

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variously morbid, satirical, and feminist stories about the violence of portraiture, which collectively register the problematic role of the beautiful woman in the reproduction of art. In the character of Dorian Gray, we witness the rupture of a century-long cultural fascination with men who create art out of the body of woman. It is not, therefore, the fact that Wilde explores a male artist's homoerotic desire for his male sitter that makes the novel "new" because the homoerotic terrain of male-male bonds within the art world had been thoroughly explored in works by Pater, Symonds, Swinburne, and others. Rather, what is so striking and so controversial about the homoerotic male trio at the novel's center is the fact that they appear uncannily similar to the figures in popular, heteronormative magic-portrait stories published throughout the century. There are countless other Dorians in Victorian fiction at the same time as there are *no* other Dorians in Victorian fiction. As both a victim and a victimizer, Dorian becomes *both* the Dorat and the Veronica of Ouida's earlier story. Regenia Gagnier has argued that Wilde's critics attacked the novel because it presented dandies in aristocratic settings, rather than middle-class English gentlemen in bourgeois households. But, reading the novel within the context of magic-portrait fiction suggests that Victorian reviewers were not horrified to find a dandy in a novel by Oscar Wilde; rather, they were horrified to discover in Dorian Gray a dandy so familiar—one who suffered in some of the same ways as the female characters they loved. In this way, Dorian changed the gender of suffering and power.

Wilde makes another significant revision to the magic-portrait genre by giving the dominant artistic voice to the story's critic—Lord Henry—as opposed to its artist, Basil. In most magic-portrait fiction the artist functions as the mad, heroic, or otherwise

eccentric protagonist, but Basil proves so sensible as to be denigrated for being "'just a bit of a Philistine'" and relegated to the background (50). Basil's idealizing love for Dorian is quickly truncated by the success of his rival, Lord Henry. And in Lord Henry's dominant personality Wilde synthesizes two recognizable forms of authority: on the one hand, his character channels the heterosexual male artists in magic-portrait stories who objectify their female sitters, and on the other hand, he channels the art critic who speaks the discourses of taste and philosophy from a position seemingly outside the sphere of action. As an agent of both of these powerful categories, Lord Henry campaigns for a kind of aesthetic hedonism. He famously advises Dorian to save his soul through his senses. The brand of hedonism Wilde is mocking through Lord Henry's character is the kind found throughout magic-portrait stories in the ruthlessly aestheticizing painters whose desires are met at the cost of the women out of whose dead bodies they make art. At the same time, Lord Henry uses the language of Pater's classical hedonism to intoxicate Dorian, but Henry's version is a distorted one barren of any of Pater's religious asceticism. Wilde emphasizes two things at once: Lord Henry's perfect performance of the fatally misogynistic artist figure and his *im*perfect reduction of Pater's critical philosophy. In this way, Wilde generates a complex satire through intertextual synthesis, just as he does in Dorian's character.

Because Lord Henry wields so many modes of power, which, in turn, evoke different symbolic codes, his relationship with Dorian can be read multiple ways. Read one way, his domination of Dorian undermines culturally sanctioned forms of female subjection (i.e. this is the feminist reading, which is hard for some to believe). Read another way, Lord Henry's bonds with his pupil display a form of pederasty that thrives

at the start, only to be doomed by Lord Henry's fascination with a heterosexist hedonism that sabotages his relationships with men *and* women. However we interpret Lord Henry's powerful homosociality and the satire that results from it, we must account for his constant misogynistic quips, his many interactions with women, including his wife, his advice to Dorian about Sibyl, and his evocation of heterosexist magic-portrait types.

Under Lord Henry's spell, Dorian plays the parts of the tragic female sitter *and* the violent victimizer. In doing so, his character queers generic conventions through allusion and analogy, rather than deviation or inversion. When he is being objectified and adored for, above all else, his physical beauty, Dorian is repeatedly associated with the figure of the female muse. For example, in the opening scene, Basil tells Lord Henry: "'I can now recreate life in a way that was hidden from me before. 'A dream of form in days of thought:'—who is it who says that? I forget; but [that] is what Dorian Gray has been to me'" (12). With these lines Basil references Austin Dobson's poem, "To a Greek Girl," which presents an idealized image of a "nymph-like" maiden. Lord Henry also interprets the young muse through female heterosexual codes; he perceives Dorian as beautiful only to the extent that he fulfills the feminized ideal of "purity" or virginity: For Lord Henry, "All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity. One felt that [Dorian] had kept himself unspotted from the world. No wonder Basil Hallward worshipped him" (17). From his doubled position of feminized object and aristocratic male subject, Dorian criticizes Basil for objectifying him; he complains, "'I am no more to you than a green bronze figure. Hardly as much, I dare say'" (25). But by the end of the scene, Dorian chooses to do what most female characters in magic-portrait fiction have no choice but to do: to overidentify with the portrait and become literally

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interchangeable with it. When we interpret Dorian's Faustian bargain to keep the youth captured in his image alongside other tragic female sitters, we see that Dorian turns an oppressive fate into a deadly choice—this is the decadence of Wilde's story.

The analogies to women continue when Dorian later compares himself to his ancestors as he walks through his family portrait gallery. In this scene, evocative of Stevenson's "Olalla," Dorian muses at length about his mother while gazing at her portrait. "[H]is mother," he says, "with her Lady Hamilton face, and her moist wine-dashed lips—he knew what he had gotten from her. He had got from her his beauty, and his passion for the beauty of others" (122). With this assessment, Dorian describes his own beauty as his mother's beauty, which is, in turn, the beauty of "Lady Hamilton." Perhaps the most powerful analogy of all is that between Dorian and Sibyl Vane. Wilde reconfirms the link between Dorian and the figure of the tragic female sitter when Dorian reenacts his own fetishization by Lord Henry through his treatment of Sibyl. Dorian's early rhapsodies about Sibyl invite comparisons between his own position as an objectified beauty and that of the beautiful actress who serves as his muse, inspiring his fantasies about "the wonderful soul that is hidden away in that little ivory body" (48).

In addition to recalling the female sitters of magic-portrait fiction, Dorian functions as a St. Sebastian-esque martyr who symbolizes the tragically shattered possibilities of male-male friendship and male homosexual love. Wilde's educated readers would have been as familiar with the face of the famous mistress, Lady Emma Hamilton, as with the cultural significance of St. Sebastian, a figure that had functioned across Western art history as a homoerotic icon. Also, as Gagnier reminds us, "the name 'Dorian' bore its significance for some as the classical term by which polemicists for the

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amendment of homosexual laws designated their noble ancestors in ancient Greece" (Gagnier 61). Together, Wilde's allusions to female and male cultural types construct Dorian as a "complex multiform creature"—to use the words that Dorian uses to describe himself.

I have argued that the novel synthesizes magic-portrait fiction and "The Decay of Lying" to *embody a theory* of anti-realist sexual and gender multiplicity. The story's rich intertextuality, operating within a heteronormative form, engenders both homoerotic *and* heteroerotic possibilities, resisting the limitations of a binary model of sexuality. But, at the end of the day, we are still left with a novel in which no body came, as Ed Cohen puts it. In the places where we might find pornography we instead find a constant, erotic love affair with art. This happens most famously in Chapter 11, in which Dorian reads the poisonous yellow book, meant to signify Huysmans's decadent novel *Against Nature*. Inspired by the yellow book, Dorian indulges in aesthetic sensations. He consumes poetry, pictures, jewelry, embroidery, even histories of Greeks and Romans. Like his construction as a character made up of other characters, his pleasures are insistently mediated through art. In this way, Wilde makes yet another move to unsettle the category of desire by *expanding* it—in this case, beyond the categorical limits of a sexual act between human bodies.

These moves toward expansion through allusion constitute narrative art as much as they do critical theory, and it is the magic-portrait form that enables Wilde to fuse the two. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* represents a rare instance in the history of this hybrid genre because its critical theory consists in great part through its references to other magic-portrait stories. The abstraction of Dorian's desiring body through the bodies

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depicted in other magic portraits puts a new twist on Kant's paradox. We find the Kantian

paradox of form in the works by Victorian aesthetes that theorize art through *anti-*

theoretical means—through art itself. Wilde's novel pushes the paradox even further by

suggesting that art is *more theoretical than theory*. Specifically, art can become theory

(and a better version at that) if it is so deeply intertextual as to express nothing else but

itself. Wilde attempts to achieve this experiment in the life and death of Dorian Gray.

And the result is that we readers have to figure out who or what Dorian wants, and what

exactly Dorian was; the only interpretive code we are given is our own aesthetic

ideology, made up of the stories we've already read. Wilde makes this point himself in

one of his responses to angry reviewers when he says, "What Dorian Gray's sins are no

one knows. He who finds them has brought them" (Gagnier 61). The magic of *The*

Picture of Dorian Gray lies in the fact that it tells a story about how stories dictate the

very possibility of nature and desire.

AFTERWORD: The Death of a Genre, 1900-1929

It is difficult to overstate the degree to which Oscar Wilde changed the landscape of British culture.[22] The magic-portrait genre's century-long function as a forum for writers to explore what it means to be an artist, and to assert their own cultural authority in the process, was shattered by *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the homosexual meanings conferred upon it after Wilde's imprisonment and demise. Writers could no longer use—at least, in a recognizable way—a genre firmly associated with Wilde's name, a name so stigmatized that it could not be spoken in polite society until the 1950s.[23] The history of what happens to magic-portrait fiction after 1900 is one of a rather explosive death—the corpse being *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—followed by heavily coded reinventions, parodies, and decadent, feminist, or retro reiterations of the nineteenth-century genre. The genre's arrested and refracted presence in British culture of the early twentieth century suggests that its life had to be a secret one. Just as the "secret" role magic-portrait fiction played in constituting British aestheticism requires a literary critical resurrection, so too does the genre's cultural afterlife between 1900 and 1929 demand a kind of unveiling.

Arthur Symons produced *Spiritual Adventures* (1905) as a volume in the line of Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* and Lee's *Hauntings*, except that Symons makes clear his motivation to restrict avant-garde aesthetic coteries to a group of men, a career-long

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[22] See *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture* (Ed. Joseph Bristow, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008) and *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe* (Ed. Stefano Evangelista, New York: Continuum, 2010), two monumental collections about how Wilde shaped twentieth-century European culture. See also Kirsten MacLeod's analysis of the relationship between British Decadence and the reception of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in *Fictions of British Decadence* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

[23] Evangelista, *The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe*, 11.

motivation symbolized by the volume's out-of-place dedication to Thomas Hardy. In what is perhaps the central magic-portrait story in this collection, "The Death of Peter Waydelin" (1905), Symons conveys art criticism that references Symbolism, Naturalism, Pre-Raphaelitism, Decadence, "art for art's sake," and even Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Yet, Symons's serious tone, his Hardmanian artist-hero, and Waydelin's predictable death make the tale seem outdated, rather than experimental. Often high-art magic-portrait stories of this period read like eulogistic dedications, evoking the death of an era while using the very forms once situated at the vanguard of Victorian culture. The most significant story of this eulogistic group is Vernon Lee's "Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" (1896), which overflows with highly wrought Wildean language.[24] Yet, rather than seeming outdated or uninventive, Lee's *Yellow Book* magic-portrait fairy tale epitomizes the strain of writers energized by *fin-de-siècle* sexual battles, who sought to commemorate Wilde's life and to sympathize with the kind of suffering he represented, albeit in coded ways.[25]

When British and American writers were not seemingly mourning personal and cultural deaths, they were mocking the suddenly defiled genre. Magic-portrait parodies—some funny, some simply dated-seeming—include H. G. Wells's "The Temptation of Harringay" (1895) in which a man comically spars with his pained likeness. Other tales evoke the Gothic tradition through the magic-portrait form, embracing rather than

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[24] See Margaret Stetz's recent contextualization of this story within *fin-de-siècle* periodical culture in the wake of Wilde's death: "The Snake Lady and the Bruised Bodley Head: Vernon Lee and Oscar Wilde in the *Yellow Book*" in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 112-22.

[25] Jaime Hovey's *A Thousand Words: Portraiture, Style, and Queer Modernism* (2006) gives a sense of the ways modernist writers used the metaphor of the portrait to explore alternative identities. She analyzes the queer literary portraits of T. S. Eliot ("Prufrock"), Marcel Proust, Compton Mackenzie, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, and Ernest Hemingway.

parodying the archaisms of a painted portrait and a haunted mansion. American writer H. P. Lovecraft produces two such works in "The Picture in the House" (1920) and "Pickman's Model" (1927). Ghost-story writer Barry Pain published several magic-portrait stories during the 1890s and early 1900s, but his last attempt, "Linda" (1911), makes a more oblique use of the genre to tell the story of a kind of Freudian Medusa figure. M. R. James's "The Mezzotint" (1904) mixes old and new forms by bringing together a photographic portrait, a haunted house, a detective story, a dead child, and stylistic links to early cinema.

A small number of women writers represented a continued and innovative investment in the genre: along with Vernon Lee, the most powerful voices to use the genre in the early twentieth century were those of Edith Wharton and Virginia Woolf. Wharton richly exploits the form, publishing at least three magic-portrait stories: "The Portrait" (1899), "The Moving Finger" (1901), and "The Eyes" (1910). Woolf's key works composed in the vein of magic-portrait fiction include *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), and, in less obvious ways, her essay, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass: A Reflection" (1929) and her last novel, *Between the Acts* (1841). By contextualizing *Orlando* within the history of magic-portrait fiction, we can see how Woolf rewrites *The Picture of Dorian Gray* through her light-hearted, ever-changing protagonist. It seems fitting to end this study by taking a look at one of Woolf's coded, portrait-less allusions to Wilde's queerly tragic sitter.

The first scene in Woolf's novel evokes the last scene in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, when Dorian brutally slashes his portrait with a knife. Whereas Wilde depicts Dorian attacking the portrait that hangs on the attic wall in the moment of his death,

Woolf describes an androgynous young man slashing at the "head of a Moor" that hangs from the attic ceiling in the moment of his story's beginning. Woolf begins: "He—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it—was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters…it swung, gently, perpetually, in the breeze which never ceased blowing through the attic rooms of the gigantic house of the lord who had slain him" (Woolf 13). Described as a man whose effeminate clothes unsettle a viewer's sense of his sex, Orlando did not kill the unnamed Moor himself, but he nevertheless slices at the corpse as if attacking a ghost that haunts him. We might say that, metaphorically, the dark dead body haunts the house of culture, despite the "gentle" but "perpetual" breeze, and that body must be cathartically excised in order for life—Orlando's life—to begin. Orlando seems to represent Woolf's means of redressing Wilde's denigration by telling the tale of another Dorian, one whose appearance—indeed, whose sex and gender and body and desires—all change constantly before our eyes. In her own semi-autobiographical *Künstlerroman*, then, Woolf playfully refuses the violent objectifications and categorical reductions that can result from focusing on just one portrait.

APPENDIX: Chronology of Titles from Walpole to Woolf

Precursor Texts

1764-1828

The Castle of Otranto (1764) by Horace Walpole
The Magic Picture, a Play: Altered from Massinger (adapted 1783) by Rev. H. Bate
The Apprenticeship of Wilhelm Meister (1795-96) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
The Monk (1796) by Matthew Lewis
The Wandering Spirit, or Memoirs of the House of Morno (1801, anon.)
Belinda (1801) by Maria Edgeworth
Heinrich von Ofterdingen (1802) by Novalis
Le Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse (1804-5) by Jan Potocki
Faust (1808, 1828-9) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Elective Affinities (1809) by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Emma (1815) by Jane Austen
"Arthur's Court" (1815) by E. T. A. Hoffmann
"Councillor Krespel" (1816) by E. T. A. Hoffmann
"The Mesmerist" (1814) by E. T. A. Hoffmann
The Devil's Elixirs (1816) by E. T. A. Hoffmann
The Antiquary (1816) by Sir Walter Scott
"Fragments from the Lives of Three Friends" (1818) by E. T. A. Hoffmann
"Tobias Martin, Master Cooper and His Men" (1819) by E. T. A. Hoffmann
Melmoth the Wanderer (1820) by Charles Maturin
"Fragment from the Life of a Fantast" (1820) by E. T. A. Hoffmann
"The Adventure of the Mysterious Picture" in *Tales of a Traveller* (1824) by Washington
        Irving
"The Story of the Young Italian" in *Tales of a Traveller* (1824) by Washington Irving
"The Tapestried Chamber, or the Lady in the Sacque" (1828) by Sir Walter Scott

Magic-Portrait Fiction

1829-1842

"Colonna the Painter" by Joseph Hardman (1829) in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*
"Sarrasine" by Honoré de Balzac (1830)
"The Unknown Masterpiece" (1837) by Honoré de Balzac in *L'Artiste*
"The Prophetic Pictures" (1837) by Nathaniel Hawthorne
"Edward Randolph's Portrait" in *Legends of the Province House* (1837) by Hawthorne
*"Dr. Heidegger's Experiment" (1837) by Nathaniel Hawthorne
"The Portrait" (1833-4, revised 1841-2, trans. & abridged1847) by Nikolai Gogol
"The Devil's Portrait" by Gérard de Nerval (1839)
"Strange Event in the Life of Schalken the Painter" (1839) by J. Sheridan Le Fanu
"The Oval Portrait" (1842) by Edgar Allan Poe

"The Story of a Picture" (Feb. 1842) in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* (anon.)
Sidonia von Borcke (1847, trans. 1849) by Wilhelm Meinhold, trans. *Sidonia the Sorceress*
      (1893) by Lady Jane Wilde

1850s

"Hand and Soul" (1850) by D. G. Rossetti in *The Germ*
"The Portrait" (Dec. 7, 1850) by Percy B. St. John in *Chambers's Journal*
"Kidnapped for a Portrait" (Jan. 1851) by Robert Postans in *Bentley's Miscellany*
**The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) by Nathaniel Hawthorne
"The Living Portrait" (Feb. 7, 1852, anon.) in *Reynolds's Miscellany*
*Bleak House (1852-3) by Charles Dickens
"An Account of Some Strange Disturbances in Aungier Street" (1853) by J. Sheridan Le
      Fanu in *Dublin University Magazine*
"The Story of an Old Picture" (Jan. 1857) by Stewart Lockyer in *Sharpe's London*
"The Painter's Revenge" (Jan.-Feb. 1857) by Shirley Brooks in *National Magazine*
"The Veiled Portrait" (Nov. 21, 1857) by "An American Physician" in *Reynolds's
      Miscellany*
"Portraits in This Style" (April 23, 1859) in *Chambers's Journal* (anon., comic)
"The House and the Brain" (Aug. 1859) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton in *Blackwood's*

1860s

"How One Fire Lit Another; or, The Mischief Done by My Photograph" (Jan. 1860) by
      Ouida in *Bentley's Miscellany*
"My First Portrait" (Nov. 1861) in *Sharpe's London* (anon., "*By the Author of the
      'Photographer's Story'*")
"Madame La Marquise: A Story Pendant to a Portrait by Mignard" (Jan. 1862) in *Bentley's*
"Favette and Thargelie; or, My Pastel-Portrait by La Tour" (Jan. 1862) by Ouida in *Bentley's*
"The Cruel Painter" in *Adela Cathcart* (1864) by George MacDonald
"The Veiled Portrait" (Feb. 1864) in *Once a Week* (anonymous)
"Gardelle, the Portrait-Painter" (July 1864) in *Sixpenny Magazine*
"The Story of a Portrait" (Jan. 14, 1865) by M. R. in *The London Reader*
"The Painter's Lesson" (June 1865) by S. C. J. in *The London Reader*
"The Unclaimed Portrait" (Feb. 24, 1866) by M. N. N. in *The London Reader*
"The Story of a Masterpiece" (Jan.-Feb. 1868) by Henry James in the *Galaxy* Vol. V
"The Portrait's Warning" (Feb. 1868) by Savile Clark in *Belgravia*
"The Portrait" (April 18, 1868) by William Wentworth in *Reynolds's Miscellany*
"The Painter's Last Portrait" (July 22, 1868) in *Bow Bells*
"The Twin Portraits" (Sept. 2, 1868) by Harriet Hazelton in *Bow Bells*
"Luca Morato, the Majolica Painter of Urbino" (April 1869) in *Temple Bar*

1870s

"The Veiled Portrait" (187-?) by James M'Govan in *English Short Stories*
"An Artist's Model" (April 1871) by Astley Baldwin in *Belgravia*

"Maria's Portrait" (May 3, 1871) in *Bow Bells* (no author listed)
"The Story of a Picture" in *Rainbow Stories* (1872) by Mary Ellen Atteridge
*Studies in the History of the Renaissance (1873) by Walter Pater (2nd ed. 1877)
"In Love with a Picture" (Sept. 24, 1873) in *Bow Bells* (anon.)
The Best of Husbands (1874) by James Payn
A Double Story (1876) by George MacDonald
*Daniel Deronda (1876) by George Eliot
"The Mysterious Portrait" (April 5, 1877) by S. G. in *Bow Bells*
Lady Alice; or, Two Sides of a Picture (1878) by Emma Marshall
"Imaginary Portrait. The Child in the House" (Aug. 1878) by Pater
"Desmond's Model" (1879) by Mary E. Penn in *The Argosy*
"The Magic of a Face" (Sept. 1879) by A. de G. S. in *The Argosy*

1880s

"The Lost Likeness" (May 26, 1880) by A. W. T. in *Every Week*
"The Portrait of a Painter by Himself" (June 1880) by Lady Pollock in *Temple Bar*
*Dantzick; or, the Story of a picture (1880) by A. H. Bencke (in verse)
Dolerino the Painter (1882) by W. Mowat
Frescoes (Jan.-Mar. 1883) by Ouida in *Belgravia: A London Magazine*
"A Painter's Vengeance" (1883) by Mary E. Penn in *The Argosy*
The Picture's Secret (1883) by Walter Herries Pollock
"Old Lady Mary: A Story of the Seen and Unseen" (Jan. 1884) by M. Oliphant in
        Blackwood's
The Hidden Picture (1884) by C. F. Brodie
"The Picture" (Mar-April 1884) by Charles Reade in *Harper's New Monthly*
"Ollala" (1885) by Robert Louis Stevenson
The Devil's Portrait (trans. 1885) by Anton Guilio Barrili
"The Portrait" (Jan. 1885) by Margaret Oliphant in *Blackwood's* 137:831 (1- 28)
"Prince Ferendia's Portrait" (Mar. 7, 1885) in *All the Year Round* (anon.)
"A Prince of Court Painters" (Oct. 1885) in *Macmillan's Magazine* by Walter Pater
"Sebastian Van Storck" (Mar. 1886) in *Macmillan's* by Walter Pater
"Denys L'Auxerrois" (Oct. 1886) in *Macmillan's* by Walter Pater
"St. Agnes of Intercession" (1886) by D. G. Rossetti
"Oke of Okehurst" (1886) by Vernon Lee
"A Painter's Love" (Feb. 1887) by Beatrice Harraden in *Belgravia*
"Amour Dure" (1887) by Vernon Lee
"Duke Carl of Rosenmold" (May 1887) in *Macmillan's* by Walter Pater
*"The Young Philistine" (1887) by Alice Corkran
Margery Merton's Girlhood (1887) by Alice Corkran
Gaston de Latour (1888) in *Macmillan's* by Walter Pater
"A Story of a Picture" (March 1888) by Baron Gardiner in *Belgravia*
"A Spoilt Negative" (March 1888) by E. W. Hornung in *Belgravia*
"The Portrait" (Aug. 29, 1888) by M. in *Every Week*
The Romance of a Shop (1888) by Amy Levy
Oliver's Old Pictures (1888) by Emma Marshall
"The Portrait and the Ghost" (May 1888) by S. Weir Mitchell in *Lippincott's*

"The Adder" (July 1888) by Ouida in *Art and Letters*
"The Liar" (1889) by Henry James
"The Old Portrait" (Jan. 1889) by Louisa Crow in *Quiver*, 61 (919-22)
"The Portrait of Mr. W H" (July 1889) by Wilde in *Blackwood's*
The Tragic Muse (1889-90) by Henry James in *The Atlantic Monthly*
"A Problem in Portraiture" (Nov. 1889) by Arlo Bates in *Scribner's*
"My Portrait" (Dec. 1889) by Henriette Corkran in *The Gentleman's Magazine*
"Ashes of the Future: The Suicide of Sylvester Gray" (1889) by Edward Heron-Allen
The Veiled Picture (1889) by Elizabeth Lysaght
Mike Fletcher (1889) by George Moore
Dorinda by Countess of Munster (1889; reviewed by Wilde)
His Other Self by Edward J. Goodman (1889)

1890s

"Dionea" (1890) by Vernon Lee
"The Portrait; or, Spanish Ingratitude" (Sept. 5, 1890) by E. M. in *Every Week*
The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890-1) by Oscar Wilde in *Lippincott's*
"A Living Portrait" (Sept. 18, 1891) by O. P. R. in *Bow Bells*
"A Phantom Portrait" (Feb. 1891) by M. Kemper in *Cornhill*
"A Portrait of a Lady" (April 24, 1891) by M. K. D. in *Bow Bells*
The Haunted Looking-Glass (1891?) by Gratiana Darrell
"The Portrait of Concitta P—" (Feb. 1891) in *Longman's*
"The Strange Case of Muriel Grey" (Nov. 1891) by R. G. Dering in *Temple Bar*
"Emerald Uthwart" (1892) by Walter Pater in *New Review*
"The Academy of Intentions" (May 1892) by C. Lewis Hind
"The Portrait Painter" (June 1892) in *The Argosy* (anon.)
"The Portrait Painters" (July 1892) by Barry Pain in *Art Journal*
"A Painter I knew" (Sept. 1892) by W. W. Fenn in *Art Journal*
"The Portrait of an Unknown Gentleman" (1892) by Sidney Pickering in *The English Ill. Mag.*
"The Glass of Supreme Moments" (1892) by Barry Pain
"Apollo in Picardy" (1893) by Walter Pater in *Harper's Magazine*
"An Artist's Romance" (Jan. 1893) in *The Argosy*
"The Lost Ideal" (Jan. 1893) in *The Argosy*
"An Artist's Vision" (Feb. 1893) by J. Newton-Robinson in *The Argosy*
"The Lesson of the Portrait" (Mar. 24, 1893) in *Every Week* (anon.)
"Paolo's Model" (April 1893) by Pauline W. Roose in *The Argosy*
"The Veiled Portrait" (May 1893) by James Grant in *Ludgate Monthly*
"The Portrait of Phillis Cromartie" (Aug. 1893) by J. Fitzgerald Molloy in *Temple Bar*
A Daughter of Today (1894) by Sara Jeannette Duncan (NB: Canadian author, 1861-1922)
"Portrait-Painting Extraordinary" (April 20, 1894) by H. H. in *Every Week*
"Jotchie: A Sketch" (1895) by Frances Forbes-Robertson in *English Ill. Magazine*
"The Picture on the Wall" (Dec. 1895) by Katharine Tynan in *The English Illustrated Mag.*
"The Temptation of Harringay" in *The Short Stories of H. G. Wells* (1895, 1927)
"Prince Alberic and the Snake Lady" (July 1896) by Vernon Lee in the *Yellow Book*
"The Death Mask" (July 1896) by Ella D'Arcy in the *Yellow Book* (See "Two Stories")

"Portrait of a Lady" in *Sketches in Lavender* (1897) by Jerome K. Jerome
"A Painter of Children" (Sept. 1897) by Harold Armitage in *Temple Bar*
Ziska: The Problem of a Wicked Soul (1897) by Marie Corelli
A Studio Mystery (1897) by Frank Aubrey
"The Story of a Portrait" (Sept. 1898) by Katharine S. MacQuoid in the *English
     Illustrated Magazine*
"Hugh Merrow" (conceived 1898, written 9/11/1900, published 198-?) by Henry James
"The Portrait" (1899) by Edith Wharton
"Portraits and Phantoms" (May 1899) by Sydney Olivier in *The Contemporary Review*

Early 1900s

"The Moving Finger" (1901) by Edith Wharton
"The Mezzotint" (1904) by M. R. James
"Esther Kahn" in *Spiritual Adventures* (1905) by Arthur Symons
"Christian Trevalga" in *Spiritual Adventures* (1905) by Arthur Symons
"The Death of Peter Waydelin" in *Spiritual Adventures* (1905) by Arthur Symons
"The Portrait of a Lady" (Feb. 1910) by Mollie E. Jamieson in *Quiver* 45:4, p. 349-52
"The Experiences of a Portrait-Painter" (April 1910) by Florence Hayllar in the *English
     Illustrated Magazine*
"The Eyes" (1910) by Edith Wharton
"Linda" (1911?) by Barry Pain
"The Picture in the House" (1920) by H. P. Lovecraft
"A Presentation Portrait" (May 1922) by William Caine in *Quiver*
"A Portrait" (July 29, 1922) by L. P. Hartley in the *Saturday Review*
To the Lighthouse (1927) by Virginia Woolf
"Pickman's Model" (1927) by H. P. Lovecraft
Orlando (1928) by Virginia Woolf

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