**ABSTRACT**

In Victorian England, the biological processes behind the act of seeing were coming under new scrutiny. These changes in the public's perception of sight, it has been argued, resulted in what Jonathan Crary calls "a massive reorganization of knowledge and social" (3). The change in the understanding of sight had a corresponding, tangible effect on the fabric of Victorian society. Issues such as the interaction between the objectivity and subjectivity of sight, or how the figure of the observer occupies positions of power, became the textual (and visual) shorthand for social interactions. Representations of art in novels therefore occupy a unique place in Victorian consciousness: because art inherently deals with issues of visuality, self-perception, and awareness, art (and portraits especially) can function as a physical embodiment of vision. The very existence of the portrait in the text brings additional concerns, such as the way that the production of the self necessarily exists in tension with the external influence of society and the subject's environment.

This project is composed of two case studies: the first focuses on *Jane Eyre*, by Charlotte Bronte, and the second on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and to a lesser extent *Salome*, both by Oscar Wilde. These works, from earlier and later parts of the Victorian period respectively, each use the devices of vision and art to show societal and personal relationships, but textually represent these devices in such different ways that it becomes necessary to examine the differences in the conclusions that each author draws from these similar subjects. Insofar as any work of literature is a product of its time, I argue that the ideological differences implicit (or explicit, as the case may be) in each text are revealed through the way that each addresses the problems inherent in vision.

The production of a portrait often results in a kind of "fracturing of the self," whereby the subject projects certain ideological and personal characteristics onto the work of art in a way that is either productive of the self, or conversely results in the disintegration of the self. Wilde's view of the sterility of art, stemming from the *l'art pour l'art* philosophy propounded by the Aesthetic Movement of the late Victorian period, contrasts starkly with Bronte's earlier, relatively hopeful view of the transcendent aspects of art, as the self-portrait that Jane creates allows her to create and claim herself. By examining instances of portraiture in *Jane Eyre* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, I demonstrate the epistemological, societal, and ideological shift that result from technological advances in the field of optics.

# From “Wholesome Discipline” to “Something Fatal”: Portraiture in the Victorian Novel

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction … **5**

Chapter I … **15**

Chapter II … **65**

Conclusion … **124**

Appendix … **126**

Bibliography … **130**

## INTRODUCTION

> Herod: "Thy beauty has grievously troubled me, and I have looked at thee overmuch. Nay, but I will look at thee no more. One should not look at anything. Neither at things, nor at people should one look. Only in mirrors is it well to look, for mirrors do but show us masks." (324, Wilde)

Wilde, like many other Victorian authors, explored social relationships through visuality; here, he uses the "mirror" and the "mask" to mediate between the observer and the object of the gaze. Beauty, meanwhile, becomes a thing to be feared -- provoking the gaze, which in turn brings with it a corresponding danger. Aesthetics and the act of looking, in short, hold immense power. This passage, however, highlights some questions for the reader: what is Herod afraid of? What is the implicit danger in "look[ing]...overmuch"? How does vision function in relation to aesthetics, and why are the associations with beauty (and therefore with vision) overwhelmingly negative? In order to begin to find answers to these questions, and others like them, one must analyze the way in which vision and art are portrayed in Victorian literature. More specifically, I will argue, an examination of portraits in early and late Victorian texts allows for a better understanding of the ways in which the self is constituted, defined, and ultimately challenged in fundamental ways in literature of the period. Visual representations of the self, as represented in Victorian literature, have the power to either create or to destabilize the self, and to allow the reader to consider or perhaps to even engage in forms of self-making.

The way that the portrait functions in the Victorian novel can be explained by their particular historical and technological moment. The Victorians witnessed the development of the camera and the photograph, and the improvement of technologies of photographic reproduction. These technological developments complicated the cultural significance of portraiture more generally. As prices lowered and the market expanded, the middle and working classes became able to participate in the economy of the portrait. Demand for photographic portraits skyrocketed, and large numbers of photographic studios began to open. In his book *The Burden of Representation*, John Tagg terms this development "a democracy of the image." The portrait (in both painted and photographic forms) is by its very nature representative of identity -- or more specifically, a *claim* to an identity. As Tagg asserts, "The portrait is...a sign whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity" (37). The portrait is thus the visual representation of the individual's claim to a certain position in the social formation. Beyond this, the portrait is a means by which one can redefine or recreate oneself, and fit that self into the larger picture of society. This use of portraiture to create an idealized visual representation of the preferred self was by no means new to the Victorians, but the profusion of photographic images that newly enabled the middle class to participate in this self-creation was a result of the historical and technological events of the later period of the industrial revolution.

The origins of the portrait genre contrast starkly with the "democratization" of the image. The modern, secular painted portrait, which in England reached its peak popularity around the late 18th century, was a form of art commissioned by the wealthy as a luxury object (Linkman, 9). The portrait thus has distinctive class associations that stem from the inception of the genre, and that are carried with it across history and medium. As the genre began to incorporate photography as well as the painted portrait, some of the visual traditions of the painted portrait were inevitably translated into the medium of photography. As Tagg states, "The bourgeois figures in mid-nineteenth-century polyphoto images aped the mannerisms of eighteenth century painted portraits and coveted their prestige" (36). The meaning behind the painted representation of self was forever altered by the invention of the camera; perceptions of vision and self-production were thus intimately related to the introduction of these technological innovations, but also dependent on their interaction with traditional forms of visuality. For the Victorian novel, therefore, the painted portrait was implicitly related to new concerns surrounding the image. The painted portrait thus becomes a response to the "democratization of the image," allowing authors to address issues such as class, art, and the production of the self in complex ways.

As the painted portrait was an object associated with status, its meaning was in some ways dependent upon its exclusivity; as a "sign" of wealth, class, and

status, the portrait only maintained its meaning as far as it eluded others as a mode of expression. As the portrait became available to other classes besides the aristocracy, therefore, the significations of the portrait underwent a dramatic shift. In his book *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary notes that the rapid technological development in the field of optics in the nineteenth century was linked to a restructuring of epistemological, societal, and (I will argue) ideological perspectives (3). Furthermore, Crary argues, "Problems of vision then, as now, were fundamentally questions about the body and the operation of social power" (3). In terms of visual representation, portraiture in particular lends itself to a demonstration of this link between the body and society: the portrait is an artistic form dependent on sight, representative of the individual body, and indicative of a claim to a specific social identity. It therefore makes sense that the spread of the image, and the development of what has been called "a cult of images," played a powerful role in the "problems of vision" that Crary describes: the way that images were haphazardly disseminated resulted in their decontextualization, and the decoupling of the image and its referent. This in turn played a part in the precipitation of the "crisis of meaning" that came most notably to fruition in the early twentieth century, visibly expressed in the development of modernist movement in visual art.

These "problems of vision" were not only based around broad structures such as social status, but were also linked to the individual; thus the crisis of

meaning associated with vision also came to be incorporated into the visual representation of the self. In Victorian literature, vision is often used to indicate a link between the physical and the mental, the exterior and the interior, objectivity and subjectivity. As Kate Flint states in her book *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*:

> The gap between interior and exterior, between imaged reflection and the contemplative mode of reflection that takes place in the mind of the perceiver… [has] far wider ramifications. It can be made to stand for the ways in which aesthetic understanding was becoming problematized; the ways in which a dialogue was developing between the practice of observation and the role of subjectivity, and…the manner in which physiology functioned as a mediating force between these two modes of approach. (Flint, 237)

The ways that the perception of vision and aesthetics changed over the course of the Victorian period is therefore mirrored in the representation of art in literature. Flint's description of the "problematization" of aesthetics also signals the use of vision as a metaphor for mediation in varying kinds of social relationships. Sight can itself imply a certain distance, or it could imply a physical closeness or access to the object of the gaze. Depending on the way in which vision functions within a text, therefore, the same act can be interpreted in very different ways, with different implications. The way in which sight can possess multiple significations emphasizes the reader's role in interpreting those significations.

For portraiture, too, the viewer's interpretation is of primary importance to its construction of meaning. Catherine Soussloff formulates her understanding of portraiture around the structures of "likeness" and "recognition," a duality that

stresses the different ways that the self can be constituted. Soussloff defines likeness as "the visualized aspects of a singular human being that correspond to an empirical reality"; recognition, meanwhile, is "less precise than identification…and becomes of great importance…precisely because it turns resemblance into a matter of viewing, rather than maintaining that a standard of likeness resides in the portrait itself" (Soussloff, 6). By specifying that "many portraits said to be of particular individuals may not necessarily be congruent with a perceived exterior reality" (6), she emphasizes the necessary tension between a surface reading of the human face and the separate subjectivity that the face implies. The genre of portraiture therefore claims to create an inherent link between objective reality and individual interiority. To add to this complexity, there is also the act of viewing the portrait, which Soussloff takes into account with her inclusion of "recognition" as a part of portraiture. Recognition thus depends in part on the viewer's interpretation of the image, which places emphasis on the correctness of that interpretation. Similarly, the consequent system of meaning on which the portrait becomes based is in some ways ascribed to it by the viewer. As photographic images became increasingly widespread, visual consumption and interpretation could no longer be regulated. The act of recognition, which in some way gives a portrait its meaning, could therefore itself be flawed -- opening up the potential for misrecognition. This reveals another kind of anxiety around vision and art: that the self might be misinterpreted

through its own representation. While recognition had remained stable in the case of painted portraits, the democratization of the image undermined this stability.

Artistic realism also presents its own set of problems in the context of photography. Visual and textual realism -- and the "truth claim" associated with both -- share in these questions of interpretation. For this reason, scholars are also quick to draw parallels between the realist novel and the photograph.[1]The way that portraiture in particular appears and operates within the Victorian novel, however, has been less closely examined. This is perhaps because portraiture in the fine arts has a long history, and does not appear immediately related to the specific concerns of the period. I would argue, however, that portraiture maintains a powerful (though altered) role in the representation of the self in Victorian literature, despite apparent competition from the new medium of photography. In fact, the destabilization of meaning that accompanied the photograph added nuance to the later Victorian depiction of the self through the painted image. The painted portrait, therefore, is an important site within the Victorian novel, as it allows authors to represent the interaction between visual and social concerns in new and complex ways.

The painted portrait also confronted other latent visual concerns of the

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[1] Daniel Novak has written extensively on this topic in his book *Realism, Photography, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Nancy Armstrong has also presented a compelling case for the link between the realist novel and the photograph in her book *Fiction in the Age of Photography : The Legacy of British Realism*. This link is in part based on the fact that both the realist novel and the photograph are products of the Victorian period, and both claim an accurate, or at least comprehensive, view of the world that draws in the reader or viewer.

period that photographic portraits did not. The painted portrait's realism, for example, challenged the relationship between visual objectivity and subjectivity. Joanna Woodall states:

> Portraiture occupied an anomalous and therefore debased position within an academy hierarchy based on the degree of invention demonstrated in a work of art…Portraits could either be theorized as exact, literal re-creations of someone's external appearance, or as truthful accounts of the artist's special insight into the sitter's inner or ideal self. Both could be assimilated to the concept of realism. (5)

The technological advances of the time made many Victorians question the importance of painting, especially in its realist aspect: mechanical reproduction of the natural world seemed to render manual recreation obsolete. A painter's re-creation of the world, due to the subjective nature of sight, is inherently flawed in some ways. It was this subjectivity, combined with the knowledge that true objectivity of sight is nearly impossible, that became the new focus of attention for Victorian authors. The problem of the artist as a mediator, a re-creator of the world, a sort of visual filter, was one that novels of this period began to explore more deeply. The painted (or manually created) portrait, therefore, became a way for authors to address the intersection between subjectivity, vision, and the production of the self. In this way, representations of fine art in literature allow authors, such as Oscar Wilde and Charlotte Bronte, to address a variety of other concerns beyond purely visual elements.

Portraiture and the novel are in some ways uniquely suited for one another -- for example, in the way both mediums navigate the division between the ideal

and the reality. Audrey Linkman emphasizes the balance that the painter must achieve between likeness and idealized beauty: "...the portrait painter's role came to be defined as acquiring a knowledge of the ideal standard of beauty, recognizing where each individual sitter failed to measure up to this standard, and taking the appropriate action…" (35). Woodall, meanwhile, asserts that the "ideological conviction [of portraiture] depended upon an elision of image and 'reality' which denied any fabrication on the part of the artist" (5). In a similar way, I would argue, the Victorian realist novel masks its ideology by claiming that the image *is* the reality -- that there is a direct correlation between internal and external. The illusion of the realist novel is thus mirrored in portraiture -- and in order to achieve this illusion, the novel must also balance the ideal and the real in equal measure.

In order to further explore the function of portraiture in Victorian literature, I have taken three works as case studies: *Jane Eyre*, *Salome*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The first chapter reads *Jane Eyre* as an early Victorian text that seeks to inculcate the reader with middle class values, and examines the way in which the novel uses art and portraiture to achieve these aims. The second chapter reads *Salome* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, written at roughly the same time by Oscar Wilde, as an exploration of late Victorian disillusionment with middle class values. Over the course of my project, I trace a pattern of visual metaphor – primarily through explicit references to art and in particular

portraiture -- to indicate this societal and ideological shift that occurred between the early and late Victorian periods. I explore the implications that the change in these representations of vision and art have on the way that the self is perceived and formulated in literature. Like Kate Flint, I am interested in the function of art, and "the ends which looking at art was made to serve" (20). In *Jane Eyre*, for example, the act of creating and looking at art reveals her own morality and enforces her self-control -- both qualities of an ideal middle class woman. The act of looking for Wilde, by contrast, is potentially deadly: as Dorian states, "there is something fatal about a portrait."

Despite a similar focus on vision and art, Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Salome* are radically different from Bronte's earlier novel. For this reason, a comparison between the two authors provides an instructive way to look at the change in public perceptions of art, vision, and the self over the course of the Victorian period. For Jane, sight and the production of art are associated with morality and the cultural supremacy of the middle class. For Dorian and Salome, vision is a powerful and potentially deadly force, and the production of art only emphasizes the increasing instability of self that this dangerous act implies. Over the course of my thesis, I will more closely examine what has actually occurred as Jane's "course of wholesome discipline" becomes Dorian's "fatal" portrait.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

*Jane Eyre* famously ends with a marriage that recreates its eponymous heroine from a figure of autonomous femininity into the "useful," bourgeois wife. The novel then frames this transformation itself as a middle class ideal. The power of the novel thus lies in this framing capability: though it portrays the deviant marriage of a governess and her employer, it nevertheless represents this marriage as the culmination of middle class values. The novel, I will argue, thus makes an authoritative claim about middle class ideals, and the ways in which those ideals can be achieved. While the marriage at the end is unorthodox in terms of traditional class relations, *Jane Eyre* upholds the fundamental tenets of middle class ideology: that a unified, singular self exists; that even a governess can become a middle class wife and mother; and that all have the potential to engage in self-creation socially and economically. The novel initially represents the self as disunified and full of internal contradictions, which serves to emphasize the eventual move toward the unity and stability of the self, consistent with bourgeois ideals. Furthermore, I will show that Bronte uses representations of art, and more specifically portraiture, to facilitate this movement from disunity to unity, and to attempt to stabilize and recreate the self after the model of the middle class ideals I have just described.

Because the novel itself is ultimately so concerned with stability, it makes

sense that the it depends on the dominant structure by which Victorians understood their society: specifically, the gender binary. As Mary Poovey argues in her book *Uneven Developments*, “the characteristic feature of the mid-Victorian symbolic economy [is] the articulation of difference upon sex and the form of a binary opposition rather than a hierarchical ordered range of similarities” (6). Opposition helps create a solid, if artificial, understanding of society and its ideals. Poovey argues this specifically in the case of the institutions surrounding gender and class, both of which are fundamental to any reading of Jane Eyre, but I will argue that there is an additional binary created that runs parallel and intersects with these institutions, and is therefore equally significant: an aesthetic, visual binary. Class and gender rely heavily on visuality and aesthetics, as it is often through visual means that class and gender are signified. The relationship between interior and exterior, between surface and substance, is therefore of utmost importance. The fact that this boundary is sometimes permeable reveals an anxiety surrounding visuality and aesthetics that pervades the novel.

For example, when Jane and Rochester become engaged and Rochester attempts to recreate Jane after the fashion of his own class, this act is portrayed as deeply concerning for both Jane and the reader:

> “I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty too,” he went on, while I became uneasy at the strain he had adopted; because I felt he was either deluding himself, or trying to delude me. “I will attire my Jane in satin and lace, and she shall have roses in her hair; and I will cover the head I love

> best in a priceless veil."
> "And then you won't know me, sir; and I shall not be your Jane Eyre any longer, but an ape in a harlequin's jacket…" (221)

Rochester's efforts to alter Jane's appearance imply that he is attempting to normalize her and understand her as familiar -- by making her into "a peer's daughter" (220) or "a very angel" (221). He first raises her to his own social status and then elevates her into the realm of the feminine ideal -- he wishes to recreate her as an ideal associated with the upper class, rather than the middle class ideal of femininity that Jane embodies. His desire to clothe her bespeaks a desire to transform her into something that he both understands and controls; if he can recreate her physical expression of self, he may be able to similarly affect her internal self. Jane rejects these attempts for the same reason that she rejects his jewels and silk clothes: because they confuse the relationship between the internal and the external. Both Jane and Rochester (and indeed, the novel as a whole) operate under the assumption that the clothing that she wears in some way signifies her internal qualities, and should therefore be representative of those qualities. Jane's concern stems from the fact that an altered style of dress would indicate something completely different about her class, gender, and occupation than the identity that she has claimed for herself throughout the novel up to this point. Rochester's attempt to dress Jane would therefore create a disjuncture between her interior and exterior selves.

Her defence against Rochester's proprietary claim is that if he interferes

with this system of visual signification, he will be unable to “know” her, as she will in effect become a different creature altogether -- “an ape in a harlequin’s jacket,” rather than a woman. In his attempt to “know” her, he has exerted control over her clothing. By controlling this visible expression of self, he attempts to redefine her in order to be able to recognize her as an ideal (aristocratic) woman. This introduces a social aspect to the form of self-expression; as the visible expression of self can change, so can the class represented by this expression. Society’s perception of her must therefore match his own (“I will make the world acknowledge you a beauty too…”). She rejects him, claiming that if he follows through with this impulse to control the way the world consumes and identifies her visually, she will simply become something else entirely. He will fail to recreate her as an ideal, and (or perhaps because) her personhood will be lost. Proper interpersonal connection, Jane claims in contrast, must be effected through “knowledge” rather than Rochester’s forced recreation. This knowledge, in turn, depends on the direct correlation between the external, presented self and the internal self. The novel’s references to belief in physiognomy, and the persistent “reading” of faces and bodies that occurs as a metaphor for visually-based understanding echo this method of understanding the world.

This passage raises many concerns, which I shall address over the course of this chapter. The question of control and who possesses the right to create the self, for example, emerges through this conflict between Jane and Rochester. This

conflict, I would argue, is fundamentally a question of whether the self is externally or internally constituted. The notion of "creating the self" is explored as primarily visual, social, and economic self-creation. Rochester attempts to create Jane visually, raising her to his own class. Jane, meanwhile, strives to create herself in each of these ways, in opposition to Rochester's class in each respect. This idea of creation and self-creation introduces the idea of Jane as artist; Bronte explores the relationship between appearance and identity by casting Jane in this role. I will therefore address instances of artistic production in the text and how they constitute a simultaneous production of self in economic, social, and performative senses. The system of meaning that depends on a direct correlation between representation and referent object is also put to the test, and the text's dependence on this system reveals additional anxiety surrounding interpretation and meaning.

The importance of the eye and the symbolic, visual/aesthetic vocabulary that accompanies it throughout the novel cannot be overstated. The eye (and its accompanying gaze) functions as a means of distinguishing classes and establishing lines of social power. Perhaps most importantly, the eye lies on the boundary between internal and external, and therefore is sometimes most suited to translate the internal into the external. At a point of physical and psychological struggle between Jane and Rochester, for example, Jane describes the battle between them in terms of their eyes and gazes: "He seemed to devour me with his

flaming glance: physically, I felt, at the moment, powerless…mentally, I still possessed my soul…The soul, fortunately, has an interpreter often an unconscious, but still a truthful interpreter – in the eye" (271). This ability to project/create the self through visual means thus assists Jane in her quest to define and create herself. By externalizing her "soul" (or self), Jane gains power over Rochester and is ultimately able to remain autonomous, despite his attempt to break her to his will, which she viscerally describes in almost cannibalistic terms ("He seemed to devour me…").

"I will be myself," Jane says, and Rochester's efforts to make her anything else always result in failure. Jane's claim to an independent, visually-constituted self is fundamentally linked to her status as a woman, as a governess, and as an aspiring member of the middle-class. It therefore makes sense that the corresponding tensions surrounding these identities are often expressed in visual terms. As I will argue in this chapter, the intersection of class, gender, and self is often visually constituted. This visuality gives an alternate dimension to the power dynamics inherent in these structures. As Jane uses vision and aesthetics to address herself to these different ideologies, she reveals latent contradictions within each.

Jane is, to some extent, an embodiment of both the ideologies associated with her identity, and of the contradictions inherent in each of them. Rochester identifies these contradictions in her body itself. When analyzing her face, he

says: “Your fortune is yet doubtful: when I examined your face, one trait contradicted another.” (171); later, he says: “…never was anything at once so frail and so indomitable” (271). In this later example, he explicitly draws attention to Jane’s eyes: “Consider that eye: consider the resolute, wild, free thing looking out of it, defying me…Whatever I do with its cage, I cannot get at it…” (271). By doing this he separates Jane’s soul from her physical body -- though he might have control of the latter, he can never access the former. The eye plays the essential role of connecting the physical and the immaterial, the external and the internal, and vision itself is capable of unifying apparently separate, even contradictory aspects of character. The way in which Bronte addresses ideological contradictions is therefore through the unifying power of sight. Jane’s contradictions, however, serve an equally important function: they indicate that the anxiety surrounding her character is based to some extent on these contradictions, and the ways in which the novel solves these problems are therefore indicative of the fragility of middle class ideology. This fragility perhaps stems from the fact that the middle class was at this moment still somewhat new and still establishing its cultural dominance. It is therefore necessary to contextualize Bronte’s novel in historical and social terms, and examine the way in which the novel represents class relations in order to better understand the novel’s broader ideological claims.

## CLASS AND AESTHETICS

Before looking more closely at the role of aesthetics in *Jane Eyre*, therefore we must first examine the way that the novel deals with class and its associated issues. As an essential structure in the construction of the novel's social reality, class functions as both an important part of Jane's identity and as a signifier of the social anxieties that surround her character. The figure of the governess more generally, Mary Poovey argues, occupied an important space in the Victorian culture: "...because of the place they occupied in the middle-class ideology, women, and governesses in particular, were invoked as the bulwarks against [the] erosion" of middle class values (127). Similarly, they were meant to "stabilize the contradiction inherent in the middle-class ideal by embodying and superintending morality," while simultaneously making obtrusive the boundary between working class and middle class women (Poovey, 128). As a woman and a governess, Jane should solidify the "bulwarks" of middle class ideology by clearly indicating various constructed boundaries between classes. However, Poovey points out, the reality of the governess's situation was far more complex, and her liminal position often resulted in the disintegration of the very boundaries she was supposed to uphold (147). The contradictions inherent in the governess were these: women were represented as simultaneously sexual and sexless; the domestic ideal was accomplished not by the mother of the house, but by the

governess, who herself represented the intrusion of the economic public sphere into the private, domestic sphere; women of different classes should theoretically have been easily distinguishable, but in fact were similar. Because of her work as a governess, therefore, Jane represents a debate surrounding women's sexuality, women's labor, and middle class domesticity. She reveals the disparity between reality and imaginary ideal -- a disparity that Poovey believes is emphasized in the novel rather than elided (145).

Jane's class is difficult to define precisely. As an orphan, she is detached from the traditional institution of family and therefore does not inherit her class position or wealth from that quarter. As a result, she occupies an indeterminate position in the Reed household: related to the upper class by blood, she remains external to the family unit. This position gives Jane the space to dispute claims that are made about her social status: "'Master! How is he my master! Am I a servant?' 'No; you are less than a servant, for you do nothing for your keep'" (9). Because of her blood relation to the Reeds, she is superficially a part of the family, which allows her to resist calling John Reed "master." Bessy's response, however, brings the question of economic value and labor into the domestic sphere; because Jane does not fit cleanly into the domestic space as one of the (upper class) family (the importance of the blood relation is here important), she does not have the licence to be inactive that the rest of the Reed children have. She is therefore lower than a servant because she is not "useful."

Poovey argues that therefore Bronte "make[s] Jane's dependence a function of family and personality…to individualize her problems so as to detach them from her position as governess" (137). Poovey claims that Bronte represents Jane's liminal state as a function of her character, rather than as linked to her occupation: "The social incongruity that others might attribute to her position as governess precedes [her] taking up this work" (Poovey, 136). Jane continues in this liminal state as she grows into an adult. When she does begin to work, she earns money for performing naturalized female labor (education, child-rearing); neither does she inherit money from her family (until later in the novel). She exists between classes, proximately near the upper class by birth and culture (she cannot imagine a life of poverty), but not quite fully accepted as a member of the immediate family. She therefore remains external to the various ideological apparatuses that are central to that class (the structures of family, economics, labor); her liminal existence is a source of anxiety for the gentry, and as a result she is ostracized further.

Therefore, class is an apparently straightforward signifier of identity that becomes convoluted and difficult to determine in Jane's case. Raymond Williams' definition of class reveals that the term itself carries many of the difficulties inherent in Jane's situation – its ambiguity means that it can refer to both "rank" in its old-fashioned sense (social status), which can be related to but is not necessarily dependent on economic status. The obscurity that surrounds the

middle class is thus carried into its very definition: "In this model an old hierarchical division is still obvious; the middle class is a self-conscious interposition between persons of rank and the common people. This was always, by definition, indeterminate: this is one of the reasons why the grouping word class rather than the specific word rank eventually came through" (Williams, 63). Far from making Jane easier to define, the ambiguity surrounding the label of "middle class" results in additional complexity. The very indeterminacy of the term is transferred into Jane's identity. Her social identity thus does not provide a means of understanding or framing her, and the ideological claim behind this construction of middle class selfhood is that this indefinite quality allows her to frame and constitute herself socially.

Williams emphasizes the importance of class consciousness as he traces the historical emergence of the term "class." He states that the modern sense of the word developed between 1770 and 1840, and argues that the term "relates to the increasing consciousness that social position is made rather than merely inherited" (61). Jane's self-consciousness is therefore essential to her connection and claim to middle class identity. Bronte frames this consciousness in terms that further promote middle class ideology: the novel portrays class (and self) consciousness as a way for Jane to separate herself from the aristocracy in ideological and social terms, and ultimately re-create herself socially, economically, and individually. The novel itself therefore participates in the

formation and dissemination of the middle class value of self-creation that Jane epitomizes.

Jane frequently expresses her class consciousness by separating her own class values from the gentry. She expresses this social difference in terms of love and emotion. When Jane compares herself to Blanche after meeting her for the first time, for example, she says: "...if a woman, in my position, could presume to be jealous of a woman in Miss Ingram's" (158). Class thus acts as a social limitation on love, and the act of falling in love takes on social and political implications. This is consistent with Blanche's anecdote about her previous governess, who had taken the "liberty of falling in love" with another tutor (151). The story is obviously aimed at Jane, but the consequences Blanche lists -- beginning with a "bad example to the innocence of childhood" and ending with "mutiny and general blow-up" on the part of the tutors and governesses -- begin to sound less like specific problem with Jane and more like a political statement. The term "mutiny" indicates a distinctly political form of rebellion and chaos. The order constructed by the upper class is thus politically threatened by middle class conceptions of love and romantic attachments. Blanche emphasizes the dangerous, almost anarchic quality of middle class love by framing it as a "bad example to the innocence of childhood." This phrase refers to the governess' role as surrogate mother, a position that gave them a certain measure of power over the development of the children of their social superiors. This was another source

of anxiety for the gentry, already concerned by the figure of the governess as a sexually available woman in the home. Middle class love thus destabilized the established social order of the upper classes.

More generally, Bronte portrays love as a distinctly middle class "motive" for marriage. Jane, for example, criticizes Rochester's choice of Blanche for "motives so commonplace" as wealth and social connections, but allows: "All their class held these principles; I supposed, then, they had reasons for holding them such as I could not fathom. It seemed to me that, were I a gentleman like him, I would take to my bosom only such a wife as I could love…" (160). Jane's intense consciousness of the divide between her own class and the upper class is thus expressed in emotional terms. These emotions, however, as they become linked to marriage, take on political connotations which persist and grow more prevalent throughout the novel as different classes begin to mix.

Armstrong argues that this connection between love and politics has to do with the way in which domestic fiction creates a "new domain of discourse as it invest[s] common forms of social behaviour with the emotional values of women":

> Consequently, these stories of courtship and marriage offered their readers a way of indulging, with a kind of impunity, in fantasies of political power that were the more acceptable because they were played out within a domestic framework where legitimate monogamy — and thus the subordination of female to male — would ultimately be affirmed. In this way, domestic fiction could represent an alternative form of political power without appearing to contest the distribution of power that it represented as historically given. (Armstrong, 29)

Marriage thus not only links emotion and politics, but constitutes a kind of radical break with existing forms of political power. Domestic fiction participates in the formation of, legitimizes, and perpetuates the political power of the middle class, and additionally grants it a form of cultural power. *Jane Eyre* presents varying kinds of love, clearly delineated by class, and then aligns itself politically with Jane and the middle class. The novel persistently criticizes the aristocracy and instead upholds middle class values such as economic independence and marriage for the sake of love.

In this way, Bronte translates opposing class values into emotional terms; the novel gives clear preference to emotion over social status. For example, when Jane accords Blanche an emotional inferiority that is the inverse of her social status -- "[she] was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling" (158) -- it is implied that her emotional incompetence negates her socioeconomic power. Armstrong argues that this is part of a larger development in the English understanding of identity, in which "the terms of emotion and behavior [are substituted] for those of one's specific sociopolitical identity" (15). She claims that as political identifiers are replaced by emotional terms, the former are "suppressed," ultimately resulting in the ostensibly apolitical genre of domestic fiction. The apolitical nature of the genre, as Armstrong successfully demonstrates, is itself a fiction: the novel is intensely political in its construction

of identity. Emotion therefore emerges as a way to portray middle class values as universal: class boundaries may imply immovably different values, but anyone can feel love.

As Bronte uses certain behaviors and emotions to indicate class differences, vision becomes one of these methods of expressing the link between class and emotional differences. For example, Blanche communicates her disdain for Jane in visual terms: "...if ever her dark and imperious eye fell on me by chance, would withdraw it instantly as from an object too mean to merit observation" (158). Class difference is thus represented in the novel not only in emotional terms, but also, in terms of vision and withheld "observation." The significance of the gaze, however, seems to change across classes: what Blanche means as a social slight becomes a manifestation of the apparent blindness of the aristocracy. This blindness is emphasized at multiple points in the text, and seems to be characteristic of the upper class: Blanche remains "unconscious" that her efforts at "conquest" have failed; her mother forgets Jane is even in the room; the aristocratic women view Mason's "blank, brown eye" that has "no meaning in its wandering" as a positive attribute (159, 151, 162). Blanche's withheld gaze can therefore be understood as a kind of self-inflicted blindness, but also as a behavioral indicator of her class. Rochester's "ceaseless surveillance" of Blanche's "manifestations of character" obviously stands in contrast to this wilful visual ignorance, foreshadowing his shift in class. Because the significance of the

gaze itself changes across class, the relationships implied by it become increasingly complex. Vision becomes a means of physically demonstrating the political subtext that Armstrong identifies as a fundamental part of the genre of domestic fiction. Visuality only becomes more important as Jane uses portraiture to investigate the way that identity is constructed in terms of class relations and vision, emphasizing the aesthetic qualities as a means of constituting the self.

## EMBODIED CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

I have already discussed the importance of class consciousness (and self consciousness) as fundamental to the formation of the middle class. Bronte represents this consciousness visually, demonstrating Jane's self-consciousness in visual terms throughout the novel. For example, Jane is frequently drawn to concealed places, such as the curtained window, where she can see without being seen. This tendency to avoid being seen reveals an awareness of the gaze of others, and by extension a consciousness of the opinions of society around her. The aristocracy, by contrast, are socially oblivious, going so far as to forget that Jane is in the room when they are speaking about her. Acting as representatives of the upper class, the gentry embody a certain kind of egotistical attitude that the novel both reviles and shows to be impractical. The roles of observer and the observed therefore take on political connotations.

In *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary stresses the importance of the figure of "the observer" in nineteenth century England, arguing that during the early part of the century there was "a massive reorganization of knowledge and social practices that modified in myriad ways the productive, cognitive, and desiring capacities of the human subject" (Crary, 3). This rather general claim is meant to expand existing criticism that remains preoccupied with nineteenth century visual culture solely in its art historical sense. Crary argues that the origin of the late Victorian, modernist "break" that other critics have written on so

extensively can be traced to a growing visual abstraction that took place between 1810 and 1840. Instead of searching for "an objective ground of visual truth," he notes that this "truth" is being overtaken by "a new valuation of visual experience" that is linked to subjective visuality (Crary, 14).

When placed in the context of the larger changes in visual culture that Crary traces, Jane's role as observer takes on a new importance. The importance of the subjective and conscious view of events is obvious, as the novel is written in autobiographical form. More specifically, however, the social power she has is bound to her visual experience of others. Peter Bellis makes this point in his article "In the Window-Seat: Vision and Power in *Jane Eyre*," claiming that the tension between Jane and Rochester "is embodied in a conflict between two modes of vision," a masculine mode that objectifies the woman, and the feminine mode that conceals itself from the male gaze (Bellis, 639). Because Jane consistently claims this masculine, penetrative gaze for herself, however, this visual tension cannot be described solely as an embodiment of sexual tension. Though sexuality plays an essential role in the interplay of gazes between Jane and Rochester, the fact that Jane's vision ultimately subsumes Rochester's at the end of the novel -- "...I was then his vision...Literally, I was...the apple of his eye. He saw nature -- he saw books through me…" (384) -- seems to indicate something more important about the relationship between physical sight and social power. Jane "literally" controls Rochester's visual interaction with reality,

and her subjectivity is therefore his subjectivity. By becoming the filter for his visual experience of the world, Jane becomes the focus of Rochester's perception in the same way that she is the reader's window into her own world. In Crary's words, because Jane is the text's primary observer, her "truth," while maintaining a subjective relationship to reality, becomes the only "truth" that the text pursues. She is thus empowered to define certain terms within the text -- her first person narration has a profound effect on the reader's experience of her world -- beyond that, her individual visual interactions take this narrative mode even further. Sight is therefore inevitably linked to certain kinds of social, interpersonal power; because class relations are so tightly linked to Jane's experience of society, this kind of visual power is also clearly differentiated by class.

In William Cohen's book *Embodied: Victorian Literature and the Senses*, he views sight as one of "a series of bodily interactions, which bring the surface and the interior into proximate relation" (35). Thus it becomes possible to interpret the exterior semiotically as a representation of the internal state of the character. This is tied to the novel's dependence on the consistency of meaning between external and internal states -- demonstrated by Jane's ability to "read" others, and the importance of physiognomy within the novel. The consistency of meaning seems to indicate a kind of faith that the signs actually correspond to reality. *Jane Eyre* relies heavily on this consistent, one-to-one relationship between sign and referent -- any disruption of this relationship is both morally

suspect and potentially destructive of the self. For example, when Rochester attempts to dress Jane as a "peer's daughter" during the incident I have described, Jane views this form of re-creation as the reduction of her selfhood and humanity, transforming her from woman to "ape in a harlequin's jacket." She must resist the slippage between sign and reality, and maintain their relationship in order to maintain her selfhood.

Historically, however, signs were becoming destabilized and increasingly detached from their realities as a result of the changing social conditions of the Industrial Revolution. As I have briefly discussed in my introduction, the Victorian's historical moment was linked to the loosening of the correlation between sign (or image) and its referent object (reality). Jonathan Crary frames the relationship between visuality and class in terms of "signs," referring to Baudrillard:

> …modernity is bound up in the capacity of newly empowered social classes and groups to overcome the "exclusiveness of signs" and to initiate "a proliferation of signs on demand." Imitations, copies, counterfeits, and the techniques to produce them…were all challenges to the aristocratic monopoly and control of signs. The problem of mimesis here is not one of aesthetics but of social power, a power founded on the capacity to produce equivalences. (12)

Aesthetics thus gain new political connotations, as the rise of the newly mobile middle class is accompanied by a shift in the significations of corresponding signs. As society became less stratified, the signs themselves were becoming equally democratized, losing their exclusivity. This change in the way that signs

constructed meaning was therefore fundamentally linked to the shifting politics of the time. The ways in which signs function in relation to reality in Jane Eyre is therefore not as simple as it originally seems. Though the novel depends on a straightforward correlation between sign and reality, between projected self and internal self, the historical context indicates that this relationship was becoming destabilized at this time, by everything from photography to emerging mass advertising. This destabilization seems to indicate a corresponding anxiety around the potential disintegration of this system, and the corruption of the lines of meaning that it reveals.

This semiotic anxiety also has its counterpart in class relations. Armstrong views the relationship between class and signs that Crary describes as representative of the way classes interact: "...culture appears as a struggle among various political factions to possess its most valued signs and symbols…the internal composition of a given text is nothing more or less than the history of its struggle with contrary forms of representation for the authority to control semiosis" (Armstrong, 23). The internal tension of *Jane Eyre* can be understood as both a tension between different aesthetic values and different class values; visuality itself becomes a political statement. The dominant form of aesthetics in *Jane Eyre* is therefore representative of its class affiliation -- which, as I have indicated, is thoroughly middle class. By setting different artistic styles in competition with one another, Bronte creates an aesthetic tension that is

representative of underlying class tensions.

## SELF-DEFINITION THROUGH OPPOSITION: CREATING AN AESTHETIC BINARY IN PORTRAITURE

Williams addresses the comparative nature of the terminology surrounding class: "the productive or useful classes," which stand opposite "the privileged or the idle" (Williams, 64). He points out that both of these structures, though not precisely comparable, are framed around comparative models. The middle (productive) classes define themselves in specific ways, often in contrast to the upper (privileged) class. Jane represents this structure of class opposition visually; one striking example is her creation of two portraits, one a self-portrait, and one a portrait of Blanche Ingram. She produces these works of art after Mrs. Fairfax informs her of Blanche's existence and the widespread assumption that she and Rochester will be married one day. As Jane identifies herself visually through her two portraits, she uses the same comparative language associated with class, portraying an idealized portrait of Blanche Ingram beside the realist self-portrait. Her self-expression functions by balancing against a statement of what the self is not. To put this into the language of art criticism, Blanche is the negative space of Jane's self-expression.

The two portraits create an aesthetic binary that is closely tied to class. They oppose each other at a basic, material level: Jane uses chalk for herself, and her "freshest, finest, clearest tints," and the "most delicate camel-hair pencils" for Blanche (137). This dichotomy of physical media is paralleled by the aesthetic

style behind each portrait: the aesthetic idealism of Blanche's portrait and the realism of Jane's oppose one another. Jane grounds her drawing solely on a second-hand description from Mrs. Fairfax, and as a result she tells herself to "delineate carefully the loveliest face *you can imagine*" (137, emphasis mine). As Jane has just criticized herself for "rabidly devour[ing] the ideal," the aesthetic idealism and opulence that she lavishes on Blanche's portrait reads like a critique of excess, both in terms of imagination and aesthetics.

In addition to associating herself with realism, Jane also links herself to Reason. In her metaphor of "arraignment," Memory and Reason give evidence against her for her "crime" of misinterpreting Rochester's "equivocal tokens" as signs of affection. She subsequently punishes herself with a "course of wholesome discipline"; her "sentence" is to create two contrasting portraits so that she might better understand her position in the world from an objective, unemotional perspective. Reason tells "a plain, unvarnished tale" – and as this tale is immediately followed by Jane's self-portrait, captioned "poor, and plain," the two seem to parallel one another. The novel's representation of visual aesthetics is thus linked to its literary aesthetic. While Reason is "plain" and "unvarnished" in terms of truth and accuracy in storytelling, Jane represents the physical manifestation of these qualities. It also connects aesthetic modesty and simplicity (such as the "Quaker" style dresses that Jane often wears) to moral truth. In this way aesthetics becomes a form of discipline.

Jane's production of art therefore implies more abstract ideas of morality, truth, and reason. She uses portraiture to reify her understanding of herself and her place in society, translating the stability of physical reality into a stability of feeling: "the task…had given force and fixedness to the new impressions I wished to stamp indelibly on my heart" (137). Art is therefore useful in its ability to make otherwise fleeting "impressions" have a permanent restructuring effect on her sense of self. As a material representation of what is otherwise ethereal and impermanent, it allows her to reify and control her emotions that would otherwise dominate her. She can thus constitute herself visually, in accordance with middle class ideology.

The ways in which the novel portrays Jane's production of art allow it to simultaneously comment on the superiority of middle class morality and emotion. Blanche, who "manufacture[s] airs" to attract attention, can only produce artificial shows of emotion, which Jane refers to as "meretricious arts and calculated manoeuvres" (159). Furthermore, Blanche's attention to surface over substance -- "she was very showy, but she was not genuine" -- makes her the opposite of the new ideals of femininity that Armstrong delineates: "...a woman whose value resided chiefly in her femaleness rather than in traditional signs of status, a woman who possessed psychological depth rather than a physically attractive surface, one who, in other words, excelled in the qualities that differentiated her from the male" (20). In *Jane Eyre*, this is further simplified: psychological depth

and physical beauty are mutually exclusive. Blanche and Jane thus represent antithetical kinds of class-boun femininity, which are represented visually in Jane's production of the portraits.

Armstrong expands on the way in which middle class ideology differentiated the middle class woman from the aristocratic woman: "the aristocratic woman represented surface instead of depth, embodied material instead of moral value, and displayed idle sensuality instead of constant vigilance and tireless concern for the well-being of others. Such a woman was not truly female" (Armstrong, 20). Jane uses the realism of her own portrait to distance herself from this kind of superficial, material, sensual woman, which she portrays in Blanche's image. The truth claim of the realist portrait means that Jane intends it to function as a mirror: a direct reflection of the self, rather than drawing attention to the portrait's surface as a barrier between reality and art. This elision of the surface reduces the emphasis on the material exterior of the painting, because it is assumed that the image is an accurate representation of the self. The portrait therefore has a kind of photographic truth claim of its own. This truth claim emphasizes the implicit link between morality and the realist aesthetic. By framing the physical construction of the two works of art in positive moral terms -- a "course of wholesome discipline" -- Jane moves the focus from the base materiality of the images to the emotional "benefit" that she "derive[s]" from the creation of art (137).

Because of this clear, class-based division between aesthetic forms, one could view the portraits as a means of reproducing class ideology. Thus while at a more basic level the portraits represent tension between classes via aesthetics, they are also "sites" of that struggle in their own right. As far as art functions as a representation of certain ideologies, aesthetics and class are inextricably intertwined. Althusser describes ideology in precisely these terms as he traces the emergence of an ideology into the physical world: "…an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice…This existence is material" (166). He defines an ideology as "an imaginary relation to real relations," and the imaginary nature of this relation is related to that ideology's "material existence." This material existence refers to the way in which the ideology is represented and expressed through a person's "corresponding attitudes" towards these abstracted principles (Althusser, 167). The "proof" of the ideology, then, is the physical action or object that results from the adherence to that ideology. Jane's portraits are "proof" of a specific ideology, in as far as they are physical objects that represent "imaginary relations to real relations." The way that the two portraits frame the conflict between middle and upper class ideologies causes Jane's subjectivity to once again become central to the novel's representation of ideological tension.

I would argue that Jane's creation of her self-portrait merges action, intention, and physical object in ways that Althusser's essay does not anticipate. Althusser's theory of interpellation holds that as an individual is "recognized" by

a system of ideology, that individual is "transform[ed]" into a subject of the ideology in question. As an example of this occurrence, he describes a person who is "hailed" on the street by a policeman and turns in response to that hailing; the action of turning in response to the summons causes the person to become subject to the ideology implied by the initial call (Althusser, 174). Both the subject and the ideology are thus simultaneously constituted. Similarly, the portraits in *Jane Eyre* hail and constitute Jane's identity. Unlike Althusser's subject, however, Jane plays an active role in the "hailing"; she creates the images herself, and is therefore "hailing" herself. Jane is therefore both the subject and the "principle of [her] own subjection," as Foucault would phrase it (203).

By taking control of both roles, Jane occupies multiple viewpoints simultaneously: the perspective of society, and her own subjectivity. These perspectives are all represented in the production of the images. The multiple perspectives parallel the production of multiple selves during this scene: as she "reviews the information [she] had got," she reveals multiple layers of self-consciousness, illustrating this for the reader by addressing herself directly: "'*You*,' I said, 'a favorite with Mr. Rochester?...Go! your folly sickens me'" (136). By dividing herself in this manner, Jane is able to simultaneously represent herself as an external, objective viewer, as well as an internal, subjective character. Jane can, and does, speak with all of these different voices at one point or another, addressing herself in various ways, and complicating the constitution

of a singular subject that Althusser describes. As these different selves interact through the text itself and through the creation of an alternate, visually-defined self (via portraiture), the relationship between subject, image, and ideology becomes increasingly complex. As the self becomes increasingly fractured, however, the question becomes whether there is a "true" self at all.

In her article "The Profession of the Author: Abstraction, Advertising, and Jane Eyre," Sharon Marcus identifies this fragmentation of the self in terms of "alienation" and "abstraction." While Marcus focuses on the instances of Jane's self-advertisement as governess and extrapolates her theory primarily from these scenes, her observations concerning abstraction are relevant to my argument: "...abstraction involves the externalization or objectification of the self into a partial image, sign, or object, which occurs in the novel as the splitting and alienation of Jane's self into portraits, truncated names, and instrumentalized body parts" (Marcus, 207). Marcus argues that Jane's subjectivity "emerge[s] most strongly during moments of abstraction and alienation," indicating that her self-actualization via advertising is also an important part of her growth both in economic and personal terms (Marcus, 207). Marcus views the division of the self, that is apparent at multiple points throughout the text, as a way to remove and "alienate" the self:

> Jane's will is…carried out through a splitting of the self, first into an absent self and the fairy, then into two rhetorical interlocutors — a questioning "I" who lacks knowledge of advertising and a savvy respondent who addresses this "I" as "you"…The momentary absence of

> Jane's self and her subsequent splitting into the first and second person constitute profitable forms of self-alienation because they condense her self into a text, "a clear, practical form"… (Marcus, 210)

The multiple perspectives or points of consciousness allow Jane to render the self textual -- in this case for the purpose of marketing herself. The broader implication, however, is that by translating the self into a text, Jane is allowing an external "buyer" access to her internal state -- access that the novel usually frames as "a threat to interior integrity," to use Cohen's language (Cohen, 44).

The portraits' captions also function in this way, giving a textual dimension to Jane's otherwise visual self. Through the captions, Jane exerts additional authorial control over the visual realm: she literally labels herself, "Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain" (137). The caption functions as an explicit naming device -- a textual extension of the portrait that makes its meaning clear to an external viewer. Because text is explicitly legible, in some ways less easily misinterpreted than its visual counterpart, the captions clarify and exemplify the two dichotomies that the novel presents at this point -- the first between the images; the second between the ideologies represented by the images to which Jane seeks to subject herself. The captions thus allow Jane to exert control over the interpretation of her image. As a result of this method of curbing alternative interpretations (presumably from external sources), the captions seem to imply additional viewers besides Jane herself -- despite the fact that the image is only for Jane's eyes. This is a first hint at the fracturing of the self that occurs

during this sequence in the text. In the same way that Jane occupies multiple perspectives, here she is both the viewer and the object of her own gaze.

The self splits more explicitly when Jane addresses herself with an objective voice: this is the voice of "judgment" that she uses after she is "arraigned at [her] own bar" (136). With this reference to the juridical system and the power of the state, it would seem that the voice with which Jane "sentences" herself to the "course of wholesome discipline" is the voice of society. The fact that this voice has become internalized and absorbed to some extent into Jane's own self indicates that Jane claims the legitimacy associated with that system, attaching it to her own system of moral values. Though she frames the production of art as a punishment, its creation is partially responsible for enabling her to identify (or "hail") herself in multiple ways at the same time. She is thus able to embody both the external, societal perspective, associated with upper class values, and the internal, individual perspective associated with a middle class morality. Jane essentially imbues the latter with the legitimacy of the former.

It seems at first that Jane's perception of herself coincides with the external view of her, because she "hails" herself in the terms she gives in the caption -- defining herself by occupation, economic and social status, and physical appearance. These appear to be externally instigated definitions, deriving from an upper class perception of her. The straightforward correlation between external and internal perceptions is problematized by Jane's conscious

presentation of the two -- consciousness that implies choice. Butler points out that interpellation frequently results in the lack of choice: one does not choose one's own name, for example (Butler, 122). The subject, she argues, is to some extent created as a result of external circumstances: interpellation "does not merely repress or control the subject, but forms a crucial part of the juridical and social *formation* of the subject. The call is formative...because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject" (Butler, 121). The act of creation behind Jane's self-portrait, however, means that she recognizes the forces of "juridical and social formation" which are acting on her, and still chooses to "hail" herself in ways that correspond with those forces. Though the initial interpellation arises from external sources, she chooses to internalize and perpetuate that interpellation. This desire to control interpellation by occupying the role of interpellator is a part of Jane's desire to create and define herself. As Butler indicates, however, the subject is inevitably formed through external influences. Jane's attempt to adhere to the middle class ideal of self-creation is therefore in some part an illusion.

The relationship between external, social perception and her own internal perception is exemplified through the relationship between her self-portrait's caption and the image itself. The caption implies an upper class judgement of her poverty, social status, and physicality. This voice vies with the image itself, which is created with attention to Jane's own individuality: she expresses her visage

"faithfully," and while she frames this individuality in negative, self-deprecating terms -- "without softening one defect: omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity…" (137) -- these defects differentiate her from "the loveliest face [she] can imagine," but also draw attention to the reality behind her own image. The tension between caption and image seems to correspond with different significations, resulting in an additional fragmentation of Jane's self. This is another way in which Jane attempts to evade external constitution: eluding a singular definition, she is able to represent herself with multiple, contradictory perspectives.

These contradictions ultimately conceal the self; the novel claims that this concealment will allow Jane to be self-constituted in accordance with middle class ideals. When one compares the two captions, for example, the absence of Jane's name is instantly noticeable as a result of the parallel structures of the two labels: "Blanche, an accomplished woman of rank" and "Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain" (137). While Blanche is named ("hailed") and instantly subjected to her class ideology (easily "recognized," in this respect), Jane is identified only by occupation. In this way, she resists individual definition and differentiates herself from the ideology associated with Blanche. Her middle class principle of self-creation has its roots in figurative and literal invisibility.

Because Jane can see and recognize others without being "recognized" herself, this grants her a measure of social power beyond other characters in the

text. Althusser argues that it is the mutual nature of the recognition that allows the structure of ideology to take effect: "The duplicate mirror-structure of ideology ensures…the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subject's recognition of himself" (Althusser, 181). Jane recognizes the way in which she is perceived by society; she uses this recognition to construct her sense of self. This is the function of the self-portrait: it indicates Jane's recognition and acknowledgement of the view that society has of her, but also allows her to present that view as related to an alternate system of meaning/value. This results in a kind of "misrecognition" -- a misinterpretation of self resulting from a disconnect between meaning and referent object.

This misrecognition is obvious throughout the course of her romance with Rochester, where it functions as a type of self-defense: it allows her to retain power over herself and, to some extent, to exert power over him as well. For example, the instance when Mr. Rochester looks through Jane's portfolio (an exhibition in a way that Jane's later portraits were not), can be understood as his first attempt to define and understand her. He frames his opinion of her art almost in terms of a challenge: "Well, fetch me your portfolio, if you can vouch for its contents being original; but don't pass your word unless you are certain: I can recognize patchwork" (106). He implies that he can also "recognize" her, through the medium of her art. Jane allows her art to speak for itself: "Then I will say nothing, and you shall judge for yourself, sir" (106). "The judge" is apparently a

figure of power, recurring as such in the text. This figure functions in visual terms that equates sight and power: in order to judge, one must make the subject visible and legible. Rochester is the external voice of judgment -- one who makes an extremely obvious attempt to define her via her "accomplishments," in the same way that Blanche is later defined. The fact that this figure is later internalized has its own implications, but the link between the figure of the judge and certain relationships between vision and power cannot be denied.

Whether this instance results in Jane giving Rochester power over her, however, is left unclear; despite his access to her artwork he fails to successfully interpret her mental state from it: "…yet the drawings are, for a schoolgirl, peculiar. As to the thoughts, they are elfish" (108). He defines her as a "schoolgirl," yet the drawings that are supposed to exhibit her schoolgirl qualities reveal different qualities than those that he is expecting – "elfish" qualities, that defy human understanding. While she allows him the position of "judge," therefore, she remains illegible to him, and safe from the imposition of his judgment.

Peter Bellis takes a different view of this scene, suggesting that as Jane "opens her portfolio to [Rochester's] gaze…in doing so she deflects and tames the gaze, substituting her pictures for herself as its object. The work of art is here both a means of self-expression and a veil that conceals the self, even in an act of ostensible revelation" (642). I would argue, however, that the production of art is

inherently linked to the production of self -- the two are mutually constituted. Because of this link between self and art, Rochester believes that he can interpret Jane through that medium. However, her art does not become a surrogate for her self; it merely creates another filter that requires other forms of interpretation. Rochester's failure to properly interpret her is her ultimate protection from his gaze.

Jane offers herself as subject, but is subsequently "misrecognized." Butler emphasizes Althusser's allowance for "misrecognition" in her discussion of the relationship between subject and interpellator: "It is this constitutive failure of the performative, this slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect, which provides the linguistic occasion and index for a consequential disobedience" (122). The danger implicit in the exhibition of her art is that he *will* recognize her, but the very fact that he cannot means that he cannot have power over her. In fact, she eventually obtains a measure of power over him, despite her subordinate role in social and economic terms. The novel's representation of Jane's power reveals the middle class desire to become the equals of the upper class. In this regard, the novel is a middle class power fantasy. In order to fulfill this desire, the novel establishes a false promise of the possibility of self-creation.

One of the novel's goals, therefore, is to systematically strip Blanche of her social power. Her loss of social power is linked to her legibility in visual terms; Blanche's role as a foil to Jane is also apparent in this respect, as she is

completely transparent to both Rochester and Jane. She lacks the barrier between self and society (the external gaze and the internal self) that allows Jane to be self-constitutive in certain ways. This aspect of her character is incorporated into her character at a fundamental level in the text; even before Jane has any substantive knowledge of her, she conceives of Blanche as "always-already subject" (as Althusser phrases it), and inevitably incorporated into the "Ideological State Apparatus." Blanche remains completely legible by this system and therefore remains subject to it. Jane's fantasy (and the fantasy of the middle class), by contrast, is that she can remain separate from this external constitution by remaining illegible.

Jane's visual power is translated into moral and spiritual superiority over Blanche. Her observations of Blanche indicate nothing but a shallow nature:

> [Blanche] was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature; nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness...She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her. (158)

Jane perceives a disparity between Blanche's material attributes and her mental and spiritual self. Her "showy," superficial qualities belie a mental and emotional sterility that Jane rejects: "She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own" (158). This sentence construction links and almost equates

originality with a (rather abstract) quality that Jane calls “good” (previously, genuine). Originality therefore seems connected to Jane’s understanding of the construction of self; this is in keeping with Jane’s internally constituted self, as was discussed previously. Jane also draws a distinction between Blanche’s “high tone of sentiment” and the “sensations” themselves, further distinguishing between the facade of self that Blanche constructs for the public and her internal self, which is “barren by nature.”

While Jane generally remains hidden from outside understanding, despite Rochester’s efforts to decipher her, Blanche remains under constant scrutiny. Jane describes Blanche’s treatment of Adele and her various other interactions as “manifestations of character” over which Rochester “exercise[s]...a ceaseless surveillance” (158). In effect, Blanche’s transparency allows this “surveillance” to take place. Jane also infers an “obvious absence of passion in [Rochester’s] sentiments towards [Blanche]” from this surveillance. Emotion itself, in her experience, defies the kind of tight control that Rochester’s “guardedness” reveals - for example, she notices in herself the tendency to erase Rochester’s faults as she falls increasingly in love with him. Surveillance therefore indicates Blanche’s failure in her attempted “conquest.”

This failure also seems to arise from sheer ideological incompatibility. Jane lays claim to Rochester, using the language of kinship and family:

> ...he is not of their kind. I believe he is of mine; - I am sure he is, - I feel akin to him, - I understand the language of his countenance and

> movements; though rank and wealth sever us widely, I have something in my brain and heart, in my blood and nerves, that assimilates me mentally to him...For when I say that I am of his kind, I do not mean that I have his force to influence, and his spell to attract; I mean only that I have certain tastes and feelings in common with him. (149)

Rochester mediates between these divergent class ideologies: while he is a member of the upper class -- “rank and wealth sever us widely” (149) -- Jane lays claim to him as a result of his innate capacity for “depth” and sympathy. The reference to “kind” indicates his potential for a middle class conversion, which foreshadows his later shift to middle class values when he marries Jane. When Jane says that “he is not of their kind...I believe he is of mine...I feel akin to him,” she claims him using the language of inheritance and kinship that is linked implicitly to the power of the aristocracy, who depend on kin relations for the perpetuation of their ideological apparatus. The visceral nature of the connection, “in [her] brain and heart, in [her] blood and nerves,” similarly appropriates the language of the aristocracy for the sake of middle class love and marriage. The idea of blood relations is obviously essential for upper class reproduction. Jane qualifies this otherwise fairly carnal relationship by saying that it only “assimilates [her] mentally to him,” making this kind of mental contact implicitly erotic. Marriage therefore becomes a different way to create a middle class cultural hegemony, as it can connect the language of blood ties to middle class conceptions of romantic relationships.

## RETHINKING MARRIAGE AND THE END OF THE NOVEL

When taken in the context of class, visuality, and aesthetics that I have just demonstrated, the end of the novel takes on new and different significance. Whether or not Jane submits or forfeits some level of independence, her individuality and status as a (newly) economically independent woman must be folded back into bourgeois ideology; this structure dictates that she must return to the domestic sphere and embody the ideal of middle class femininity. Poovey argues that, in this way, Bronte's method of solving the problems that Jane presents is quite conservative:

> From one perspective, Bronte neutralizes the effects of this revelation and downplays its subversive implications. By making Jane leave Thornfield, Bronte seems to reformulate her dilemma, making it once more an individual, moral, emotional problem and not a function of social position or occupation. As soon as Jane stops being a governess, she is "free" to earn her happiness according to the paradoxical terms of the domestic ideal… (142)

Once Jane leaves Thornfield, she finds the kin relations that she has been searching for throughout the novel, and also inherits a fortune. The problems associated with governesses -- their sexual availability, and the mixing of spheres, for example -- seem to fall away. Poovey, however, also points out when Jane is no longer a governess, her similarity to other women, the very thing that allows her to cross between governess and middle-class mother, reveals "the instability of the boundary" between types of women -- such as the fallen woman/the lunatic and the governess/mother (143). The ways in which Bronte resolves the problems

that are inherent in Jane's identity -- such as those that revolve around her status as a governess -- only reveal new concerns surrounding Victorian feminine ideals. Bronte's solution is to implement a disciplinary, narrowing move that simplifies and consolidates Jane's "self." This movement represents an attempt, however unsuccessful, at resolving the problems that emerge throughout the novel.

On an individual level, this simplifying action is made obvious as a result of the final chapter: the multiple selves that constitute Jane's personhood, such as are apparent through her visual self-representation through portraiture, are condensed into a singular self. This self is necessarily one with Rochester as a result of their marriage. Jane's description of her married life is oddly visceral: "No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am; ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh" (384). The sexuality of their physical connection is therefore made acceptable via religious language, as was the norm for a middle class marriage. The stranger aspects of their intellectual relationship, which may have been previously unacceptable because of the difference in social status, are thus alleviated. This religious language, however, could also be literally interpreted as a kind of physical absorption -- Jane and Rochester merge bodily into a singular subjectivity. This reading is supported by the fact that Rochester, crippled and blinded, requires Jane to fill the roles of his eyes and hand:

> Mr. Rochester continued blind the first two years of our union: perhaps it was that circumstance that drew us so very near…for I was then his vision…he saw books through me; and never did I weary of gazing for his behalf, and of putting into words the effect of field, tree, town, river,

> cloud, sunbeam – of the landscape before us; of the weather round us – and by impressing by sound on his ear what light could no longer stamp on his eye. (384)

As Rochester is cut off from external, Jane can function as a mediator between the external world and the internal mind. As I have observed earlier, Jane's monopoly on visual power, represented in many ways throughout the text, but especially through her own production of that text in autobiographical form, limits the perspectives of the reader, channeling them through her own, singular subjectivity. In this passage, Jane also translates her sight into sound -- she functions as his eyes, giving him information about his surroundings, but this information is necessarily textual. Words and storytelling therefore take on a new importance - it is through these that husband and wife can be merged appropriately into a single flesh. Because of this, the fact that the text is an autobiography indicates that the act of storytelling has similarly been enacted so that the previously fractured, undefinable self could be unified and identified through the structure of marriage.

Cohen discusses the process by which Bronte achieves this unification -- what he describes as the development of "intersubjective inwardness" allows merging of two selves without sacrificing internal integrity (Cohen, 52). This process is similarly described in physical terms; Rochester and Jane merge physically, but in addition to this their souls and minds are also represented as both physically embodied and unified. Jane says, "to talk to each other is but a

more animated and an audible thinking" (384) -- this demonstrates that their minds function as one, and consequently implies a merging of selves. This seems to be what Jane has been searching for, in some ways, throughout the novel: someone who can meet her on her own expressive plane. However, finding this person negates the need to struggle to connect with external human minds and souls. The tension and struggle for self-expression and definition that powered the novel to a certain extent are ultimately erased in an attempt to resolved the perpetual ideological and symbolic "crises," as Crary terms them.

In a broad, ideological sense, one finds that Bronte has attempted to solve these problems in much the same way: by resolving class difference and conflict through marriage, Jane is firmly tied back to the middle class ideal of the mother, rather than to any of the alternative, unacceptable female types. I would therefore argue that the marriage that occurs at the end of the novel symbolizes a shift from the reproduction of upper class values to the reproduction of middle class values. How this marriage is accomplished in the novel is therefore of primary importance in terms of the relationships between the classes. Ideological reproduction becomes physical reproduction as it is embodied through the institution of marriage. The children are described as the physical continuation of their parents: "When [Rochester's] firstborn was put into his arms, he could see that the boy had inherited his own eyes, as they once were – large, black, and brilliant" (384-385). As Rochester's eyes have been destroyed, his child is

essentially his reincarnation. This physical reproduction therefore has its roots in a more abstract, ideological continuation.

As the child inherits Rochester's physical characteristics, inheritance is also brought back into consideration. Inheritance is a concept that is applicable across class boundaries, though specific attitudes differ accordingly, as a comparison between the views of Blanche and Jane makes clear. The implications of inheritance therefore change according to class. Jane's inheritance is yet another chance for her to prove her moral purity, and to become "an independent woman" (370); Blanche's relation to inheritance (as discussed previously) is more complicated, as it provides an opportunity for her to attempt to reject upper class values; Rochester's inheritance is framed largely in ironic terms: though he has improbably inherited (as the second son), he is trapped by the conventions of marriage and bound to a woman who embodies upper class degeneracy.

The reproduction of ideology through marriage has its echoes in the description of Adele's re-education and subsequent reintegration into England: "As she grew up, a sound English education corrected in a great measure her French defects; and when she left school, I found in her a pleasing and obliging companion: docile, good-tempered, and well-principled" (383). As Adele becomes absorbed into the ISA of English education, her very character changes, in much the same way as Rochester's absorption into middle class ideology has had a tangible effect on him. What I have been calling "middle class ideology"

therefore comes to indicate "English ideology" in a broader sense.

The spread of English ideology finds its natural conclusion with St. John's departure for India and his death there. St. John cannot marry in India – the resulting family would be hybridized in unacceptable ways – and so his expiration in a blaze of divine glory is a logical conclusion. The fact that the novel ends with him, however, indicates the importance of his mission to spread "English-ness," "clear[ing the] painful way to improvement…hew[ing] down like a giant the prejudices of creed and caste that encumber [his race]" (385). His inability to compromise on the basis of culture seems to indicate the essence of the British imperial mission – the "correction" of these "prejudices" is described as the "ambition of the high master-spirit," a phrase which has obvious supremacist connotations.

The death of St. John and the crippling and blinding of Rochester seem to be part of a larger pattern of pain inflicted on those who do not conform to the middle class ideals that the novel espouses. Poovey points out that the widespread trouble that haunts the characters of *Jane Eyre* can be read as displaced revenge: as there was no space in Victorian fiction for female anger, she argues, the violent occurrences that punctuate the text can be understood as a "pattern of enforced dependence and indirect revenge." Jane's anger against those who have attempted to take away her agency or her voice is expressed textually, and her "agency is dispersed into the text": "The text — not as agent but as effect — turns out to be

precisely what is at stake in these series, for in each of them Rochester's most serious transgression has been to usurp Jane's control over what is, after all, primarily her story" (Poovey, 139-140).

Beyond this individual reading of this pattern, which Poovey understands as a way for Jane to reclaim agency and reassert herself in the text, I would argue that ending the novel with the death of St. John indicates a larger, ideological structure behind these acts of violence against those who have defied Jane, or attempted to control her forms of self expression. St. John's death is the obvious conclusion of his narrative path; after the fashion of Helen Burns, his religious beliefs consume his individuality and ultimately his life. He becomes a symbol of the empire rather than a man. The end of the novel treats Jane in a similar way, limiting the individuality and autonomy that previously defined her, and simultaneously limiting her possible significations. She becomes the representative middle class mother and wife, linked inextricably to her husband, and dependent on him for meaning.

## CONCLUSION

As Jane develops, she claims the right to define and create herself – and as I have argued, it is her very indeterminacy that gives her the space to achieve this self-making. Self-creation is an inherently middle class phenomenon. The concept of self-creation is, in itself, an illusion central to the novel-- the self is always to some extent constituted through external means (especially visually). Though the middle class promises power, and that its goals are both desirable and attainable, there is no guarantee of achieving these goals. As Poovey mentions briefly, the shortage of marriageable men meant that respectable middle class women could no longer achieve the goals provided by middle class ideology (Poovey, 144). The instability of the middle class ideological apparatus is therefore a source of constant concern – and this concern is apparent in Jane Eyre from the beginning.

The promise of "self-constitution" is revealed as a fiction at the end of the novel, when Jane is reincorporated into traditional middle class ideology. She must be physically and psychologically altered to achieve this ending: she is punished, in some degree, for transgressions against nature – she therefore suffers privations in the wilderness before recreating her life and transforming into an ideal middle class mother. This transformative process results in Jane's multiple significations becoming reconstituted, both visually and textually. She becomes a simpler, socially acceptable woman – the roles of wife and mother replace her

role as a worker within the domestic sphere, and she defines herself through naturalized, unpaid labor: “I will be your neighbor, your nurse, your housekeeper…I will be your companion – to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you” (370). This is work that Jane will not receive monetary compensation for -- she does it in part because of a “natural” maternal instinct.

Similarly, the multiplicity of visually constituted selves must be reorganized and simplified. As Jane becomes Rochester’s eyes, in some ways, he also begins to serve the same function as her self-portrait -- the physical expression of her visually represented self. Rochester, meanwhile, is emptied out spiritually and physically: “I have little left in myself -- I must have you,” Rochester says of himself at the end of the book, when he has lost the use of his eyes and hand (371). Jane responds to this dependence in a predictably positive way: “I love you better now, when I can really be useful to you, than I did in your state of proud independence, when you disdained every part but that of the giver and protector” (379). His dependence allows her to retain her “useful” status -- a quality that still remains a fundamental part of her character and womanliness. As the importance and power of his gaze diminishes, Jane’s own gaze and perspective subsumes his own.

The end of the novel also represents a corresponding movement away from upper class aesthetics. Rochester rejects the aesthetic of the upper class that

he has been associated with for the novel up to this point: “Never mind fine clothes and jewels now: all that is not worth a fillip” (380). This echoes Blanche’s denouncement about the system of worth surrounding female aesthetics earlier in the novel -- “Hunt, shoot, and fight; the rest is not worth a fillip” (153). While Blanche rejects aesthetics altogether as a representation of degeneracy of masculinity among the aristocracy, Rochester gains Jane’s faith in the aesthetic system of representation that the novel depends on: the kind of opulence that Blanche espouses as representative of femininity and its “legitimate appanage” in fact illustrates the shallowness of her soul. The novel itself ascribes to the system that is implicit in Rochester statement: expensive clothes and jewels are worthless, as they conceal the relationship between external and internal on which the novel depends. After the battles that Jane has waged to maintain control over her clothes and the external expression of her subjectivity that they represent, Rochester’s statement reads like an ideological surrender.

The novel itself therefore functions as a kind of disciplinary apparatus in several ways. As Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*, discipline functions in some ways by “reduc[ing] what, in a multiplicity, makes it much less manageable than a unity” (Foucault, 219). By reducing the multiplicity of interpretations possible down to a single viewer, the novel’s end could ultimately represent an attempt at applying this disciplinary principle to an otherwise unruly, polysemous text. Jane’s subjectivity is, from the start, the lens

through which the reader perceives her world -- the reader's perspective is therefore necessarily bound to Jane's psychological limits. This impulse toward simplicity is therefore linked to an attempt at ideological unity and fortification. Jane explicitly calls self-portraiture "a course of wholesome discipline," which she uses to both visually constitute the self and its control interpretations. In this way the fiction of the novel becomes that she will be able to create herself. As the concept of discipline is built into Bronte's discussion of aesthetics, her language opposes the ostensible goal of her own project. The disciplinary action of art is at odds with the way in which it is also representative of the middle class ideology of self-creation. This internal contradiction, then, ultimately reveals this ideology as an illusion.

# CHAPTER II

## INTRODUCTION

I have argued thus far that bourgeois ideologies of class and gender in the Victorian period are expressed through representations of visual culture in *Jane Eyre*. As a product of the earlier Victorian period, Bronte's novel upholds middle class values such as the possibility of socioeconomic and personal self-creation -- which I have argued are linked to visual self-creation through the genre of self-portraiture. Though this ideal is ultimately a fiction, the novel successfully represents and perpetuates this illusion. As the Victorian period drew to a close, however, these class and aesthetic ideals began to fall under new scrutiny: the ubiquity of middle class ideologies, such as that of self-creation, allowed artists to critique and analyze these ideals. This attention is manifested in a distinct shift in the way that visuality was represented in literary terms. In this chapter, I will use two works by Oscar Wilde to explore the ways in which he uses visuality to interrogate middle class ideology in an attempt to expose the inherent fiction behind self-making. These two works, *Salome* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, were written at roughly the same time -- the first in 1891, and the second around 1890. In both, Wilde represents visuality in a way that is radically different from *Jane Eyre*; I will argue that this change in the representation of vision, art, and portraiture is linked to a growing disillusionment with middle class ideology, and its associated aesthetics and morality.

This shift in representations of portraiture also has its roots in the advances in printing technology and the development of the camera. As Jonathan Crary asserts in his book *Techniques of the Observer*:

> …the break with classical models of vision in the early nineteenth century was far more than simply a shift in the appearance of images and art works, or in systems of representational conventions. Instead, it was inseparable from a massive reorganization of knowledge and social practices that modified in myriad ways the productive, cognitive, and desiring capacities of the human subject. (Crary, 3)

Furthermore, Crary argues, "Problems of vision then, as now, were fundamentally questions about the body and the operation of social power" (Crary, 3). Vision, then, is not only a useful device for Wilde and Bronte as they construct individual characters in their novel, but a statement in itself concerning the way that society, the individual body, and subjectivity interact. At a biological level, vision always mediates between self and world. Because of the technological advances of the moment, however, this mediation happened in new ways; thus vision and art were uniquely positioned to address concerns about the middle class.

In the last chapter I discussed this crisis in relation to the pursuit of subjective truth, arguing that through such devices as first person narration, the novel limits the "truth"/reality of the novel to that which is directly perceived by Jane; this form gives primacy to an individual, subjective perspective, which similarly reflects bourgeois individualism. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, however, the novel's representation of reality becomes the basis for another set of questions. Rather than limiting the reader to a singular perspective, the novel

assumes an omniscient third person narrator, allowing Wilde to represent multiple perspectives, and multiple acts of interpretation. His use of the form of a debate between characters, which occurs several times within the text, serves a similar purpose: by putting different voices into competition, he encourages multiple, competing interpretations of the novel itself. As multiple perspectives exist simultaneously within the text, the "reality" and meaning of the text itself are destabilized. By throwing open the subject of the interpretation of art, the novel shows a deep concern with the anxieties around what these interpretations could spawn.

Beyond this, the "crisis of meaning" around images is translated into a link between physical danger and the gaze. In this chapter, I will also argue that Wilde gives visuality itself negative connotations, such as death and moral degeneracy. In both *Salome* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, for example, Wilde uses sight to suggest ideas about the dangers of the gaze and looking -- both generally and in the case of art in particular. By making vision itself dangerous, Wilde is able to comment on a universal human condition, (apparently) set apart from the middle class concerns of novels like *Jane Eyre*. His representation of the way that the self is constituted -- externally, through the "influences" of others -- creates a stark contrast with Jane Eyre's middle class ideal of self-creation.

## VISUALLY CONSTRUCTED: SEXUALITY AND POWER IN *SALOME*

In his experimental play *Salome*, a retelling of the biblical story of the beheading of John the baptist, Wilde sexualizes and mystifies the gaze, making visuality a cognate for sexuality. The act of seeing becomes eroticized, and sexuality is likewise expressed through the language of vision. Salome's power stems from the fact that the men around her have to look at her. This could be interpreted in a more voluntary sense, as male desire. However, I understand the male gaze in this play as a function of Salome's power, which is visually constituted and sexually based. Because her power is based on this visual interaction, there are necessary limitations. The primary example of this is when Iokanaan refuses to look at her: "…wherefore didst thou not look at me, Iokanaan? …If thou hadst looked at me thou hadst loved me." (328). Because he refuses to look at her, she cannot possess and control him; her obsession with him also seems to come in part from the fact that she cannot control him without destroying him. She claims that he was "the man that [she] loved alone among men," singling him out, making him unique through repeated hyperbole: "There was nothing in the world so white as thy body. There was nothing in the world so black as thy hair. In the whole world there was nothing so red as thy mouth" (328). His physical qualities entrance her, and she fetishizes them -- resulting in her eventual possession of his head and the kiss. In her relationship with Iokanaan, Salome takes the masculine role that attempts to claim the love object,

only to have it disintegrate or change as she attempts to possess it. Here, Wilde draws on and subverts the tradition of courtly love poetry, in which love-sick men dismember the female form, dismantling it through language in an attempt to describe and possess it. Through this reference to an older form of love poetry, Salome takes on the role of the (masculine) lover, while Iokanaan becomes the (feminine) love object. Salome thus implicitly commands a powerful form of language (which I will return to later), which allows her to make her claim of love on Iokanaan.

Her power, both visual and sexual, is inherently dangerous, and therefore the figure of the volatile woman that she represents is also dangerous. Before vision and sexuality are linked, however, sight itself is described as an act that is potentially deadly: as the page of Herodias says to the young Syrian, “You are always looking at her. You look at her too much. It is dangerous to look at people in such fashion. Something terrible may happen” (301). While this statement is overtly a warning about hypersexual women, the text also seems to claim that there is something hazardous about the very nature of sight and the act of looking -- the gaze leads to “something terrible.” The corresponding attempt to block the gaze is therefore dependent on this understanding of danger -- the simultaneous occurrences of gaze and withheld gaze are predicated on the awareness of the danger it entails. Herod’s changing attitude toward sight is most apparent. He begins the play looking unashamedly at Salome; he is warned to stop looking by

Herodias; and finally he responds to the dangers of the gaze: "Surely some terrible thing will befall…I will not look at things, I will not suffer things to look at me. Put out the torches! Hide the moon! … Let us hide ourselves in our palace…" (328). One can trace these instances as a part of a pattern -- a retreat or recoiling away from the gaze and back to a sheltered, hidden place. This pattern corresponds to the tension between the impulse to look and the impulse to prevent the look in the first place. The dependence of these impulses on one another emphasizes the importance of self-consciousness, and the awareness of the danger that the gaze entails. The tension between the gaze and the withheld gaze is fundamental to the structures of power and vision that form the play, and perhaps is the reason for its titillating nature.

The withheld gaze is used in a limited, purposeful manner at the end of the play. Light, which allows sight to occur, is extinguished; "some terrible thing" eventually comes to pass, as Salome is murdered, and the dangerous object of the gaze is symbolically destroyed. Herod's retreat away from both light and external sight indicates his recognition of the source of the danger – the gaze of others -- and this awareness/recognition of Salome as "a monster" is an essential part of the play, as she must ultimately be condemned and sacrificed. As Salome is illuminated (in the stage directions), she is almost immediately destroyed. She is too visible, too sexual, and has too much power. The female therefore begins as object of desire, but in some way this role becomes perverted and she gains power

from a role that acquired a large part of its meaning from her passivity. Herod consequently interprets this transformation and resulting feminine power as monstrous. Her manipulation and deviation from constrictive sexual/social norms become too obvious, as demonstrated through her increasing visibility and the legibility of her significations.

The danger of the gaze is that it entails a reciprocal relationship of power; this power relation is inherently gendered. As Laura Mulvey writes in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (19). Thus, even as the male viewer might exert power or some kind of proprietary claim over the (female) object of the gaze, he is simultaneously baring his soul to that object. Salome is not subject to the male gaze; instead, her viewers become subject to her. This is a reversal of traditional visual understanding of voyeurs, where the viewer is understood to have power over the unconscious subject. Mulvey comments on this theory as well, with her exploration of Freud's theory of the scopophilic instinct, which she defines as "sexual satisfaction...from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other" (17). Because of the way the gaze is traditionally gendered, the female gaze, according to this theory, cannot create meaning in the way that the male gaze does (15). I will expand on this in a later, with a discussion of Salome's relation to symbol and meaning in terms of visuality.

Men obey Salome because they desire her, but their physical access to her is limited to the incorporeal act of looking. She is able to capitalize on this limitation, pragmatically creating an economy around visual access to her body, which she exchanges for other services and promises. She does this twice; first, to convince the young Syrian to let her speak to Iokanaan: "Thou wilt do this thing for me…And on the morrow when I shall pass in my litter by the bridge of the idol-buyers, I will look at thee through the muslin veils…" (307). Here, Salome uses the act of returning the gaze to imply that she reciprocates the young Syrian's romantic feelings. The gaze becomes a metaphor for love, which is ultimately denied, or shown to be meaningless as Salome instead lavishes her romantic attentions on Iokanaan. She exchanges visual access to her body a second time to bargain with Harod for an open ended promise. She gains tangible political authority through this pragmatic approach to her own visible (sexual) availability. The nature of the exchange, however, is uneven. The play ultimately reveals that ascribing too much meaning and value to the female body can become destructive, both to the viewer and to Salome herself as the object of the gaze.

Even Iokanaan is not safe, though he recognizes Salome's visual/sexual power before Herod does. Salome is able to manipulate Herod, who is less aware of the nature of her power (and perhaps less understanding of her character) than Iokanaan, into promising to have the prophet executed. The only way that she can possess him if he refuses to look at her is by having him decapitated. The head

can be understood as the locus of the self, as well as the place where the qualities that she desires (the white of his skin, the black of his hair, and the red of his lips) come together. The severed head is therefore the objectified self – but by possessing him she has destroyed both his bodily autonomy and integrity: "…thou art dead, and thy head belongs to me. I can do with it what I will. I can throw it to the dogs and to the birds of the air. That which the dogs leave, the birds of the air shall devour…" (327-328). Instead of filling out her threat, however, she kisses the head's mouth – she needs to strip him of agency, of the ability to defy her, before she can complete her fantasy.

As a further indication of the destruction of his autonomy, Iokanaan's decapitation also results in his blinding. Salome, speaking to his severed head, says: "Thine eyes that were so terrible, so full of rage and scorn, are shut now. Wherefore are they shut? Open thine eyes!" (327). Vision, as much as tangible, physical qualities, defines his selfhood. This is similar to the blinding of Rochester, for whom blinding reveals (and facilitates) a transformation of character, from aristocrat to bourgeois gentleman. In the case of Iokanaan, however, the destruction of his vision (and self) is irreversible. He is not broken down to be built anew, as in the case of Rochester, who is reborn as a middle class citizen. Death and its corresponding blindness are cold realities in *Salome*: there are no glowing middle class ideals of self-making and self-re-making as in *Jane Eyre*. As vision becomes representative of the self, it similarly becomes

representative of the fragility of the self, and the finality of death.

Salome's vestigial desire for the head indicates that the survival of Iokanaan's selfhood is not necessary for her erotic desire for the head. This is its own kind of perversion; her objectification of the head, as well as her obsession with his physicality, seems to indicate that she does not want Iokanaan as a person, but rather as a thing -- "thing" being the part of the self that is object. In terms of portraiture, the face is the part of the body that is linked to individual identity. Iokanaan's head is thus similar to a portrait: the self reduced to object, separated physically from the body, but still *representative* of the self. Salome's possession of the head is also an indication of her complete control over him: she has destroyed the unity of his body, essentially negates his individuality and autonomy, while still allowing him to exist in the world – but only as an inanimate object. As Brad Bucknell argues in his article "Seeing Salome," he "becomes an icon of silence, an unseeing, unhearing, untalking head: in other words, an image of utter impotence, mute testimony to the destructive power of the female…this emblem of castration will become the clue to the element of anxious projection of the gaze itself which is so necessary for seeing and reinscribing Salome" (506). Rochester's blindness renders him similarly helpless, but in such a way that it emphasizes the maternal, supportive qualities of the female. Here, blindness has no such nurturing feminine counterpart. Female power is represented as not only monstrous, but fundamentally destructive.

Herod does not comprehend the erotic nature of Salome's desire for Iokanaan's head, attempting to redirect her wish onto more conventional, material items: "The head of a man that is cut from his body is ill to look upon, is it not? It is not meet that the eyes of a virgin should look upon such a thing. What pleasure couldst thou have in it. There is no pleasure that thou couldst have in it. No, no, it is not that thou desirest" (324). As the body is dismembered, Herod claims, it should simultaneously become aesthetically unappealing. An attraction to the decapitated head, whether aesthetic or sexual, can only be understood as unnatural (another reason for his final condemnation of her as "monstrous"). Salome is explicit that her desire for Iokanaan is sexual in nature; as Herod understands sexuality in this instance in visual/aesthetic terms ("It is not meet that the eyes of a virgin should look upon such a thing"), sexuality and sight become further entangled.

Herod only recognizes the danger of his unchecked gaze when it is too late, and his desire has led him to promise Iokanaan's head to Salome. He blames both her beauty and his own gaze: "Thy beauty has grievously troubled me, and I have looked at thee overmuch. Nay, but I will look at thee no more. One should not look at anything. Neither at things, nor at people should one look. Only in mirrors is it well to look, for mirrors do but show us masks" (324). The comment about mirrors implies that the reflected image somehow also defers the sexuality associated with the gaze, or at least that it deflects the dangerous aspect of control

that accompanies vision. The mirror is therefore an object that mediates between the bodies behind the gazes of both parties. The word “mask” emphasizes its role as a mediator, but also as an object that disguises the true nature. Laura Mulvey, theorizing about the cinema, writes:

> …curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world. Jacques Lacan has described how the moment when a child recognizes its own image in the mirror is crucial for the constitution of the ego. (17)

Herod uses the mirror as a shield between the self and the eye, a device that prevents recognition and the subsequent “constitution of the ego” that recognition implies. In order to create a moment of misrecognition (to defend the vulnerable self from outside control/creation), Herod advocates for the destruction of the pathways that the gaze implies: “Neither at things, nor at people should one look.” In order to defend against Salome’s destructive capabilities, which are manifested visually, Herod must redirect the eye and impose visual mediation on the gaze. The fear implicit in this act indicates a new recognition of the female as a powerful figure, as well as the disintegration of the Victorian feminine ideal and its associated middle class values as portrayed in *Jane Eyre*.

# LANGUAGE IN *SALOME*: A FORM OF VERBAL AND PHYSICAL DISMEMBERMENT

Salome's visual power has its counterpart in her use of language and comparison. Her words allow her to define and create the world around her, and imply a subjectivity and internality that is denied to her biblical counterpart. Bucknell argues that Salome's lengthy passages of descriptive language, most notably those about Iokanaan, constitute transformations in themselves. She reconstitutes him in these various roles -- first the virginal quality of his white body, "like the lilies of a field that the mower hath never mowed," and then re-creating him in the opposite role, as "the body of a leper…a whited sepulchre, full of loathsome things" (309). More particularly, Bucknell argues, these descriptions "perform verbally and in plain view of the reader/viewer what will take place in the blackness of the cistern later in the play. She dismembers and re-members Jokanaan before our eyes in a virtuoso act of verbal/visual creation" (Bucknell, 518). Through her language alone, Salome is able to destroy and create Iokanaan according to her will, with a distinctive parallel to the physical destruction and separation of self later in the play.

I would argue, however, that this profusion of similes constitutes a certain emptiness of language: instead of being constructive and definitive, as Bucknell argues, the meaning of language is undermined. The pattern of similes that pervades the play might indicate power, in a basic sense, but the meaning of

language itself becomes a form to be interrogated. Characters speak in lists of similes, comparisons building on comparisons with little connection between them. The moon, for example, is compared to “a woman rising from a tomb,” “a virgin,” and “a mad woman who is seeking everywhere for lovers” (301, 304, 311). These similes are created by different characters, with different perspectives that manifest themselves through their verbal interpretations of the single object. The moon itself, however, can be all of these things; it can carry these disparate interpretations, and become a symbol of conflicting meanings.

The moon is also textually linked to Salome: when the young Syrian remarks, “How beautiful is the Princess Salome tonight,” the page says “Look at the moon”. This begins a sequence in which each observes things about these different objects, resulting in an intertwined list of metaphors that links the two together. Similarly, by the end of the play it becomes apparent that in some way all of the ways in which the moon has been described (a virgin, a dead woman, a mad, naked woman looking for lovers) can also be applied to Salome. The different interpretations of the single symbol (or “icon,” as Bucknell calls it) are therefore transferred from the moon to Salome. She is similarly a symbol of the feminine, an object of the gaze that is able to hold different and occasionally conflicting associations. The way that Salome as a symbol has meaning imposed upon her implies an inherently gendered structure of the visuality: as Mulvey argues, “Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male

other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (15). According to this theory, female power is apparently circumscribed by the masculine gaze; Salome, as I have argued earlier, seems to subvert this structure. Despite this, she remains subject to external definition, as she is constituted through layers of textual meaning.

Herodias, Salome's mother, demonstrates an alternative structure of language and interpretation. She is oddly deaf to the wordplay and omens in the text around her: "...the moon is like the moon, that is all" (312). Her literal attitude towards language contrasts with passages such as Salome's description of Iokanaan's eyes: "They are like black holes burned by torches in a tapestry of Tyre. They are like the black caverns where the dragons live…They are like black lakes troubled by fantastic moons" (308). It is through these similes that Salome constructs that the wider formulation of the play becomes apparent: metaphoric significations might be superficially beautiful in a linguistic sense, but are ultimately empty structures that are void of meaning. They can indicate their own opposites as easily as their apparent original meanings. Iokanaan is similarly incapable of communicating in a straightforward manner, as he speaks in prophetic language that is ambiguous and easily misinterpreted. This problem of representation seems linked to Crary's "crisis of meaning," the way that visual

signs during this period have lost their "exclusivity" with the advent of improved printing technologies (12).

Herodias' inability to hear and communicate in the language of the play is linked to her ineffectuality and relative powerlessness. She appears petty, slightly out of tune with the rest of the characters, and therefore easily dismissed: Herod says, "Peace woman! It is not to you I speak" (323). He additionally attempts to frame Herodias as the source of Salome's request: "Do not listen to thy mother's voice. She is ever giving thee evil counsel. Do not heed her" -- to which Salome responds, "It is not my mother's voice that I heed. It is for mine own pleasure that I ask the head of Iokanaan in a silver charger…" (323). In the original biblical text, Herod's plea would have held true -- Herodias was the instigator of the prophet's execution, Salome serving the role of a pawn acting according to her mother's wishes. In Wilde's play, however, this characterization of Salome conflicts with his portrayal of her as an independent, powerful, manipulative woman. Her power therefore comes at the expense of her mother's. In this way, Herodias represents an alternate form of femininity: she cannot embody opposites successfully in the way that Salome can, and is therefore relatively politically impotent.

Salome's relation to language is intimately related to her own semiotic significations. In Bucknell's words, "It is the refiguration of Salome, the play from sign to sign, which constitutes her" (506). She is able to occupy multiple

roles simultaneously, both the virgin and the whore, while maintaining her agency. This is represented textually through this inability of the play to settle into a single mode of linguistic definition, oscillating instead from sign to sign, from simile to simile. Her creative, formative power comes as a function of this movement, but when it is extended too far into the physical world, Herod becomes aware of her mixing of signs and defines this unstable, heterogenous semiotic form as “monstrous.” Salome’s power is therefore defined as abnormal, outside the scope of “natural” humanity; “normal” femininity as constructed through the text of the Victorian novel, is singularly constituted. Defying this paradigm not only links Salome to the non-feminine, but also to the nonhuman. Salome’s visual/sexual power is linked to the profusion of similes that implies an increasing abstraction from reality. Starting with a color based in reality, such as the black of Iokanaan’s hair, she moves quickly away into an imagined world, spun from associations from her observation.  The empty quality of Salome’s language therefore seems to stem from its separation from reality. Her kind of power is therefore linked, paradoxically, to unreality. Herodias, by comparison, possesses little tangible power in a political sense, but maintains the relationship between words and reality. By denying the cycle of simile, she re-infuses the language of the play with meaning. She provides an alternative form of power that is linked to an accurate form of vision, connected to reality, but unable to affect that reality. The destabilization of the real (implied here by Salome’s power) is a

theme of Wilde's, which he returns to in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; in the novel, he also explores the problem of reality, specifically through the medium of art. Later in this chapter, I will return to Wilde's use of the visual as a means of destabilizing reality.

The power of the language is carried into Wilde's project in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in a similar way. Visuality and words are explicitly linked from the beginning of the novel: in the preface, Wilde emphasizes that both the painter and the writer can claim the title of artist: "Thought and language are to the artist instruments of an art" (4). "The artist," he claims "can express everything." Words and literature maintain their importance throughout the novel, playing a parallel role to the visual arts in terms of Dorian's formation and growth. For example, the portrait finds its literary equivalent in the form of the book that Henry lends Dorian: "Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book. There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception of the beautiful" (145). Similarly, the portrait is compared to a text: Dorian at one point refers to the portrait as "a diary of [his] life…[that] never leaves the room in which it is written" (152). He understands the portrait in textual as well as visual terms, in as far as the painting can be "read," interpreted, and understood. The relationship between literature and the visual arts is thus emphasized: both find their importance in terms of a quest for expression, arts through which the internal state of the artist visibly expressed.

Beyond this basic link, the attention that Wilde gives to language seems to be a kind of commentary on his own work. When Dorian says that words "seemed to be able to give a plastic form to formless things," one hears the pride of the writer in his own text. When Dorian wonders "Was there anything so real as words?" (22), however, the text becomes a little ironic -- inasmuch as the text itself is on a basic level rather "unreal." As John Peters argues in his article "Style and Art in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," the text itself is not meant to be understood in terms of reality. This contrasts with the realism that was so important to the projects of other Victorian authors, such as Bronte. Peters argues that the apparent contradiction in the novel between the preface and the rest of the text is in fact a misreading; Wilde, he claims, "deliberately juxtaposes the art and morality in the novel in order to emphasize their relationship" (Peters, 1).

> …Wilde produces a work of art whose justification rests solely on its stylistic beauty not on its moral plot. And by rejecting nineteenth-century realism's representation and morality, Wilde's idealized world of art can employ the raw materials of a moral plot without having to posit a particular moral stance. As a result, far from the moral plot leading to a particular moral conclusion with which to instruct Wilde's readers, the plot emphasizes, by contrast with the novel's style, the unreal, ideal picture Wilde wishes to paint. (Peters, 10)

Words are able to "articulate…a new world," to give structure and order to Dorian's raw emotional response to Henry's philosophy, and perhaps most importantly, Henry's words make the ideas behind them seem "real." As the novel's primary creative force, then, language not only frames new ideas, but also creates and re-creates the characters themselves. This implies a destabilization of

the self, which I will explore in depth later. Dorian, for example, becomes the "realization" of Henry's philosophy -- Henry later acknowledges to himself "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" (59). Henry creates Dorian through words as Basil creates Dorian's portrait with paint: in effect, Dorian is Henry's work of art, the physical realization of his hedonistic philosophy. Expression itself, meanwhile, becomes a means of affirming reality; again quoting Lord Henry, Dorian says: "If one doesn't talk about a thing, it has never happened. It is simply expression, as Harry says, that gives reality to things" (108). The lack of originality behind this statement makes it ironic, as well as adding to its complexity. If art itself is a kind of mirror, Dorian is a similar kind. Dorian makes it a habit to "put into practice" everything that Henry says; he therefore simultaneously makes Henry's words real and himself becomes less real in the process.

Conversely, if words entail a fundamental act of creation in the novel, refusing verbal definition allows the subject to escape this form of reconstitution. Henry is extremely active in this refusal:

> It is a sad truth, but we have lost the faculty of giving lovely names to things. Names are everything. I never quarrel with actions. My one quarrel is with words. That is the reason 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." "Then what should we call you, Harry?" she asked. "His name is Prince Paradox," said Dorian. "I recognize him in a

> flash," exclaimed the duchess. "I won't hear of it...From a label there is no escape! I refuse the title." (193)

As he refuses the title, he also denies the accompanying recognition. By explicitly rejecting "vulgar realism in literature," Wilde sets his characters self-consciously in opposition to other Victorian authors, such as Bronte. This way of defining and expressing reality, he implies, is ultimately limiting. In this passage, however, language and recognition function in a similar way as in *Jane Eyre*. In the previous chapter, I have argued that recognition is itself a form of external constitution and definition of the self -- when Rochester attempts to dress Jane in "the clothes of a peer's daughter," for example, he is redefining her external state in order to better understand and master her internal nature. Language in Wilde's novel functions in a similar way -- Henry refuses the label altogether, because "from a label there is no escape," while Jane simply rejects Rochester's definition and attempted reconstitution. Both are instances of a character making a claim for about the nature of self: for Jane, it is about the accurate representation of the self, while for Henry, it is about the elusion of the label/representation and its associated recognition. For Wilde, however, there is a different kind of claim being made: it is not that you can ever truly create yourself (according to the middle class ideal), but rather that "vulgar realism" is pedantic and limits the potential forms of textual expression.

Wilde's self-conscious demonstration of the power of the written word, and his opinions on genre and style are thus made explicit in his own text. The

intersection between visuality and language is similarly a powerful theme throughout his work. For *Salome* in particular, a biblical text with a long history in visual art, it is logical that art acts as a link between vision and language. This use of illustration as a hinge between visual art and language can be seen in the prints made for Wilde's *Salome* by the artist Aubrey Beardsley.

# AESTHETICISM AND AMBIGUITY: AUBREY BEARDSLEY'S ILLUSTRATIONS OF *SALOME*

Aubrey Beardsley was a controversial artist with ties to the Aesthetic or Decadent Movement, and a contemporary of Wilde's. As a result of his interest in Wilde's *Salome*, he created a series of prints illustrating the play. In these, he emphasizes Salome's visual and sexual power, to such an extent that three of his original prints for the play were suppressed by the publisher. As Bucknell has noted, there is a long visual tradition surrounding the biblical story of John the Baptist. Earlier depictions, he says, emphasize the dance and the severed head, "demonstrat[ing] an interplay between the signs of the narrative and those of the visual arts which suggests no strong division between the visual and the verbal, as well as an ongoing interest in the reparation of the story in dramatically different ways" (506-508). The visual interest in the body and the head, objects of desire and repulsion/horror respectively, are similarly presented in Beardsley's images, anchoring the images to the story.

The specific ways in which Beardsley presented the story visually, however, are rarely traditional. In contemporary art, for example, Salome is often portrayed nude, to emphasize the fact that her power stems in large part from her sexuality. In most of Beardsley's illustrations that couple John the Baptist and Salome, however, Salome remains fully clothed. Her body is often lost in folds of material, with only her head and posture showing her inclination and power. In

the illustration entitled *The Climax* (Figure 1), for example, the sexual implications of the title are balanced by the lack of explicitly erotic content. Salome hovers mysteriously, her body covered in cloth. Her eyes stare into John's, a pictorial translation of visual power over him, while his own eyes are shut in death in a sign of visual and physical impotence. The fact that she is clothed in this image, as well as the other image including her and the severed head, *The Dancer's Reward* (Figure 2), emphasizes her visual power rather than her sexual power. The image builds on the text's message in this way, stressing visual power and contextualizing it with violence. This highlights the destructive qualities of vision that are implicit in the text itself.

Beardsley's unique style combines with Wilde's literary project in other ways as well. For example, according to Frankel, both men were interested in "the public side or "mask" of textuality," an interest which "led Beardsley to develop a rigorously semiotic understanding of the language of print, in which the literary text is conceived to be an inherently visual affair" (Frankel, 274). Despite this, Beardsley's drawings and their meanings remain only tenuously related to Wilde's actual text; Frankel suggests that this indicates that "Beardsley preferred to play with materials and techniques more than he cared to make each graphic line a slave to its referent" (Frankel, 277). The resulting ambiguity is one characteristic of Beardsley's signature style. In the illustration *The Toilet of Salome* (Figure 3), for example, the figure of Salome moves almost seamlessly

from the indication of a three-dimensional figure into a flattened shape, a design on the surface of the page. This movement from pictorial depth to shallowness, from an indication of space to the destruction of that illusion, is accomplished almost in the use of a single line. *The Peacock Skirt* (Figure 4) achieves this movement even more dramatically, as the human figure is almost subsumed by the design that is theoretically a part of her clothing, but in fact seems to float on the surface of the image. The white space of the figure's body contrasts starkly with the heavy black of the design of the cloth that hangs down; the visual description of the body is limited to the two lines that delineate the figure from its surroundings. This contrast emphasizes the relationship between design and figure, and puts these two features of illustration in tension with one another.

The play between surface and substance in Beardsley's images is essentially a visual translation of ideas present in Wilde's text. As Wilde writes in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril" (4). In a similar way, Beardsley's stylistic relation between line and form draws attention to the surface and symbol of the art simultaneously. As one reads the "symbol," the content of the image, the "surface" interrupts the eye and forces the viewer to acknowledge both aspects of the art. By drawing attention to its own status as a representation, Beardsley's work sets itself apart from the traditional aims of painted portraiture, in particular the illusion of

realism and accuracy. While the lack of illusion is partially a function of the medium of print, this quality of Beardsley's work raises important questions about the creation and destruction of illusion, and the ways in which that illusion is interpreted. This stands in stark contrast to the project of the painted portrait, which attempts to hide the process by which it creates the illusion, attempting instead to equate the reality and the image. For the painted portrait, the artist attempts to create and enforce a singular interpretation of the work -- the direct relation between image and referent object. For Beardsley, the play between "symbol" and "surface" multiplies and confuses pictorial interpretations, resulting in an abundance of potential interpretations. Sometimes, for Beardsley, a line is just a line; an attempt to read its eccentricities is not always productive. The danger is one of misinterpretation on the part of the viewer, but it is a danger that the artist purposefully courts. By drawing attention to symbol and surface at the same time, Beardsley undermines his own illusion in a way that is similar to what I will argue Wilde does later in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, when he returns to the painted portrait.

Beardsley achieves this effect by using certain visual associations and pictorial traditions to imply content while simultaneously denying or subverting those traditions. By traditions, I mean the system of perspective that had been "discovered" in the Renaissance by Leon Battista Alberti which allowed artists to create the illusion of three-dimensional space in a two dimensional image. The

influence of such traditions can be seen in the angle of the bookshelf to indicate depth, for example, in the *The Toilet of Salome* (Figure 3). Beardsley's visual subversion of these traditions was deeply influenced by the interest in Japanese art that was sweeping Europe at this time; Linda Zatlin indicates that "Japanism" had been introduced to Britain in 1854, and had begun to merge with Aestheticism around the 1870s. By adopting the simplicity of line that was stylistically Japanese, artists of this movement were also "revolt[ing] against moralizing, story-telling Victorian art" (Zatlin, 44). The movement espoused Walter Pater's "the love of art for its own sake," as well as the decoupling of art from its moral and spiritual associations (Zatlin, 44).

The relation between Wilde's text and Beardsley's illustrations has been the subject of some critical debate: Frankel claims that "it is virtually commonplace in critical discussions of Salome to say that Beardsley's illustrations "pervert" the text of Wilde's play or maintain a "parodic distance" from it" (Frankel, 261). This criticism, he contends, "remains deeply entrenched in a perceived binary opposition between "image" and "text" from which it has yet to emerge" (Frankel, 261-262). I agree with Frankel on this point: such a superficial view of this relationship is unproductive. The projects of both Wilde and Beardsley are in fact very similar: Wilde's intense interest in the visual aspect of literature is a perfect counterpart to Beardsley's concern with the textual aspect of the visual arts. By translating Wilde's textual work relating violence and

vision to the visual arts, Beardsley makes Salome visually legible, but challenges the viewer by subverting pictorial expectations and multiplying potential interpretations. Wilde engages in a similar project in textual form, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

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# CLASS AND PORTRAITURE: THE CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

The world of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is distinctly upper class in its characters and social perspective. Diametrically opposed to *Jane Eyre's* espousal of bourgeois values, Wilde's novel uses class not as a way to provide a model or ideal "type" to aspire to, but to reveal the ways in which bourgeois ideals had become destabilized. This destabilization was multifaceted: one aspect was a loss of faith in the promises made by middle class ideology, such as the promise of the possibility of self-creation; this ideological destabilization was linked in turn to a semiotic destabilization, what Crary calls "the mobility of signs" (11-12). As I have indicated in the first chapter, signs in the Victorian period were becoming increasingly universal, and no longer solely linked to a specific class; in a corresponding development, middle class ideals were becoming similarly widespread. To escape the increasingly universalized cultural and aesthetic ideals of the middle class, the novel focuses instead on the obsolete upper class. Wilde uses this focus on the upper class as a framework for a new way of representing the self, one that is explicitly opposed to the middle class formulation. His critique of middle class ideology thus emerges through his use of portraiture, and through the cultural and class associations that accompany this visual production of self.

Painted portraiture is historically linked to the upper class. As I have

explained in the introduction, the painted portrait was consistently tied to wealth and the aristocracy: Audrey Linkman explains that "The portrait in oils remained firmly fixed at the luxury end of the market and never became an article of mass consumption" (Linkman, 12). Similarly, Wilde uses portraiture as a class symbol in this old-fashioned sense: Dorian's "fatal" portrait is a singular image, produced by hand and therefore not linked to mechanical reproduction and mass consumption. This singularity stands in obvious contrast to what Tagg calls a growing "democracy of the image," a phrase which refers to the new ability of the middle class to join in the economy of portraiture as a result of cheaper, more easily produced photographic images.

The singularity of Dorian's portrait raises ideas about exhibition and the control of the image after it is produced. When a portrait is painted, it remains a single art object that is not easily reproduced; because of this quality, it is easier to regulate the viewership of the image, and maintain control over how it is interpreted. In his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin writes: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (Benjamin, 220). Mechanical reproduction means that the original loses its "authority" or "aura" (Benjamin, 221). Though the portrait in question is not a product of mechanical reproduction, the way the self is influenced, created, and re-created through the portrait is in

some way a response to mechanical reproduction. The original or "real" self therefore becomes a form to be interrogated.

As mechanical reproduction undermines the authenticity of the self, the act of reproduction also draws attention to the way that the self is actively created and produced. This ties aesthetics back to class once more, as the creation of a portrait was also a claim to a certain class identity, a self-conscious production of self. As Tagg notes, "To 'have one's portrait done' was one of the symbolic acts by which individuals from rising social classes made their ascent visible to themselves and others and classed themselves among those who enjoyed social status" (Tagg, 37). In portraiture, the self is actively represented and produced, which raises questions about the authenticity of that self. The tension surrounding the public (or performed) self and the private ("real") self is thus implicit in the genre. The difference between Dorian's painted portrait and a mechanically reproduced image lies in the pervasiveness of that the visual claim of selfhood. In the case of the mechanically reproduced image, which Benjamin argues is inherently detached from reality in some respects, the image becomes detached from the self. By contrast, Wilde's use of the painted portrait means that Dorian maintains a direct and intimate relationship with the work of art, and therefore with the claim of selfhood that it represents.

In the previous chapter, I argued that in *Jane Eyre*, visuality itself signifies different things across class lines -- for a member of the middle class, keen and

perceptive vision indicates a moral nature and a certain degree of social power; for the gentry, the act of withholding the gaze is meant to act as a social slight, but in fact only emphasizes their degeneracy. Ideological differences across class boundaries are thus expressed through the language of visuality. This is also linked to how Wilde portrays the relationship between middle and upper classes in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Told from the perspective of the upper class, the novel's characters display a generally disdainful attitude toward middle class ideology. When Henry detaches himself pointedly from his own family, he also comments on "the rage of the English democracy against what they call the vices of the upper orders":

> The masses feel that drunkenness, stupidity, and immorality should be their own special property, and that if any one of us makes an ass of himself, he is poaching on their preserves. When poor Southwark got into the divorce court, their indignation was quite magnificent. And yet I don't suppose that ten percent of the proletariat live correctly. (12)

By separating himself from both the masses and his own upper class family, Henry seems to feel that he is sufficiently removed to comment on class relations in general. In this way, the novel attempts to move beyond the relationship between the upper and middle classes; it is less concerned with competing class ideologies, and more interested in commenting on humanity in general. By attempting to circumvent middle class ideology altogether, Wilde also attempts to reveal the illusion created by the middle class cultural hegemony, which claimed that middle class values were universal human values in themselves.

The way that activity, or "having something to do," is portrayed is also indicative of the novel's attitude towards class relations. The upper class is clearly associated with some kind of moral degeneracy which also linked to physical inactivity; as Henry says to Dorian, "You will always be loved, and will always be in love with love. A *grande passion* is the privilege of people who have nothing to do. That is the one use of the idle classes of a country" (51). For the upper classes, emotion replaces labor; their "work," however, involves the corruption of emotion, framing "passion" as a destructive quality. Henry often ties class and emotion together:

…how delightful other people's emotions were! --much more delightful than their ideas it seemed to him. One's own soul, and the passions of one's friends -- those were the fascinating things in life. He pictured to himself with silent amusement the tedious luncheon that he had missed…the whole conversation would have been about the feeding of the poor and the necessity for model lodging-houses. Each class would have preached the importance of those virtues, for whose exercise there was no necessity in their own lives. The rich would have spoken on the value of thrift, and the idle grown eloquent over the dignity of labour. (16)

One of the first things that Basil learns about Dorian, similarly, is from their mutual acquaintance, who says, "Quite forget what he does -- afraid he -- doesn't do anything -- oh, yes, plays the piano -- or is it the violin…" (11). While he is interested in music, it is never an occupation in the professional sense of the word. This creative sterility will also emerge as one of Dorian's fundamental characteristics, and the quality simultaneously emphasizes Basil's role as artist (creator of the image).

I want to argue that the way that Wilde portrays the self through

portraiture reveals his perception of the human condition as a naturally fractured state. By focusing on the upper class, he is able to move beyond certain middle class ideals, such the association between morality and labor, or immorality and beauty. Even the concept of the unified self emerges from the middle class, as I have shown in the last chapter; Wilde's work is to destabilize this unified self and prove it to be an illusion. He expresses and reveals this illusion as such through the medium of art. By using the portrait as a mirror, for example, or by separating the public and private selves, the novel creates an irreducibly fractured representation of the self, both visually and textually.

## THE PORTRAIT AS MIRROR: RECOGNIZING (OR MISRECOGNIZING) THE SELF IN THE GLASS

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* reveals a multitude of ways in which the self is visually and otherwise fractured. Wilde reveals these fractures through the equation of the portrait and the mirror. Dorian essentially attempts to use the two for the same function. He intends to use the painting as "the most magical of mirrors," a device through which he can see his own physical and spiritual identity reflected back to him: "As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul" (107). The portrait thus has a claim to visual objectivity and reality. As a mirror, it only "reveal[s]" the self, rather than indicating a representation of a visually-constituted self in its own right. I will argue that Wilde stages this claim to objectivity as an illusion: the self that is produced in the portrait overtly claims objective truth, but in fact reveals the performative nature of social identity.

As time passes, the visual resemblance between Dorian's body and the portrait (which he interprets as the physical manifestation of his soul) becomes increasingly disparate: "[he would stand] with a mirror, in front of the portrait...looking now at the evil and aging face on the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed back at him from the polished glass. The very sharpness of the contrast used to quicken his sense of pleasure" (128). The divergence between the mirror and the portrait indicates their ability to reflect different kinds

of reality. In this way, the portrait itself destabilizes the structure of a singular reality. Its ability to reveal that which is hidden to the mirror (and by extension to the observer) gives primacy to art's representation of reality -- it is able to reveal both "surface and symbol," as Wilde puts it in his preface.

The interpretation of these different aspects of art, however, is potentially dangerous: Wilde says that though "all art is at once surface and symbol," "those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril," and similarly, "those who read the symbol do so at their peril" (4). The act of reading and interpreting art is linked to the act of recognition -- if the viewer recognizes or imposes an interpretation on the work of art, the consequences might not be attributed to the work of art itself, but rather to the viewer. The importance of the viewer's role in the of looking and interpreting can also be found in *Salome*, where the act of looking becomes physically dangerous. For Wilde, to interpret or "recognize" the symbols (via looking) can be equally dangerous, implying that balancing the dual nature of art (surface and symbol) is of fundamental importance to the human condition.

The first and perhaps most important effect of the portrait is the recognition and revelation that it induces in Dorian: when he sees the portrait for the first time, "a look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time…The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before" (27). The act of viewing the portrait instigates a state of

awakening consciousness for Dorian -- a movement from ignorance to knowledge. The revelation of the portrait is similar to the Fall, representing his loss of innocence and the beginning of the decline of Dorian's character into moral depravity. Recognition is therefore dangerous -- it represents a coming of age and a consequent degeneration.

Like the child in Lacan's mirror theory, Dorian's recognition is instigated and affirmed by others in his environment, who project their desires onto him. Basil is obsessed with his beauty, while Henry emphasizes his ability to manipulate others with that beauty: "Life has everything in store for you, Dorian. There is nothing that you, with your extraordinary good looks, will not be able to do… your victories…are brought to you. No, you must keep your good looks…" (104). He learns from these men that his potential is based solely on his physical appearance: without his beauty, he would almost lose his personhood/individuality itself. This definition of selfhood is the exact opposite of Jane Eyre's model, which promotes morality while denigrating physical beauty.

In this respect, as well, his personality is almost completely embodied by the portrait -- his power is based on his physical expression of self. The physical expression of the self, it was believed in the Victorian period, could be decoded and used to understand the internal character: "Innately present character traits were not the only indicators of individuality which were believed, at least by some, to be decipherable from a body's appearance…actions come to show their

traces on human faces, rather than that physiological characteristics are invariably indicative of a predisposition to criminal activity" (Flint, 18). *Jane Eyre* depends on a similar model, using the physical self to understand the internal, hidden self. This is most conspicuous in the case of the aristocracy, who are represented as explicitly putting stock in physiognomy. To a lesser extent, Jane herself also creates and perpetuates the model: through the creation of her portraits, she puts emphasis on the accurate "reading" of the exterior as a way to interpret the interior. Flint cites Dorian Gray as another prime example of this belief in the semiotic properties of the physical self.

For Dorian, however, these signs have been displaced from the body to the portrait. Wilde thus takes the peculiarly Victorian concept of physiognomy and subverts it: even if actions leave physical, legible traces on the body, he seems to say, there is no guarantee that these signs will be made available for recognition. The fiction of the portrait, in some ways, is that it is a mirror: but if the mirror is hidden, and the line of the gaze disrupted, then the process falls apart. Because of this visual imbalance, Dorian wields power through his apparent purity that allows him to manipulate those around him. At the same time, however, the portrait as an object is a vulnerability for Dorian, and he lives in fear that it will be discovered. He thus remains subject to the portrait, his power balanced by susceptibility.

This fear of discovery is linked to recognition -- as Dorian has recognized

himself in the portrait, he fears that others will do the same if granted visual access. Dorian becomes self-aware enough to realize the vulnerability implied by this recognition by viewing the portrait, which seems to promote this kind of self-consciousness. Dorian's recognition of self, however, is predicated on the subjective perspectives of those around him: he recognizes what others see (or want to see). His understanding of his self is externally constituted. As Lacan argues in his seminar, "The Mirror Stage," the moment at which the child recognizes itself in the mirror also constitutes a moment of fundamental misrecognition: "this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction" (503). The recognition is instituted by an external source. The ideology of the unified self that Lacan propounds, however, is reversed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. As Dorian becomes a composite of the desires of "the Other," his body, the physical locus of self, similarly diverges from its natural, unified state. He splits (or doubles) in a fashion that is materially represented through the disconnect between his face in the mirror and in the face in the portrait. The project of Wilde's novel is thus to represent the production of the self in such a way that it is always inherently fractured and disunified.

## FRACTURING THE SELF

In the last chapter, I described a process that I termed "a fracturing of the self," which I used to analyze the way in which portraiture functions in *Jane Eyre*. As Jane addresses herself as subject in the text, and visually creates that subject through portraiture, I have argued, the self becomes increasingly abstracted; the novel is thus able to represent multiple facets of Jane's character, resulting in a seemingly more accurate representation of her internality. This abstraction and fracturing also acts as a kind of shield, preventing Jane's observers from gaining access to her internality, and giving her the space for self-creation. This ideology of self-creation, I ultimately conclude, is itself an illusion. The novel condenses back into a single subject, a movement that reveals a fiction about the self and subjectivity that is central to the bourgeois ideology that shapes the realist novel in this period.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, this fracturing is similarly an essential part of the text, but is both accomplished in a different way and represents a completely different critical relationship to it. While Jane's portrait is created by herself, representing her own perception of her physicality (as well as an associated claim about her morality), Dorian's portrait is produced by a professional artist with his own motives (and the lofty goal of "a new ideal" or "a new school of art"). His painting is represented as a mirror in itself, while his

youth and beauty is a mask (218). Jane's realism, meanwhile, links itself to a healthy sense of morality in itself -- the truth claim of realism linking itself to a kind of internal, moral truth. For Dorian, the truth claim is something to be interpreted, circumvented, and is in fact representative of his moral degeneration. The same artistic style therefore possesses opposite meanings.

Most of the fracturing of self that occurs in *Jane Eyre* is metaphorical or only textual in nature, so that only the reader is privy to its existence. Wilde's novel, however, takes the fracturing of self to new, literal extremes, with the embodiment of the alternate self in the portrait. As a kind of supernatural extension of this fragmentation of self, the portrait gains a level of individual life distinct from Dorian: Basil notices that the painting's alterations appear to have come from within, as though "through some strange quickening of inner life" (156). As a separate entity, with its own existence in the world, it exhibits influence over its human counterpart. It is not just the observation and the gaze itself that corrupts Dorian, but the way in which his sins have become embodied and physically manifested. The portrait itself is the means by which his corruption is furthered, and ultimately the means by which he is destroyed. Dorian gives voice to this life more explicitly earlier in the text: "There is something fatal about a portrait. It has a life of its own" (117). Dorian simply "glance[s]" at the painting, and experiences "an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil," an emotion that is so unexplained and violent that it is "as though [the feeling] had been suggested to

him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips" (157). The painting's influence on Dorian therefore seems almost as powerful as his influence over it. Just by looking at it, the corruption visually portrayed on the canvas becomes actively manifested into the physical world. When Basil asks Dorian "Why is your friendship so fatal to young men?" (149), the reader hears an echo of Dorian's statement about the portrait, an echo of the portrait's influence on him and on the world beyond the reflection of the self. More generally, the novel seems to imply that there is something fatal about being desired at all. Wilde also makes this connection in *Salome*, where he stresses the relationship between the gaze (as a function of desire) and violence.

That the portrait is intimately related to Dorian's self and yet remains a separate, potentially living entity raises questions about the "real" Dorian Gray. Almost immediately after the painting is completed, Dorian begins to cry, apparently out of jealousy: "Every moment that passes takes something from me and gives something to it. Oh, if it were only the other way!" (29). Basil and Henry subsequently begin to talk about "the real Dorian Gray." Henry uses the phrase to mean that Dorian's new attachment to his youth and beauty is a natural, "real" part of his personality; through this slightly cryptic phrase, he claims that he has simply revealed the truth of Dorian's nature, the "reality" of him. This question of "reality" is emphasized later in the scene as Basil again refers to the painting as "the real Dorian," though he says "At least you are like it in

appearance. But it will never alter" (32). This situation, the natural order of things, is obviously reversed as Dorian becomes physically unchanging, and the portrait degenerates. The separation between the "reality" of Dorian's nature and its surface qualities remains: the portrait reveals the self, while Dorian's body hides it. By producing multiple realities, the portrait itself not only reveals the self, but also destabilizes it. Creating a disjuncture between reality and image leads to a further fracturing of the self.

When Basil offers to destroy the portrait ("What is it but canvas and color?"), Dorian both establishes the painting as the equivalent of a person and merges himself with it in a sudden display of narcissism: "Don't Basil…It would be murder…I am in love with it, Basil. It is a part of myself" (30). Dorian elevates the portrait, but does not address Basil's claim, which draws attention to the surface of the image and the means by which it was produced. As a response to Dorian's claim about the painting, Basil satirically speaks as if it were Dorian himself: "…as soon as you are dry, you shall be varnished, and framed…Then you can do what you like with yourself" (30). This elevation refigures the way that the reader considers the work of art -- the man and the portrait become equivalents, on some level; the way in which the self is represented and performed cause the destabilization and fracturing of that self.

Wilde links art and life explicitly, referring to what he calls the "unreality" of both:

> For the canons of good society are, or should be the same as the canons of art. Form is absolutely essential to it. It should have the dignity of a ceremony, as well as its unreality …Is insincerity such a terrible thing? I think not. It is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities…[Dorian] used to wonder at the shallow psychology of those who conceive the ego in man as a thing simple, permanent, reliable, and of one essence. To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead. (142)

The fracturing and multiplying of the self is therefore described as an inevitable part of life. The "double life" that Dorian lives is merely an exaggerated form of any natural human life, in some capacity. The artificiality and "unreality" of society, with its attention to superficiality and ceremony, stands in stark contrast to the internal life of its participants. Dorian's multiple selves parallel those of Sibyl Vane, who is "all the great heroines of the world in one" (56-57). Dorian says that this fractured, disunified quality makes her "more than an individual," but in fact it would seem that the opposite is true: her occupation of these different roles and the inscription of her by the different interpreters *reduces* her to a symbol. She may be more than an individual, but she is also slightly less than human. Sibyl, like Salome, becomes inscribed and reconstituted into various roles by her observers. This ultimately results in Dorian's idealization of her, his disillusionment when he realizes her humanity, and her suicide. By idealizing her and reducing her to a symbol that can be perpetually re-written, Dorian insures her destruction. While she can be all of the characters that she pretends to be, she can never be Sibyl Vane -- her art and her self are mutually exclusive.

By understanding the nature of the self as inherently “complex” and “multiform,” Dorian denies the singular understanding of self that “shallow psychology” propounds. In this kind of psychology, one hears echoes of the middle class ideology of *Jane Eyre*, which requires the simplification of its originally multiple heroine into a more unified self. For Dorian, unity or harmony of self can only be achieved through death. When he destroys the image, he destroys himself; the image and his physical body merge in this way. When Basil and Dorian have the exchange “You told me you had destroyed it.” “I was wrong. It has destroyed me” (156), Dorian uses a chiastic construction to indicate the damaging effects of Basil’s ideal. The chiasmus acts as a kind of equation, creating a cyclical pattern of mutual destruction that ultimately unifies them. The self is thus naturally divided, a characteristic that can be seen in terms of the performative nature of the self as well.

## THE ART EXHIBITION AS AN EXPLORATION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SELVES

The separation between public and private selves (or to phrase it differently, the true self and the performatively constituted self) lies at the heart of the novel. This separation is itself actively produced; Dorian's impulse to shield the private self (represented by the portrait) is predicated on his initial recognition of himself in the image. The painting makes him aware of his own beauty, and as he gains consciousness, his actions and morality begin to be based around this consciousness. Before the creation of the portrait and his subsequent self-awareness, his youth was equated with his innocence and ignorance of the "domination" he exerted over Basil, Sibyl, and others in his social environment. After his meetings with Henry and himself (in painted form), he becomes something distinctly more sinister – someone who is aware of his manipulative power, and uses it however he likes. The fact that his body possesses this power is not the only problem. Rather, his awareness and use of his power threaten the fabric of society. Dorian disrupts the societal order in the same way that Salome does with her deviant behavior; in the same way, he begins to become monstrous as his significations start to mix.

The portrait creates the expectation of a mirror, the assumption of a correlation between internal and external, between body and soul. This mirroring process, however, becomes corrupted. While the painting is "a visible symbol of

the degradation of sin" (96), Dorian is the "visible symbol" of Henry's philosophy of "new Hedonism" (25). Both are "visible symbols," but only one is revealed to the world, and therefore the true face of Henry's proposed ideal is hidden. This act of masking the true nature of the symbol is fundamental to the way in which the novel creates meaning. The assumption is always that the observer will be able to correctly interpret the interior from the exterior: Henry notes from his initial impression of Dorian that "there was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world" (19). The assumption implicit in Henry's observation of Dorian is that one can "feel" something about his internal purity -- that "something in his face" is enough to make the viewer "trust" not just him or his internal purity, but that there is a relationship between his physical purity/beauty and his internal state. This logic is made explicit through the text, as well: "Even those who had heard the most evil things against him…could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw him" (128). The reader is associated with the Dorian's observers within the novel, and is therefore not encouraged to question why this relationship between internal and external is essential the novel's structure.

Dorian's power comes through his physical appearance or presence. For Basil, "his merely visible presence…defines for [him] the lines of a fresh school [of art]" (14), while Sibyl insists to her brother that "If only you saw him, you

would think him the most wonderful person in the world…To see him is to worship him; to know him is to trust him" (69). Sibyl's emphasis on sight corresponds with Dorian's superficial existence on the physical plane; she misrecognizes him as "Prince Charming." Basil, too, falls prey to the power of Dorian's appearance, assuring him: "Mind you, I don't believe these rumors at all. At least, I can't believe them when I see you. Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed" (148). These characters immediately seem naïve to the reader, who knows the extent of the corruption of Dorian's nature; their belief in physiognomy, though it is not explicitly stated, is therefore linked to a kind of wilful ignorance. By trusting that there is a visually obvious correlation between the external features and the soul, these characters also display a faith in the inherent legibility of the internal self. Because the self has been translated into visual terms, the possibility of reading and understanding the soul is left open. Without Dorian's voluntary consent -- he must allow Basil to read/see him -- their assumed knowledge amounts to misrecognition.

The belief that there is a visually obvious correspondence between the external features and the soul allows the characters to fit Dorian into their conception of society, despite the increasing anxiety that surrounds him. They are able to accept him because, as Wilde puts it: "Society…feels instinctively that manners are of more importance than morals…" (141). By limiting their perception of Dorian's nature to his externally produced self, Wilde implicitly

indicates, society ascribes more importance to the superficial self, rejecting the unpleasant truths that might arise from delving below a person's surface. Even though his deeds speak of internal corruption, the power of Dorian's beauty supersedes them. The act of viewing art therefore becomes a kind of metaphor for true perception in the face of the deception that Dorian's beauty embodies.

Viewing art is also a literal act in the text -- one that is associated with violence and immorality. References to museums and exhibitions circulate around the edges of the novel. As an artist, Basil is often linked to them; as the portrait is a work of art, it is inherently linked to the concept of exhibition. The structure of the museum is thus a presence that constructs and re-forms the heart of the text. For example, when Henry is initially speaking to Basil about the piece, he says "It is your best work, Basil…You must certainly send it next year to the Grosvenor" (6). Basil replies "I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it" (6). What Henry views as a means to gain professional fame, Basil views as a negative revealing of the private self. The fear of exposure is therefore is not a fear of misinterpretation -- it is the fear of true recognition.

Because Dorian "recognizes" the portrait as a manifestation of himself, a projection of his soul into the world, he accepts the accompanying dangers associated with this projection. His consciousness of this danger is manifested as anxiety surrounding the exhibition of the portrait: just as the portrait "[holds] the secret of his life, and [tells] his story," he fears that it might be revealed if it is

exhibited to the world: "...a strange sense of terror creeping over him. Was the world going to be shown his secret? Were people to gape at the mystery of his life?" (113). In order to preserve this mystery, he tightly controls access to the portrait, preventing Basil from exhibiting it and locking it in the attic. By controlling the gaze and who gazes on the portrait, he also controls potential interpretations of the image; part of his anxiety surrounding exhibition is not only the revelation itself, but the potential conclusions that the public might draw from the image.

He attempts to rationalize away his visceral terror of exposure, but his fear persists: "He was quite conscious that [the portrait] would tell them nothing. It was true that the portrait still preserved, under all the foulness an ugliness of the face, its marked likeness to himself; but what could they learn from that? …Yet he was afraid" (140). Likeness, as Catherine Soussloff defines it, relates to "the visualized aspects of a singular human being that correspond to an empirical reality" (6). She goes on to indicate that likeness is not a necessity of portraiture, distinguishing between likeness and recognition; recognition, she asserts, is "less precise than identification…[and] turns resemblance into a matter of viewing, rather than maintaining that a standard of likeness resides in the portrait itself" (6). By separating identification from recognition, Soussloff indicates that portraiture, as an artistic genre, depends heavily on the viewer for the creation of its meaning. The portrait is not simply an objective representation presented by

the artist; it must interact with the viewer, and the viewer must interpret the image. Exhibition and recognition are therefore inextricably linked as concerns with the genre itself. Dorian's concern is based on a fear of *recognition*, which is not necessarily dependent on empirical reality; the portrait bears "a marked likeness" to him, but what is more concerning is the interpretation which might be drawn from it -- that the truth of Dorian's internal state might be extrapolated from a proper reading of the image. This removes the fear of the gaze from the subject upon himself, onto the active gaze of the external observer; when it cannot be controlled, it is dangerous for its interpretive capabilities.

Keeping the self hidden is in some way an essential part of being a member of society: "Society -- civilized society, at least -- is never very ready to believe anything to the detriment of those who are both rich and fascinating. It instinctively feels that manners are of more importance than morals…" (141). Despite the artificiality of the externally produced self, society is incapable of penetrating this superficial facade to gain access to the hidden, internal truth -- or perhaps more accurately, it refuses to read beneath the surface. This passage is also a comment on class: "[Dorian's] great wealth was a certain element of security" (141). Society still prioritizes the qualities "rich and fascinating" over morality. His class and social status is therefore another kind of shield between his interiority and the external world. By using class to disguise the self, Wilde once again devalues class as an identifier; only by moving past this superficial

characterization of self can one reach the hidden, universal human truth. Class functions only as a artificial factor of identity, descriptive rather than constitutive.

The tension between what is revealed and what is hidden is mediated in terms of the institution of the art exhibition. Walter Benjamin identifies such a development over the course of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth: the hidden art that was used for ritual, magical, or religious purposes slowly becomes replaced by secular, exhibited art: "With the emancipation of the various art practices from ritual go increasing opportunities for the exhibition of their products" (Benjamin, 225). The implicit mysticism associated with hidden art gives Dorian's supernatural portrait other connotations: by keeping the "secret of his soul" hidden, he essentially maintains control over the magical process by which his soul is artistically reproduced.

As Barbara Black points out in her book *On Exhibit*, museums themselves were newly emerging in the Victorian period, and gaining new cultural momentum. She argues further that the museum functioned to "[illuminate] the ideological workings of Victorian society and literature," working as a symbol of such things as "the growing hegemony of the middle class…and the democratization of luxury" (Black, 4, 9). She describes the museum as "the people's instrument of power" (Black, 9) -- and in a way that power also turns in on itself, becoming a structure that encourages visual discipline of the artist, through the medium of their art. The way in which the museum functions as a

disciplinary apparatus is therefore in itself worth examining. These institutions function as an embodiment of the penetrative qualities of external vision. The threat of exhibition is thus representative of a kind of visual disciplinary structure. The escape from this external gaze, and the way that Dorian is able to regulate the viewership of his portrait, indicates the limitations of this structure. If visuality, like the novel, can function as a disciplinary apparatus, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* challenges these notions through stylistic inversion and the inclusion of supernatural elements. The text plays with this structure of power, but does not allow it to subdue the artistic force behind it.

As the portrait establishes the expectation of a one-to-one correlation between Dorian's body and soul, the novel makes its subject the increasing visual separation between the empirical reality of Dorian's physical appearance and his internal state and soul. The viewer's trust in his or her ability to interpret Dorian's physical appearance is betrayed, and this betrayal can only be revealed through the representation of reality through art. Portraiture becomes more true to life than a mirror, able to reveal more than the external superficial reading of a person's exterior. The question then becomes: why bother having a correlation between external appearance and soul in the first place? Wilde makes a point of inverting the (by this point) old-fashioned ideas about physiognomy, but at the same time the logic of his novel depends on the very correlation that he attempts to undermine. The answer to this question might lie in the nature of the

representation of art. The object that the novel focuses on is a painting, rather than a photograph or a mirror, which are more direct, unmediated ways of representing reality. The painted portrait, however, necessarily includes subjectivity in the way that it reproduces the world. The artist is a visual filter for the world, reproducing his own flawed vision onto a fixed medium.

The painting is still an interpretation. Because it is not a mirror, not a direct reflection of empirical reality, there is the space for interpretation that is otherwise denied the viewer. The interpretation of a painting is distinct from the interpretation of a mirror, because the figure of the artist adds another layer of visual mediation and interpretation, which the viewer must then re-interpret in turn. One of the most essential parts of art is its interpretation – the point at which the viewer, the artist, and the art object connect and speak to one another (see *Art and Illusion*, pg. 234). The correlation between exterior and interior that the novel depends on (though in an inverted form) is thus hidden – not destroyed. The connection is made apparent to the reader in such a way that the reader does not question it, but accepts it as a part of the logic of the novel: realist portraiture is inherently powerful and dangerous, and looking at it is potentially a revelatory act. Wilde builds on earlier Victorian realist fiction's foundations in this sense, rather than destroying them. He must first establish that foundation or accept some part of it as truthful in order to then subvert it.

# VISUAL MEDIATION: THE FIGURE OF THE ARTIST

The figure of the artist is obviously a primary concern of Wilde's, as he is interested in the production of art in addition to art's role in society in general. Basil Hallward can therefore be interpreted as the representative of many of Wilde's ideas surrounding the production of art, and how the artist creates and interacts with the world. Basil's production of a literal portrait also parallels Henry's production of Dorian as a metaphoric work of art; he claims that "to a large extent the lad was his own creation" (59). Dorian does not produce the portrait; he is himself produced, both in terms of his image and in a more literal, psychological sense. Henry and Basil therefore serve parallel roles in the novel, though the former possesses the Aesthetic Movement claim of the amorality of art, while the latter is more spiritually inclined. They represent different kinds of artistic attitudes toward the production of art, and ideas about the impact that art should have on society.

The portrait in *Jane Eyre*, in contrast, is a self-portrait. Because she is both the artist and the subject of the art, the realism of her self-portrait indicates her own clarity and accuracy of vision. Because she is both the artist and the subject of art, she is able to control access to the image and its interpretation. Additionally, the realism of her self-portrait indicates her own clarity of vision. Because clear vision (and the production of art it enables) is tied to the production

of middle class ideology, Jane's dual roles as artist and subject allow her to further emphasize her own morality.

By including the artist as a separate figure (or figures, if you include Henry as a kind of artist), Wilde is able to comment further on viewership and the role of the spectator as opposed to the producer of art. Dorian is the impotent, sterile art object, incapable of creation in his own right. He is not an artist in the technical sense: as Henry tells him, "I am so glad that you have never done anything, never carved a statue, or painted a picture, or produced anything outside of yourself! Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets" (214). Henry claims that Dorian's "self" is his art object. Dorian, however, is in some ways a reproduction in his own right -- depending on where the "true self" or "real self" that I have discussed earlier in regard to the portrait lies. Early in the novel, the characters refer to the portrait as "the real Dorian Gray." Dorian is therefore in some way a reproduction in his own right, both visually and ideologically. He thus begins to fit Benjamin's definition of mechanical reproduction -- he is a work of art without an aura. Like the image, which as Crary argues had at this period become abstracted from life, resulting in a "crisis of meaning," Dorian himself has become separated from reality. He becomes representative of the ways in which reality and the self have become increasingly destabilized.

The figure of the artist is also available as a scapegoat: some critics read

Basil as the instigator of Dorian's moral flaws. For example, in his article "A Tragedy of the Artist," Houston Baker interprets the text primarily through Basil's own failings as an artist. Because Basil is the initial creator of the artistic ideal, his production of the portrait is the instigation for Dorian's corruption: "The novel, in fact, can be seen as a tragedy of the artist, a work in which Wilde calls to account the overly self-conscious artist who projects his own personality too severely on the public" (Baker, 350). While this projection of the self, as I have argued, may be relevant in that it causes the self to fragment into multiple parts, I would argue that Baker's understanding of idealism could be made more complex. He argues, "It is important to realize, however, that Dorian is first of all an artistic ideal, and the corruption that he undergoes in his hedonistic pursuit of pleasure is the corruption of an artistic ideal" (Baker, 353). Even if Dorian is an artistic ideal, I believe Wilde's statement is more about the nature of ideology and idealism itself. In my understanding, Dorian's own emptiness allows the projection of external ideals onto and into him. Dorian himself is not corrupted: he merely becomes an embodiment of an ideal, and therefore appears morally corrupt because idealizing something inherently corrupts it. In the process of creating an ideal, whether in theory or visually in terms of art, the objective purity of the subject is necessarily corrupted; therefore the process of idealizing is morally suspect in itself. The ideal, then, is a not corrupted, but is itself a corrupting influence. The portrait itself, as it is similarly a representation of an

ideal (as far as Dorian himself is a physical realization of that ideal, and it reproduces him), is just a more transparent transcription of Basil's artistic ideal. It reveals the corrupting influences inherent within it.

Basil expresses many of the same concerns about visuality that Dorian develops later in the novel. Basil, like Dorian, claims the portrait as a kind of mirror: "...every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter, who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul" (9). The artist, however, is the active producer of the image; this is not a passive reflection. The act of creation itself is involved in the transference or translation of the self into color and canvas. In this passage, Basil describes the creation of art in terms of a process of unveiling what was already present: the creation of the portrait "reveals," rather than indicating the production of a completely new object. According to Basil, the secrets entailed are therefore those of a fundamentally internal nature, connected solely to the artist; it is the mechanism by which the internal is made external.

Like Dorian, Basil fears the exhibition of the portrait and the potential ways that it might be interpreted: "...without intending it, I have put into it some expression of all this curious artistic idolatry…the world might guess it, and I will not bare my soul to their shallow prying eyes. My heart shall never be put under

their microscope" (14-15). Basil's soul is not physically embodied by the portrait in the same way that Dorian's is; what he seems to mean here is that the ideal that he "worships," that he understands through Dorian's image, is made manifest through his creation of the portrait. The danger of an ideal is that the process of elevating a person is dehumanizing, as in the case of Sibyl Vane, and ultimately deadly.

# CONCLUSION

If the novel *Jane Eyre* acts on the reader as a disciplinary apparatus, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* reveals this function and essentially destroys it. As I have argued in the last chapter, Bronte ultimately condenses and simplifies Jane's multiplicity of selves; she becomes reinscribed into middle class ideology, and her relation to visuality mirrors this effect. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, conversely, emphasizes this "fracturing of the self" to the point of exaggeration. The process of unity of self that is advocated in *Jane Eyre* is represented as destructive and unnatural. As the only way that the portrait and Dorian become re-unified is through death, it seems to present a model that is the opposite of *Jane Eyre's* movement toward singularity and harmony. Wilde's concern is with what he considers to be the natural state of the human, and he uses portraiture to reveal the dangers implicit in the simplification of the self. The only way to unify the self, it seems, is to destroy part of the self. True unity, with a complete soul, is therefore impossible.

Wilde's representation of a naturally fractured self anticipates modernist portraiture in painting. In an era in which creating visual realism manually was obsolete, portrait artists began to rely on "recognition," rather than "likeness." Soussloff references modernist artists such as Picasso and Warhol, claiming: "The expectation of the truth claim of portraiture has allowed artists…to use effacement of physical characteristics as an effective means of highlighting the

contingency of resemblance and, consequently, of emphasizing the other pole of the functional dialectic of portraiture, interiority" (6). This attention to subjectivity and interiority, as represented externally in portraiture, thus has its roots in the development of the camera in the Victorian period. "Photography," Soussloff writes, "upholds the exteriority and truth claim of the portrait genre" (7). Because painters were no longer bound to the conventions of the traditional reproduction of self, they were free to explore other methods of expression. The performative self remains a fundamental aspect of these kinds of images; the artist's goal, however, is no longer a slavish attention to the referent object, but rather the exploration of other forms of self-expression and production. Wilde's literary work similarly represents a conscious detachment of "surface" and "symbol"; Wilde's project was not to create "vulgar realism," but rather to explore alternate forms of self-expression that had been rejected by the middle class.

**APPENDIX**

Figure 1: Beardsley, Aubrey. *The Climax*. 1893. *ARTSTOR*. Web. 24 April 2014.

Figure 2: Beardsley, Aubrey. *Dancer's Reward*. 1893. *ARTSTOR*. Web. 24 April 2014.

Figure 3: Beardsley, Aubrey. *The Toilette of Salome II*. 1893. *ARTSTOR*. Web. 24 April 2014.

Figure 4: Beardsley, Aubrey. *The Peacock Skirt*. 1893. *ARTSTOR*. Web. 24 April 2014.

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