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# Societal Policing of the Internal Self: Patriarchal Forces, "Correction" of Gender Performance, and Homosexuality in Victorian Literature

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# Patriarchal Forces, "Correction" of Gender Performance, and Homosexuality in Victorian Literature

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## I. Introduction

During the mid to late nineteenth century, the concept of homosexuality slowly emerged from the scientific and legal discourse of the time period, during which time it transformed from a specific sex act between two men, or sodomy, into an identity that the greater Victorian society branded as simultaneously criminal, insane, and hermaphroditic.[1] Although scholars such as Michel Foucault pinpoint 1870 as the approximate date of this emergence, traces of unacknowledged homosexual desire permeated popular British literature published in the early 1860s.[2] Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1859-60), for example, describes a woman named Marian Halcombe, who is not only described as physically and temperamentally hermaphroditic, but as also having inappropriate "husband-like" feelings toward her half-sister. *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) by Mary Elizabeth Braddon follows a man named Robert Audley, who is so distraught by his childhood friend's disappearance that he monomaniacally searches for him. In the midst of this, Audley falls in love with the missing man's sister, who looks, sounds, and acts suspiciously like his childhood friend. This ultimately suggests that Audley diverts his romantic feelings for his friend toward someone whose sex makes her a more socially acceptable partner. As the nineteenth century progressed, queer tendencies such Halcombe's and Audley's were for the first time fully recognized as homosexual desires. While some unconsciously diverted their feelings into the realm of the socially acceptable, others privately acknowledged their homosexual desires as an unalterable aspect of their identity. Their homosexuality was then closeted and banished into the realm of secrets for the sake of passing as "normal" within Victorian society.

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[1] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction* (New York: Random House, 1990), 43.
[2] Ibid.

In order to understand the development of an acknowledged homosexual identity, it is imperative to examine the competing understandings of homosexuality that existed during the late nineteenth century, both within the emerging homosexual community in Victorian Britain, as well as within the greater Victorian society. Within the male homosexual community, sexual relationships between men were incorporated into greater cultural movements that stressed male bonds and self-improvement, thus rendering their understanding of homosexuality as one closely associated with intellectual and cultural growth. Literary scholar Brian Reade identifies two distinct homosexual sentiments that emerged by 1870: the intellectual Oxford movement, which stressed a Hellenistic ideal, and muscular Christianity, which was encouraged by Matthew Arnold and emphasized athletic comradeships.[3] Both, as Reade argues, encouraged emotional friendship between males and the general unimportance of women, allowing some, particularly within the intellectual movement, to justify promiscuous affection between men.[4] As Linda Dowling argues in her book *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, the emphasis on Hellenism by many Oxford intellectuals was a partial response to a generalized fear that Victorian Britain was culturally stagnant and in decline.[5] These intellectuals hoped that ancient Greek ideals regarding self-development and diversity of talents would reinvigorate British culture.[6] This being said, many homosexual men within this intellectual movement, such as Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds, viewed Hellenism's emphasis on Ancient Greek methods of intellectual growth, which included pederasty between educators and students, as a means of legitimizing male homosexual relationships in the cultural mindset of greater Victorian

[3] Brian Reade, introduction to *Sexual Heretics: Male Homosexuality in English Literature from 1850 to 1900* ed. Brian Reade (New York: Coward-McCann, Inc., 1970), 29.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1994), 31.
[6] Ibid.

society.[7] In this sense, the Oxford movement served as a vehicle for validating homosexual sentiment in addition to defining it as an integral aspect of this culture of self-improvement.

This Hellenistic understanding of homosexuality as an aspect of intellectual growth was nevertheless at odds with the views of same-sex attraction held by the greater Victorian society, in which it was criminalized and generally viewed as immoral. In England, sodomy was first declared a felony in 1533, when Henry VIII outlawed it as part of a larger attempt to incorporate ecclesiastical laws into the rule of the state when breaking with the Catholic Church.[8] Obviously, this melding of state and ecclesiastical laws rendered the "criminal" and the "immoral" indistinguishable, especially in regard to acts such as sodomy. As homosexuality gradually came to be associated with a type of person, moreover, this stigma of immorality and criminalization became attached not only to the sexual act, but also to the identity. Documenting the various representations and theorizations of homosexuality in his 1894 pamphlet *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, John Addington Symonds writes, "It is the common belief that a male who loves his own sex must be despicable, degraded, depraved, vicious, and incapable of humane or generous sentiments."[9] In other words, in Victorian Britain, male homosexuals encompassed the same sense of immorality that was initially associated with the act of sodomy.

Furthermore, this focus on homosexuality's criminality and immorality illustrated the ways in which same-sex love was inherently subversive to established gender norms in late-Victorian Britain. In addition to the ways in which it was labeled criminal and immoral, Symonds, in *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, also explores the ways in which homosexuality was rendered pathological by summarizing Krafft-Ebing's conclusion, as detailed in his 1889 study

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[7] Ibid., 31-5.
[8] Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 104.
[9] John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics Being an Inquiry into the Phenomenon of Sexual Inversion* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1971), 11.

*Psychopatha Sexualis*, that "sexual inversion," or homosexuality, was an "acquired form of neuropathy."[10] When coupled with the perceived criminality of homosexuality in Victorian Britain, this need to transform homosexuality into a mental illness points to a greater desire on the part of the larger Victorian society to stigmatize it as inherently deviant and "othered." As Foucault argues in *Madness and Civilization*, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, "Madness was individualized, strangely twinned with crime, at least linked with it by a proximity which had not been called into question."[11] This connection lies in the fact that both madness and crime are deviations from the social norm and have a history of being treated as such. As he remarks,

> Until the seventeenth century, evil in all its most violent and inhuman forms could not be dealt with and punished unless it was brought into the open. The light in which confession was made and punishment exuded could alone balance the darkness from which evil issued.[12]

By using "evil," a sweeping and generalized term, Foucault not only highlights the ways in which deviance is negatively viewed, but also shows how people often fail to differentiate between types of deviance, whether it be erratic behavior due to mental illness, or an explicit breach of the law. Regardless, the purpose of society searching for a pathological explanation for homosexuality, in addition to rendering it criminal and immoral, is to differentiate it from the established norm and to give it specific reasons to be policed. This ultimately gives further weight to the Oxford movement's emphasis on homosexuality as a method of self-improvement, which could thus be viewed as an effort to combat this pathological, criminalized perception.

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[10] Ibid., 43-5.
[11] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Routledge, 2007), 217.
[12] Ibid., 62-3.

For the greater Victorian society, the established norm from which homosexuality deviates is entrenched in binary understandings of gender performance as well as class. As Thomas Laqueur argues in his essay "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," the gender binary emerged during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a result of an increased emphasis on biological differences between men and women in order to justify social and political differences between them.[13] This ultimately gave biological support to the concept of separate spheres, thus solidifying the connection between sex and gender performance. In Victorian Britain, these spheres not only have specific attributes attached to them, but are also dictated by the middle class. With the Industrial Revolution increasing the wealth and opportunities available to the middle class, and the Reform Bill of 1832 expanding franchise to those who owned or rented landed property worth at least £10, the British middle class' economic and political power increased exponentially during the nineteenth century.[14] This increase in power resulted in new ways of ostentatiously proving one's class status through gender performance. Middle class women, for example, stayed in the home and oversaw the domestic sphere as a means of showcasing their husband's wealth. Moreover, because the middle class' power and wealth helped make it one of the most influential blocs in Victorian Britain, the gender values it championed proved instrumental in defining the established norm. Consequently, women of all classes—including the working class and aristocracy—who ventured outside the home and thus deviated from this established norm risked sexual

[13] Thomas Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," *Representations* 14 (1986): 18.
[14] George Woodbridge, *The Reform Bill of 1832* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1970), 68.

harassment.[15] As historian Judith Walkowitz argues in her book *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*,

> Being out in public…was for a woman to enter an immoral domain…The cityscape of strangers and secrets, so stimulating to the male flaneur, was interpreted as a negative environment for respectable women, one that threatened to erase the protective identity conferred on them by family, residence, and social distinctions.[16]

By stating that the public sphere was "an immoral domain" that threatened to "erase" women's "protective identity" of respectability, Walkowitz illustrates the strength of the relationship between middle class gender expectations and the established norm. Those who failed to adhere to these norms risked losing their respectability and thus falling into the same category of deviance, immorality, and criminality that was conferred upon the mentally ill and homosexuals. Therefore, the established norm within Victorian Britain can be defined as one that reinforces middle class expectations of gender performance.

Just as Victorian women of all classes were expected to remain in the domestic sphere, men were also expected to exude certain gendered traits as part of this cultural adherence to the middle class norm. As literary scholar Ed Cohen argues in the book *Talk on the Wilde Side*, literature throughout the nineteenth century emphasized self-control and somatic discipline as the cornerstone for middle class masculine performance.[17] Drawing from the early nineteenth century writings of Isaac Taylor, Cohen specifically notes that young men were advised to "avoid idleness and waste" and to "regulate [their] conduct" so as to "bring [their bodies] and [their] will into alignment with [their] 'duty.'"[18] Therefore, middle class masculine ideals not only revolve around self-control and discipline, but as the phrase "avoid idleness and waste"

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[15] Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 46.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*, 32-3.
[18] Ibid., 33.

alludes, they revolve around a type of self-control that specifically resulted in *production*. This production, moreover, could manifest itself in middle class ideals of capitalist industriousness, in which men produce goods or services and thus contribute to the national economy in some way. This also manifested in an understanding of production that was inherently linked to sexual reproduction.[19] As a result, "unproductive" acts such as masturbation were, much like homosexuality, labeled deviant and unnatural, and were subject to policing by doctors who transformed the acts into pathologies.[20]

In addition to self-discipline and productivity, honesty and openness were also an integral aspect of the respectable middle class masculine ideal, traits that homosexuality specifically threatened to undermine in the greater cultural mindset. As historian H. G. Cocks succinctly argues in *Nameless Offences: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century*, "Candor and truth functioned as socially necessary indicators of integrity in an industrial society based on commercial credit and became the corresponding cornerstones of Victorian masculinity."[21] In other words, the commercial productivity that was expected of men within this middle class minded society hinged upon a man's trustworthiness. This resulted in the absorption of "candor" and "truth" into Victorian masculine gender performance. Conversely, "deceit" and "mendacity" were considered "feminine vices" simply because they countered these masculine ideals.[22] Naturally enshrouded in secrecy due to its illegality and deviance from the status quo, homosexuality was simultaneously viewed as a threat to, as well as the antithesis of, these masculine traits. Furthermore, since "deceit" was not only "anti-masculine," but rather was

[19] Ibid., 39-41.
[20] Ibid., 45-55.
[21] H.G. Cocks, *Nameless Offenses: Homosexual Desire in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2003), 5.
[22] Ibid.

specifically associated with the "feminine," the male homosexual's inability to openly declare his identity made him both an inadequate male and hermaphroditic, or simultaneously possessing male and female traits, in the greater Victorian cultural mindset.

Because homosexuality's deviance in Victorian culture is derived from its subversion of the established ideas of middle class gender performance, it therefore must be treated as a gender issue. Various scholars, including Eve Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet*, debate this assertion, arguing that in the twentieth century gender and sexuality "present two analytic axes that may productively be imagined as being distinct from one another," or in other words, that there is a concrete difference between choice in one's sexual partner and performing gender.[23] However, because homosexuality was only recently contrived in the nineteenth century, these two concepts are invariably linked. As Symonds notes, most of the leading theories circulating about homosexuality in the late nineteenth century centered on the homosexual's ambiguous, seemingly hermaphroditic gender performance. Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, for example, emphasized that the homosexual man suffered from "spiritual hermaphroditism," in which he possessed the physical body of a man, but the soul of a woman, thus resulting in his "feminine" tendencies, such as his sexual attraction to men.[24] Psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing also categorized homosexuality as an issue of gender performance, noting that homosexual men "dressed as far as possible in female clothes" and "preferred to consort with girls and help their mothers in the kitchen," or in other words, acted like women rather than men.[25] Although Krafft-Ebing depicted homosexual men performing highly specific, domestic gendered acts, homosexuality must be more broadly thought of as subverting traits associated with gender. As established earlier, being

[23] Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 30.
[24] Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, 84.
[25] Ibid., 58.

deceitful, not being productive, and showing a lack of self-discipline all deviate from the middle class expectations relating to masculinity. Therefore, homosexuality did not simply equate to acting "feminine," but rather was associated with failure to perform up to the standards of the Victorian masculine ideal.

This failure to perform according to Victorian standards of masculinity is exemplified in Oscar Wilde's 1891 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Initially described as an effeminate "lad," Dorian Gray quickly realizes his own homosexuality after gazing into a portrait painted of him by his admirer, Basil Hallward. During this time, Hallward and his friend Lord Henry Wotton fight over Gray, ultimately rendering Gray a feminized sexual object and illustrating the infiltration of heterosexual patriarchal values into homosexual relationships. Internalizing Hallward and Lord Henry's perception of him as a sexual object, Gray then wishes that he and his likeness could trade places. As a result, the figure in the portrait grows old and bears the grotesque physical marks of his sinful experiences, while his person remains forever young and beautiful. Shortly afterward, Gray's feminine traits quickly transition into a broadened failure to adhere to Victorian masculine standards through performance, or in other words, the willful and deceitful concealment of his true self. This performance manifests in two ways, the first being the concealment of his homosexuality, as seen when he claims to love Sibyl Vane, a young actress who coincidently performs for a living. The second manifestation of Gray's performance occurs when he conceals his criminality, which can be seen when Gray uses his perpetually youthful and innocent-looking face to hide the "touch of cruelty in his mouth" that appears on his portrait after rejecting Sibyl Vane and driving her to suicide.[26] In order to maintain his performances, Gray hides his portrait, and the crimes and homosexuality it represents, in an old

[26] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (New York: Random House, 1992), 103.

school room in his house. This serves as a literal and figurative "closet," or space in which his true self can exist without judgment from external society while he performs. Afterward, Gray's crimes proliferate and culminate in the murder of Hallward, further marring his portrait. Out of narcissistic self-pity, Gray then attempts to reverse the markings on the portrait by choosing not to corrupt a young girl named Hetty, hoping this one deed would counteract some of the crimes that he committed. Seeing that his portrait has the mark of a hypocrite, Gray then slashes it with a knife, destroying his portrait and killing himself.

From the "deceitful" aspects of performance to the emphasis on Gray's criminality, the events in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* illustrate that homosexuality in late Victorian British literature is invariably twinned with external patriarchal forces that regulate gender. As Gray's own homosexual self-identification and struggle to outwardly conform to societal values demonstrate, external forces that sought to police homosexuality as an issue of gender performance (by labeling it as deviant and criminal) became increasingly internalized in the consciousness of homosexuals. The vehicle that permits this internalization, moreover, is the closet, which Sedgwick defines as a "performance initiated by the speech act of a silence," or in other words, an outward performance that conforms with societal expectations while concealing one's true identity.[27] When one considers that this outward "performance" is synonymous with one's external gender performance, the closet can naturally be viewed as an internalization of the external policing forces that regulate gender. Furthermore, as these external forces become internalized, homosexuality as an issue of gender performance becomes increasingly irresolvable. Before, these external forces resolved or "corrected" undesirable gender performances so that they adhered to Victorian patriarchal understandings of the gender binary.

[27] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 3.

However, with this internalization, these "corrections" became nothing more than a self-policed veneer, or an outward performance that masked the resolute homosexual identity that lay beneath.

My thesis is twofold: first, as homosexuality is increasingly recognized as an identity, as opposed to a specific set of sex acts, external patriarchal forces that previously "corrected" it as an issue of gender performance became internalized in the homosexual's conception of self. Second, after the character self-identifies as homosexual, he becomes increasingly aware of the disconnect that exists between himself and the rigid gender expectations that the greater Victorian society expects him to uphold. The awareness of this disconnection ultimately results in the character's inability to "correct" his gender performance according to these Victorian patriarchal values. In proving this, I will illustrate how external patriarchal forces previously "corrected" homosocial tendencies and gender irregularities in novels written before 1870, specifically looking at Marian Halcombe in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*. Although Halcombe is a woman and lesbianism itself challenges patriarchal assumptions in ways that do not apply to male homosexuality, she nevertheless illustrates how homosexuality is treated as an issue of gender performance that can be "corrected" by patriarchal forces. Next, I will analyze how these external patriarchal forces, gender performance, and conceptions of self coalesce to create a homosexual identity that incorporates societal, heterosexual norms in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Lastly, I will reexamine the feasibility of "correcting" one's self according to these patriarchal gender norms once the male homosexual subject acknowledges homosexuality as an integral part of his identity. By analyzing Gray's gender performance, morality as determined by middle class norms, and the closet, I will specifically look at how performance functions as a means policing gendered traits which fail to adhere to the middle class masculine ideal.

## II. Miss Halcombe's Two Genders: Hermaphroditism, Homosexuality, and Patriarchal "Correction" in *The Woman in White*

In the mid-nineteenth century, the notion of separate spheres for men and women gave rise to the need for rigid definitions of gender. This resulted in a binary in which men and women possessed distinct sets of physical traits, mental qualities, and interests. Described as having "masculine" characteristics both in terms of her physical appearance and her temperament, Marian Halcombe of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859-60) seems to defy this gender divide. However, instead of exemplifying an alternative to the binary, Halcombe embodies it in a way that could be viewed as hermaphroditic and therefore, in the context of the Victorian understanding of gender, "perverse." When understood in tangent with the medical and literature written during the mid to late nineteenth century, these descriptions of Halcombe as hermaphroditic can be viewed as an indicator of "inverted sexuality," further solidifying the notion that during the Victorian period, homosexuality was viewed as an issue of gender dysmorphia. Furthermore, both her hermaphroditism and homosexual tendencies are eventually "corrected" by male characters, thus suggesting that external patriarchal forces attempt to regulate the line that demarcates the difference between men and women.

When first introduced, Halcombe is an unconventional woman who directly challenges and critiques traditional Victorian ideals of femininity. In describing her distaste for drawing to Walter Hartright when he first takes his post at Limmeridge, Halcombe states the following:

> Drawing is *her* [Laura Fairlie's] favourite whim, mind, not mine. Women can't draw—their minds are too flighty, and their eyes are too inattentive. No matter—my sister likes it; so I waste paint and soil paper, for her sake, as composedly as any woman in England.[28]

[28] Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35.

According to Halcombe, feminine pursuits, such as drawing, are merely "whims," or non-serious activities that do not amount to anything substantial. In both the context of the novel and in the context of Victorian gender norms, femininity, therefore, can be partially defined by an inability to partake in serious and critical pursuits. In justifying this assertion, Halcombe turns to the biological, stating that women have "flighty minds" and "inattentive eyes," strengthening the idea that this feminine whimsy is innate. However, by specifically stating that "*Women* can't draw [emphasis added]," and by using the pronoun "their," Halcombe initially does not include herself in this critique, suggesting that she views herself as somehow above this inability to be serious, if only because she possesses an awareness of it. While she does eventually include herself in this feminine category by admitting that she too "waste[s] paint and soil[s] paper… as composedly as any woman in England," she also clarifies that she partakes in drawing for her half-sister's sake, suggesting that she constrains her true desires in order to act out an artificial feminine performance.

The notion that Halcombe's femininity is something that she performs rather than embodies is further solidified in a diary entry she writes when first arriving at Blackwater Park. In anticipation of seeing her half-sister Laura for the first time since her wedding, she writes,

> If I only had the privileges of a man, I would order out Sir Percival's best horse instantly, and tear away on a night-gallop…Being however, nothing but a woman, condemned to patience, propriety, and petticoats, for life, I must respect the housekeeper's opinions and try to compose myself in some feeble and feminine way.[29]

By longing for the "privileges of a man," Halcombe admits to not wanting to partake in the "patience, propriety, and petticoats" that characterize the feminine gender sphere. This ultimately suggests that she does not wish to be limited by the social constraints associated with Victorian femininity. Moreover, the fact that she feels "condemned" to "[composing herself] in a feeble

[29] Ibid., 200.

and feminine way" not only suggests that she equates femininity with weakness, but also solidifies the notion that she feels confined by her sex and is thus forced to act in a way that goes against her own personal impulses. When compared to her half-sister Laura, moreover, the notion that Halcombe falls outside traditional ideas of femininity is irrefutable. Whereas Halcombe describes Laura as possessing the ideal womanly traits of being "fair and pretty," "sweet-tempered and charming," as well as being the archetypal Victorian domestic "angel," Halcombe admits that she herself is "dark and ugly," "crabbed and odd," and in short, Laura's decidedly un-feminine opposite.[30]

Although Halcombe demonstrates a definitive lack of femininity both in terms of her behavior and personality, instead of being viewed as absence, Halcombe and others ultimately re-label it as masculinity. As Fosco notes when commenting on Halcombe's "unfeminine" actions in a secret late night meeting with Sir Percival:

> Quiet resolution is the one quality the animals, the children, and the women all fall in…Where are your eyes? Can you look at Miss Halcombe, and not see that she has the foresight and the resolution of a man?[31]

Halcombe is once again categorized as unfeminine because she does not possess a "quiet resolution" or, in other words, the same meekness and dependency that prevent "animals, children and women" from taking action for themselves. However, instead of being understood as simply "unfeminine," Halcombe is said to possess "the resolution of a man," and is thus considered masculine. According to this logic, if a woman expresses traits that fall outside of the traditional realm of femininity, then she must be part male. Physical descriptions of Halcombe ultimately solidify this notion. As Hartright narrates when he first encounters Halcombe, "The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a

[30] Ibid., 34.
[31] Ibid., 330.

moustache. She had a large, firm masculine mouth and jaw."[32] By stating that she has a "moustache" and a "large, firm masculine mouth," Hartright is quick to underscore attributes that make Halcombe mannish. However, this is contrasted with Hartright's earlier description of her physical appearance that highlights her womanly attributes: "I was struck by the rare beauty of her form…her figure was comely and well developed… her waist perfection in the eyes of a man."[33] In addition to her manly characteristics, Halcombe possesses a feminine figure, rendering her physically hermaphroditic and calling her entire biological sex into question.

This depiction of Halcombe as double-gendered ultimately stems from the Victorian understanding of the gender binary itself. As gender scholar Thomas Lacquer notes in his essay "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," the idea of a gender binary, in which one must be either male or female with no spectrum of gender expression in between, is an eighteenth and nineteenth century development that attempted to utilize emerging understandings of biological difference for the purpose of explaining social norms.[34] As he explains,

> For several thousand years it had been common place that women had the same genitals as man, except that, as Nemesis bishop of Emesa in the sixth century, put it: "Theirs are inside the body and not outside it."[35]

With "ovaries" interchangeable with the phrase "female testicles" and the vagina considered an inverted penis, women were considered "imperfect men," which, in terms of a gender binary, stressed similarities between the sexes.[36] However, as Lacquer notes,

> The problem of this theory then is how to derive the real world dominion of women, of sexual passion and jealousy, of the sexual division of labor and cultural practices

[32] Ibid., 32.
[33] Ibid., 31.
[34] Lacquer, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology," 19.
[35] Ibid., 2.
[36] Ibid., 3-5.

> generally from an original state of genderless bodies. The dilemma, at least for theorists interested in the subordination of women, is resolved by grounding the social and cultural differentiation of the sexes in a biology of incommensurability that liberal theory itself helped bring into being.[37]

Essentially, in order to stress the social differences between the sexes and, most importantly, justify the "subordination of women," a "biology of incommensurability," or, in other words, a radical re-imagining biological sex, needed to take place. Women could no longer be "imperfect men" if they had to adhere to separate social roles; instead, they had to be biologically reconstructed as a completely separate animal. This was ultimately solidified both by biological discoveries in the nineteenth century regarding the ovary as a structure distinct from the testicle, as well as through eighteenth century texts which, as Lacquer argues, "[contributed] to a physical construction of women not much different from that of domestic ideologists."[38] For people like Halcombe, moreover, this re-imagining of biological difference naturally had to manifest in some physical outward sign that counteracted the reader's understanding of her as a female, such as a "moustache" or a "masculine jaw."[39] These physical descriptions of her gender hybridity can ultimately be viewed as an attempt to reconcile her masculine impulses with the rigid construction of the gender binary. Because she is not wholeheartedly and traditionally "feminine" according to nineteenth century social norms, she does not express a variant of the female gender, but is rather two conflicting biological structures encapsulated in a single body.

This hermaphroditism, moreover, results in Halcombe's homosexual tendencies, which are depicted as simultaneously grotesque, unnatural, and at times perverse. Upon discovering Halcombe's masculine physical features, Hartright, for example, exclaims, "The lady is ugly!"

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[37] Ibid., 19.
[38] Ibid., 26, 19.
[39] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 32.

immediately defining her duality as negative and almost appalling.[40] This translates into Halcombe's expressions of her sexuality. The notion that Halcombe's masculinity may result in her lack of attraction toward men can be seen in her description of Sir Percival:

> There can be no doubt—though some strange perversity prevents me from seeing it myself—there can be no doubt that Laura's future husband is a very handsome man . . . Bright brown eyes, in either a man or a woman, are a great attraction—and he has them.[41]

By directly stating that "some strange perversity" prevents her from finding him attractive, Halcombe simultaneously admits that she is not attracted to him while blaming it on an "unnatural" impulse. While it is possible that this impulse may be an intuitive understanding of Sir Percival's ruthless nature, it could also be construed as a homosexual disinterest in men. The object of her attraction, moreover, may in fact be her half-sister, Laura Fairlie. Explaining to Laura that she would not be able to accompany her and Sir Percival on their honeymoon, Halcombe writes in her diary, "I was obliged to tell her that no man tolerates a rival—not even a woman rival—in his wife's affections."[42] By describing herself as Percival's "rival," Halcombe puts her affections on the same plane as Percival, likening her affections toward her half-sister to that of a husband and lover. As she further states in her diary before Laura and Sir Percival marry:

> Before another month is over our heads, she will be *his* Laura instead of mine! *His* Laura! I am a little able to realize the idea, which those two words convey…as if writing of her marriage were like writing of her death.[43]

By expressing her disgust at her half-sister being "*his*," or Sir Percival's Laura "instead of mine," Halcombe states that she wants to have the same possession over Laura that Victorian men have, by virtue of marriage, over their wives. Although she earlier justifies her behavior by citing

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[40] Ibid., 31.
[41] Ibid., 190-1.
[42] Ibid., 188.
[43] Ibid., 187.

Laura's own hesitancy in the match, by indignantly repeating that Laura would be "*His* Laura" and by stating that writing of their marriage "were like writing of her death," Halcombe behaves more like a scorned lover than a sorrowful sister. In the context of the Victorian gender binary, Halcombe's attractions toward women could be considered an "unnatural" byproduct of her "maleness." This is ultimately compounded by her attraction to her half-sister, which is incestuous and thus intended to be viewed as perverse.

This idea that Halcombe's homosexual tendencies are a product of her dual gender is ultimately expounded upon in later medical and forensic texts. As John Addington Symonds summarizes in *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, forensic medical experts J. L. Casper and Carl Liman argue in their 1889 *Handbuch der Gerichtlichen Medicin* that inborn sexual inversion, or homosexuality, is "like a kind of physical hermaphroditism" and that for homosexual men, "sexual contact with women inspires them with real disgust."[44] Psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing takes this further, with Symonds describing his characterization of male homosexuals as such: "Here the soul which is doomed to love a man, and is nevertheless imprisoned in a male body, strives to convert that body to feminine uses so entirely that the marks of sex, except in the determined organs of sex, shall be obliterated."[45] In short, Krafft-Ebing believes that homosexuals have hermaphroditic souls which strive to "convert that body" to exude traits of the opposite sex. In this sense, spiritual hermaphroditism could be seen as related to physical transsexuality, or biological miscasting, in which a person is born with the wrong physical sex and one's "soul," attempts to make up for that by performing according to the gender with which the person internally identifies. Therefore, by expressing sexual attraction toward someone of the same sex, a spiritually hermaphroditic person is adhering to the gender performance that aligns

[44] Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, 26.
[45] Ibid., 59.

with his or her internal gender. This idea of hermaphroditic souls can be traced back to the writings of the homosexual German jurist Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who classifies homosexual men as belonging to a third sex called Urning.[46] As far as sex is concerned, the "body of an Urning is masculine, his soul feminine," thus making homosexuals spiritually hermaphroditic.[47] In terms of Halcombe, her masculine traits could thus be seen as an expression of her hermaphroditic soul, and thus as an indicator of her homosexuality.

Although these texts on sexual inversion deal primarily with homosexual men, they nevertheless offer a distinct insight as to how understandings of homosexuality are entrenched in understandings of gender performance, and in that sense can apply to Halcombe. When placing Halcombe's "hermaphroditic soul" in context of these writings on homosexuality, it is imperative to acknowledge the differences that exist between her lesbian tendencies and the default male subjects of Ulrich's, Krafft-Ebing's, and Symonds' texts. In her book *Figures of Resistance: Essays in Feminist Theory*, Teresa de Laurentis highlights the idea that within patriarchal society, which defines women according to their relationships with men, lesbians are erased because they define themselves not in relation to men, but rather according to their relationships with other women.[48] She then applies this idea of lesbian erasure to the broad category of homosexuality, which effaces the gender distinction between gay men and lesbian women, and ultimately threatens to erase lesbians, and the distinct problems that they face, once again.[49] The default male subjects of these texts on sexual inversion naturally underscore the idea that lesbians are erased from discussions of homosexuality, and imply that patriarchal values

[46] Ibid., 90.
[47] Ibid., 92.
[48] Teresa de Laurentis, *Figures of Resistance: Essays in Feminist Theory*, edited by Patricia White (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 49.
[49] Ibid., 49-50.

regarding how women are defined in relation to other women are still at play, even among homosexual writers like Symonds and Ulrich. However, these theories do propose that at its core sexuality is an aspect of gender performance, an idea that can ultimately be seen in Halcombe's "mannish" traits and how they give way to her possessive, "husband-like" attitude toward her half-sister. This does not mean that all theories regarding homosexual men can apply to homosexual women. However, it does illustrate that during the mid-nineteenth century, one's sexual object of choice is invariably linked to one's gender, and as a result, if one possesses "hermaphroditic" traits, it may affect one's sexual attraction toward one sex or the other.

Halcombe's dual gendered-ness and sexual inversion can ultimately be traced to a lack of strong, paternal figures in the Fairlie household, which may provide an environmental impetus that allows her masculinity to flourish. At Limmerage, Mr. Fairlie is described not only as an invalid who has no interest in participating in the public and thus, male sphere, but he is also described as effeminate. Upon first meeting him, Hartright describes Mr. Fairlie's "beardless face," and notes that his "feet were effeminately small," that his hair was "soft to look at," and that he wore "womanish bronze leather slippers."[50] With the head of the household characterized as feminine and permanently indisposed, Halcombe is forced into the role of Laura's masculine protector in social situations, and when Laura is physically threatened by her husband. It is Halcombe, for example, who first notices an improper attraction forming between Hartright and Laura, speaks to Mr. Fairlie on the matter, and then takes it upon herself to notify Hartright of his dismissal as if she were the head of the household.[51] Given her "husband-like" feelings toward Laura, this decision to banish Hartright could stem from jealousy about their relationship. Nevertheless, in this instance, Halcombe is the driving force behind Hartright leaving

[50] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 39.
[51] Ibid., 70-1.

Limmerage, and because she expresses a resolute agency that would have otherwise belonged to Mr. Fairlie, in doing this she steps into a decidedly masculine role. Halcombe again acts as her half-sister's protector after Sir Percival holds Laura captive in a bedroom. Although she reassures Laura that, "by this time to-morrow [she] will have a clear-headed, trustworthy man acting for [her] good," Halcombe is the one who, in the mean time, takes action and contacts both Mr. Fairlie and her lawyer, essentially fulfilling the role of Laura's guardian, which would otherwise belong to Laura's husband.[52] When both appeals to these supposedly "trustworthy men" fall through, it is Halcombe who continues to shield her sister from Sir Percival's wrath and Fosco's plots. In this case, her "masculinity," or in this case, her agency and willfulness, is allowed to flourish with the absence of actual men.

Yet despite this demonstrated need for her masculinity, the duality in Halcombe's gender is repressed, or "corrected" in the presence of biological men. As Fosco states the following to Sir Percival during their secret meeting on the verandah after Laura is imprisoned:

> With that woman for my enemy, I, with all my brains and experience—I, Fosco, cunning as the devil himself, as you have told me a hundred times—I walk, in your English phrase, upon egg-shells! . . . This magnificent woman, whom I admire with all my soul, though I oppose her in your interests and in mine, you drove to extremities, as though she was no sharper and no bolder than the rest of her sex.[53]

Fosco's "admiration" for Halcombe is a result of her masculine attributes, particularly the fact that she is "sharper" and "bolder" than the rest of her sex. However, this attraction may not be a result of an "admiration" at all, but rather may stem from a desire to conquer, or to exert his authority and power over her. Fosco has a history of coercing women to bend to his will. In her diary, Halcombe writes that Madame Fosco was in her maidenhood a "vain and foolish woman" who talked "pretentious nonsense" and had been transformed by her marriage into a woman who

[52] Ibid., 314.
[53] Ibid., 331.

"sits for hours together without saying a word" and "[rolls] up endless little cigarettes for the Count's own particular smoking."[54] In short, Madame Fosco went from an independent being, to an obedient, dependent, creature under Fosco's command. As Halcombe further notes, "A plain matronly cap covers her head, and makes her look, for the first time in her life . . . like a decent woman," ultimately suggesting that Fosco's influence transformed his wife into more exemplary model of femininity than she was before.[55] Fosco's notion of conquering somebody, therefore, solidifies the idea that being female equates to biological difference and thus automatic subordination to males in a social context. This ultimately reinforces the Victorian gender binary by clarifying the division and differences that exist between the sexes.

However, for Halcombe specifically, notions of being conquered mean the suppression and eradication of her masculine attributes, transforming her, like Madame Fosco, into a subordinate, more "feminine" creature. As D.A. Miller argues in his essay "Cages Aux Folles," Fosco's ultimate expression of dominance over Halcombe occurs when he writes in her diary:

> In the exact middle of the novel, when the text of Marian's diary, lapsing into illegible fragments, abruptly yields to a postscript on whom it suspicions center. Not only has Fosco read Marian's "secret pages," he lets her know it, and even returns them to her . . . It is not just, then, that Marian has been "raped," as both the Count's amorous flourish . . . and her subsequent powerless rage against him are meant to suggest. We are "taken" too, by surprise.[56]

As Miller argues, Fosco's "violation" of Halcombe's diary, with his forcible reading of its "secret pages" can be viewed as rape, and thus an aggravated expression of dominance and power over Halcombe. However, what Miller fails to note is that expressions of dominance occur more regularly throughout Halcombe's attempts to act as Laura's "masculine guardian," even if

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[54] Ibid., 218-19.
[55] Ibid., 218.
[56] D.A. Miller, *The Novel and The Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 163-4.

it does culminate in one final action that disempowers, and ultimately emasculates her. It is Fosco who snatches Halcombe's first letter to Mr. Kyrle out of the postbag and reads it.[57] It is also Fosco who orders his wife to visit Laura's dismissed maid at the inn where she is staying, drug her, and then snatch Halcombe's letters to Mr. Fairlie and Mr. Kyrle.[58] These violations—this reading of Halcombe's letters that flatter her masculine attributes by putting her in the position of a surrogate guardian—ultimately undermine and thwart Halcombe's power as a masculine figure. The reading of her diary may constitute sexual dominance, but by consistently foiling her efforts to appeal for help, Fosco reminds Halcombe that she is powerless to act on her own and on her half-sister's behalf, and is thus nothing more than a woman.

Furthermore, within the context of the Victorian gender binary, these expressions of male dominance and female submission ultimately "correct" Halcombe's hermaphroditism. Miller also argues that the text of *The Woman in White* is a homosexual fantasy, in which its invocation of "sensation" and "nerves" feminizes the male reader, thus rendering him spiritually hermaphroditic and thus homosexual.[59] This being said, he argues that the novel is simultaneously "a homophobic defense against that fantasy; and the male oppression of women, among other things, extends that defense."[60] In the context of Miller's argument that the individual oppression of women extends the defense against the narration's hermaphroditic and homosexual aspects, Fosco's metaphorical "rape" of Halcombe could be seen as an additional means of reasserting masculinity and patriarchal authority. This is particularly apparent when one considers that the "feminized" male reader must on some level identify with Halcombe and her hermaphroditic traits. By forcefully "correcting" her gender performance, the novel reasserts

[57] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 257-9.
[58] Ibid., 349-50.
[59] Miller, *The Novel and The Police*, 153-5.
[60] Ibid., 155.

the distinctions between the two genders, and ultimately reasserts the patriarchal structure that empowers the male reader in society. Therefore, patriarchy and the oppression of women could thus be seen as external forces that reinforce binary gender norms if they are in some way threatened. However, these patriarchal forces do not simply reassert male authority, but individually correct hermaphroditic, and thus homosexual traits, in the individual. Much like Madame Fosco, who is transformed into a "decent woman" after being "tamed" by her husband, Halcombe is transformed into a domestic being by the novel's end.[61] As Hartright describes, "Marian was sitting now, with the child industriously sucking its coral upon her lap."[62] Not only does she move in with the newly married Hartright and Laura, but she also takes care of their child, casting off her masculine persona in favor of one that is "nurturing" and thus "feminine." Furthermore, the fact that Halcombe is cast as this "nurturing" mother-type essentially erases any traces of sexuality that she may have exuded simply because mothers are viewed as asexual in the Victorian popular consciousness. Therefore, Fosco's external patriarchal subversions of Halcombe's hermaphroditism eradicate her homosexual tendencies while simultaneously correcting her gender performance according to the accepted male-female binary.

With her masculine attributes, Halcombe simultaneously defies and reinforces the Victorian understanding of the gender binary. She is neither singularly male, nor singularly female, rendering her spiritually hermaphroditic and thus homosexual according to the medical literature of the time. The way in which this hermaphroditism and homosexuality are resolved underscores the idea that external patriarchal forces—in the form of Fosco's constant subversion of Halcombe's masculine traits—reinforce the gender binary. However, the fact that Halcombe's gender expressions are not simply policed, but are ultimately *corrected* by these external

[61] Ibid., 218.
[62] Ibid., 642.

patriarchal forces suggests that homosexuality is something that is routinely regulated and eradicated by larger societal forces.

## III. The Man in the Mirror: The Infiltration of Patriarchal Norms and Self Identification in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Published thirty years after *The Woman in White*, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* documents the intricacies of homosexual self-identification. In the novel's first two chapters, Dorian Gray, an effeminate "lad," identifies himself as homosexual after gazing at his portrait painted by Basil Hallward, a man who idolizes Gray. Unlike *The Woman in White*, which takes a "corrective" perspective on characters with homosexual tendencies, Gray's self-realization seems to imply a certain amount of empowerment in the sense that he is able to identify, and thus define himself. However, under the influence of Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton, Gray defines himself as a sexual object, which subjugates him under the same patriarchal constraints that are often placed on women in heterosexual relationships. Although Gray defining himself as "feminine" initially seems counterintuitive to the narrative of "correction" established in *The Woman in White*, the superimposition of heterosexual dynamics onto homosexual relationships could be seen as an alternative means of "correcting" Gray's homosexuality so that it adheres more closely to a patriarchal ideal of sexual relationships between men and women. Gray's effeminacy and self-identification as a sexual object thus illustrate how external patriarchal norms have infiltrated the dynamics of homosexual relationships, and ultimately Gray's understanding of himself as a homosexual man.

When first introduced, Dorian Gray is both described and treated as feminine, thus creating a dynamic in which his effeminacy is simultaneously internal, or innate, and externally ascribed to him by other characters that in turn classify these traits within the patriarchal power

system, diminishing Gray's agency. Gray has innate interests that are typically classified as feminine, as revealed when he and Lord Henry are first introduced. Speaking about his relationship with Lord Henry's aunt, Gray notes, "I promised to go to a club in Whitechapel with her last Tuesday…we were to play a duet together."[63] In addition to referencing his piano playing, a skill typically associated with accomplished young ladies, Gray's reference to a club in "Whitechapel," a Victorian slum, suggests that the visit was for charity, another pursuit closely associated with Victorian women who sought a socially acceptable reason for venturing outside of the domestic sphere. With such interests, Gray unconsciously ascribes to Krafft-Ebing's notions of sexual inversion, in which the male subject desires to perform specific gendered acts, such as helping their mothers in the kitchen.[64] Yet these innate feminine interests are further reinforced by Lord Henry's indirect characterization of Gray as feminine, stating the following after Gray wonders if he will "always" be glad to have met Lord Henry: "Always! That is such a dreadful word...Women are so fond of using it."[65] However, unlike Gray's interests, which originate from within and just happen to have strong societal associations with femininity, Lord Henry's indirect characterization of Gray as a "woman" originates from without, or is, in other words, a label ascribed to Gray by an external character. The assignment of meaning to Gray's feminine traits is more clearly seen when Hallward refers to Gray as a both "good boy" and a "lad" when painting his portrait, which not only references Gray's youth, but diminishes his masculinity and categorizes him, like women and children, as a dependent who is unable to make autonomous decisions.[66] In terms of patriarchal power structures in which men are given the most power, Hallward and Lord Henry's categorization of Gray as feminine

[63] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 18.
[64] Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics*, 58
[65] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 27.
[66] Ibid., 20.

ultimately diminishes Gray's power within the system. Therefore, while Gray may have an innate inclination toward "feminine" activities, they are only labeled as such by external characters who ascribe additional meaning to these traits within the patriarchal system, particularly regarding his diminished power.

While Gray is predominantly portrayed as feminine, he is simultaneously marked as homosexual according to a masculine, Hellenistic ideal. This not only illustrates the dichotomy that exists between competing characterizations of male homosexuals, but also illustrates the spectrum of gender expression among homosexual men, ranging from feminine to masculine. In *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, Linda Dowling argues that homosexual intellectuals such as Walter Pater and John Addington Symonds viewed Hellenism as a means of legitimizing "Greek-love" between men in the greater cultural consciousness.[67] Ancient Greece became a signifier for homosexuality, an idea which can be seen in Dorian Gray himself. When first introduced, Gray is described as having the "air of a young Greek martyr," and later as having a "romantic olive colored face," as if he were from the Mediterranean.[68] Yet in addition to these overtly Greek references, Lord Henry describes Gray as possessing a "rose-red youth" and a "rose-white boyhood," thus suggesting that Gray adheres to a Paterian Hellenist masculine ideal in addition to possessing feminine traits.[69] Specifically, Pater advocates that homosexual men, in adhering to a Greek standard, should possess a nimble yet masculine physique and a "red" and "white" beauty that rivals that of the Greek gods, an ideal that can be seen in essay on Winckelmann: "The Greek system of gymnastics originated as part of a religious ritual. The worshiper was to recommend himself to the gods by becoming fleet and fair, white and red like

[67] Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1994), 28-31.
[68] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 19, 24.
[69] Ibid., 21.

them."[70] This Greek masculine homosexual ideal is further ascribed to Gray through his first name, which not only references the Ancient Greek ethnic group, but also invokes K. O. Müller's ideal of Dorian comradeship, which contested the idea that men who loved men were effeminate.[71] Although this Greek masculinity is in some ways at odds with Gray's feminine traits, Gray nevertheless embodies both ideas of "homosexual" male gender performance, thus illustrating the spectrum of gender performance that homosexual men are encouraged to embody.

The spectrum of gender performance can also be seen among Gray's friends, particularly Lord Henry and Hallward, who both take on comparatively masculine roles when compared to Gray. As previously established, the societal meaning behind Gray's "feminine" traits is not established until Lord Henry and Hallward assign that meaning to them. This naturally suggests that Lord Henry and Hallward act upon Gray's gender performance, specifically in terms of how others define and perceive it. This then places Gray in a more submissive, "feminine" role and allows Lord Henry and Hallward to both take a more active "masculine" role in their relationships with Gray. Therefore, by actively defining Gray's gender performance as "feminine," Lord Henry and Hallward define themselves as "more masculine" than Gray by virtue of being comparatively more active.

Because Gray possesses a variety of signifiers that suggest he has the potential to embody Pater's Greek masculine ideal, Hallward and Lord Henry's emphasis on his femininity early in the novel suggest that external patriarchal forces that perpetuate a heterosexual standard are replicated in his relationships with men. This ultimately illustrates the ways in which external societal forces influence homosexual relationships. To begin, the multiplicity of gender performances not only illustrates the competing ideals that exist about homosexuality and

[70] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 134.
[71] Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford*, 130.

gendered traits, but also underscores the differing origins of these gender labels. Gray's feminization is closely aligned with Krafft-Ebing's ideas of sexual inversion, or in other words, is aligned with the external construction of homosexuality imagined by greater Victorian society, in which men who "fail" to exude certain masculine traits are perceived as feminine and thus disempowered within the patriarchal structure. Pater's Greek, masculine ideal reclaims any power that is lost to this characterization by reasserting the homosexual male's place in the patriarchy. Yet for Gray, the fact that he is consistently feminized and disempowered by Lord Henry and Hallward, who focus on his aesthetic beauty and treat him as a dependent "lad," suggests that while he may possess certain markers of Greek masculinity, he remains at the mercy of societal patriarchal forces. This suggests that external patriarchal values have infiltrated homosexual relationships. Although speaking specifically about lesbians in her essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Judith Butler nevertheless theorizes on the patriarchal values that underpin and perpetuate compulsory heterosexuality: "Compulsory heterosexuality sets itself up as the original, the true, the authentic; the norm that determines the real implies that 'being' a lesbian is always a kind of miming, a vain effort to participate in the phantasmatic plentitude of naturalized heterosexuality which will always and only fail."[72] Therefore, in feminizing Gray, both Hallward and Lord Henry reinforce patriarchal methods of subjugation and ultimately fall into the trap of "replicating" the patriarchal norms that govern the dynamics between the sexes. Because there is no attempt to break away from this heterosexual dynamic, this illustrates how homosexual relationships can internalize external patriarchal values.

This internalization of patriarchal values can ultimately be seen both in the way Gray first self-identifies as a homosexual, as well as the ways in which Hallward and Lord Henry influence

[72] Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 2010), 306.

this self-identification. Gray's realization of his own homosexual identity only comes after he sees Basil's portrait, ultimately sparking a narcissism that stands in for his same-sex desire. When Gray first sees the portrait of himself, the following is stated:

> Dorian made no answer, but passed listlessly in front of his picture, and then turned towards it…A look of joy came to his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time… The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation.[73]

Because Gray "recognized himself for the first time" while gazing at his portrait, he passes through the Lacanian mirror phase, in which the subject identifies himself for the first time as an independent being. Although the subject of Lacan's mirror phase is typically an infant identifying himself as independent from his mother, the theory itself can be appropriated to fit other kinds of self-identification, regardless of the subject's age. This is solidified by the idea that Gray's "sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation," which suggests that he realizes his ideal self while looking at his own portrait. In relation to the mirror phase, Jacques Lacan refers to this self-idealization as the "Ideal-I," which consequentially "situates the agency of the ego… in a fictional direction," or in other words, causes the subject to identify with the idealized image that he sees in the mirror.[74] Although other characters' open acknowledgement of his beauty suggests that he is actually as beautiful as he imagines himself to be, it is only after looking at the portrait that he acknowledges his own beauty and idealizes it as much as these other characters do. Literary scholars such as Christopher Craft and Eve Sedgwick argue that because this idealization of self occurs when Gray looks at his portrait, his admiration gives way to a narcissism that is indicative of Gray's homosexual desire, thus making this idealized

[73] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 28.
[74] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (London: Tavistock Publications, Ltd., 1977), 2.

realization of self a realization of his homosexuality.[75] This idea stems from Sigmund Freud's 1914 essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction," in which he writes that narcissists "treat their own body in the same way as otherwise the body of a sexual object is treated; that is to say, he experiences sexual pleasure in gazing at, caressing and fondling the body, till complete gratification ensues upon these activities."[76] Undoubtedly, in "gazing on his own loveliness" and generally internalizing this Ideal-I, Gray treats himself as a sexual object and thus embodies such narcissism. Furthermore, Sedgwick argues that this is indicative of homosexual desire in the sense that homosexuality is defined by the "sameness" that exists between partners.[77] As she explicitly states, the portrait plot in Dorian Gray rests upon the idea that "any one who shares one's gender [is viewed] as being 'the same' as oneself, and anyone who does not share one's gender [is viewed] as being one's Other."[78] Therefore, by transforming himself into his own idealized sexual object, Gray underscores his attraction to "sameness," thus betraying his own homosexuality.

Yet while Gray's self-identification as a homosexual man could be viewed as an autonomous conclusion, this realization is nevertheless mitigated through the perception and influence of Hallward and Lord Henry, not only suggesting that Gray's understanding of self is a product of external forces, but also negating any agency that he may have otherwise acquired by defining his own identity. When painting Gray's likeness, Hallward, for example, admits "I put into it all this curious artistic idolatry, of which, of course, I have never cared to speak to

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[75] Christopher Craft, "Come See About Me: Enchantment of the Double in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," *Representations* 91 (2005): 124-5.
Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 158-62.
[76] Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," *Collected Papers* vol. IV, ed. Ernest Jones, trans. Joan Riviere (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 30.
[77] Sedgwick, *The Epistemology of the Closet*, 158.
[78] Ibid., 160.

him…There is too much of myself in the thing."[79] In referencing his "artistic idolatry," Hallward alludes to his own homosexual attraction to and idealization of Gray, which he then sublimates into his art. This ultimately influences both the portrait as well as the way Gray perceives his idealized self, thus indirectly influencing how he understands his own homosexuality. This is not to say that Hallward somehow transformed Gray into a homosexual through his portrait of him, but rather it illustrates how Hallward's own desires and feelings infiltrated the portrait and, in turn, subtly shaped Gray's perception of himself when he looks at it. Lord Henry's influence is also paramount, with their first conversation causing Gray to understand his sexuality in a way that he never had before: "There had been things in his boyhood that he had not understood. He understood them now."[80] This translates to Gray's own identification of himself in the portrait, during which time he notes the following:

> Then had come Lord Henry Wotton with his strange panegyric on youth, his terrible warning of its brevity. That had stirred him at the time, and now, as he stood gazing at the shadow of his own loveliness, the full reality of the description flashed across him. Yes, there would be a day when his face would be wrinkled and wizen, his eyes dim and colourless, the grace of his figure broken and deformed.[81]

In stating that Lord Henry's "terrible warning of [youth's] brevity" resulted in his realization of his own youth's transience, Gray internalizes Lord Henry's external influence, thus incorporating it into his own understanding of self. Yet because this external influence occurs when Gray's identity is coalescing, any agency or autonomy that realizing and defining his own identity could give Gray is taken away. Instead, Gray's own perception of self is dependent on Lord Henry's perception of him, as well as Hallward's perception of him.

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[79] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 12.
[80] Ibid., 22.
[81] Ibid., 28.

When understood in terms of Hallward and Lord Henry's external influence, Gray's narcissism could thus be seen as an internalization of their own idealization and objectification of his beauty. As previously argued, Freud defines narcissism as the treatment of oneself as a sexual object.[82] This ultimately means that Gray's obsession with his own idealized beauty when gazing at his portrait equates to his own sexual objectification of himself, an idea that is reinforced by Gray's fear that he will lose his good looks as time passes. As Gray states, "How sad it is! I shall grow old, and horrible and dreadful. But this picture will always remain young . . . If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything!"[83] Here, Gray's obsession with staying young and beautiful could be viewed as an extension of his narcissism, or his own love and sexual objectification of his idealized self. However, this sexual objectification begins externally though Lord Henry and Hallward's treatment of him. As Lord Henry notes while conversing with Gray in Hallward's garden, "You have a wonderfully beautiful face, Mr. Gray. Don't frown. You have. And Beauty is a form of Genius—is higher, indeed, than Genius, as it needs no explanation."[84] By describing Gray's beauty, Lord Henry simultaneously brings it to the forefront and elevates it to the status of "Genius," thus suggesting that his physical appearance is Gray's only attribute of worth. Moreover, by focusing specifically on his "beautiful face," Lord Henry fragments and objectifies Gray using the same patriarchal tools that are used by men to disempower women who they perceive as a threat to their masculinity, rendering him an idealized body part instead of a person. This objectification is more clearly seen in Hallward's treatment of Gray as a subject for his art, which causes Gray to exclaim "I am no more to you than a green bronze figure" after the portrait

[82] Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction," 30.
[83] Ibid., 29.
[84] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 24-5.

is finished.[85] By suggesting that he is only a "green bronze figure," Gray directly acknowledges that Hallward perceives him as an object. Moreover, because Hallward both idealizes Gray's beauty in his portrait of him, and, when discussing what Gray means to him as an artist, asserts that Gray "has all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek," Hallward also sexualizes Gray according to his own homosexual desires.[86] This being said, when Gray laments his fading beauty when looking at his portrait, it could thus be seen as an incorporation of Hallward and Lord Henry's sexual objectification into his own perception of self. His narcissism is not simply a love of himself or an indicator of his homosexuality, but rather is an internalization of Hallward and Lord Henry's own sexual desires.

Furthermore, when coupled with the idea that Gray is consistently feminized in order to perpetuate a heterosexual patriarchal norm, this self-identification as a sexual object illustrates the ways in which patriarchal values infiltrate not just homosexual relationships, but also influence Gray's perception of himself. In believing that he is a sexual object, Gray internalizes values that are used by the patriarchy to subjugate and disempower women in a heterosexual context. This not only suggests that he perceives himself in this disempowered context, but ultimately shows how the patriarchy attempts to infiltrate, and in some ways "correct" homosexuality by forcing heterosexual norms onto those within homosexual relationships. More specifically, the external application of these norms does not only occur within the context of Gray's relationships, but more deeply occurs in Gray's entire conception of himself as a sexual being.

Although Gray is able to recognize his own homosexuality when gazing at his portrait, he is nevertheless subjected to the same external patriarchal constraints that attempted to "correct"

[85] Ibid., 29.
[86] Ibid., 11.

Marian Halcombe's expressions of gender. Because his homosexual identity is partially shaped by Hallward and Lord Henry, Gray is effeminized and rendered a sexual object, not only diminishing his agency and power within his relationships with other men, but also affecting his perception of self. While this incorporation of heterosexual patriarchal values is not necessarily a "correction" of Gray's homosexuality in the same sense that Marian Halcombe's gender performance and homosexual tendencies are "corrected," it nevertheless serves as a "correcting" influence that aligns Gray with Victorian societal patriarchal values.

## IV. Criminality, Performance, and Paranoia in the Closet

In the last chapter, I illustrated the ways in which Dorian Gray's conception of himself as a homosexual man is influenced by external patriarchal norms. Specifically, Basil Hallward and Lord Henry Wotton treat Gray as a sexual object, pigeonholing him into a feminine role that is at odds with the Paterian, masculine homosexual ideal. This is a role that Gray subsequently internalizes in his relationships with Hallward and Lord Henry, which then perpetuates the illusion that homosexuality strives to imitate, or "copy" the heterosexual norm upheld by Victorian society. However, despite his internalization of heterosexual patriarchal values, Gray is also keenly aware that as a homosexual man, he inherently violates the societal norms that these values uphold, particularly in terms of masculine gender performance. This contradiction is best illustrated through the performance Gray uses to hide his criminal undertakings and by extension his homosexuality, in which he uses his youthful appearance to defy the Victorian notion that sinful experiences can physically manifest on one's body. This creates the illusion that he is not criminal, and that, as a result, he is an upstanding gentleman who adheres to masculine norms. Yet while Gray attempts to abide by these norms externally, the performance itself violates these norms by failing to comply with Victorian ideals of masculinity. As a result, Gray is forced into

a double bind, in which he is both paralyzed by his need to adhere to societal norms externally, and his self-conscious awareness that he internally cannot live up to these norms. Therefore, as these gender expectations are internalized, homosexuality, and other forms of deviance that contradict established gender norms become increasingly irresolvable, or "un-correctable" resulting in the character's inability to assimilate into heterosexual patriarchal society.

Throughout the novel, Gray is consistently associated with criminality, illustrating the extent to which patriarchal values attempt to label and police Gray as deviant. After Gray recognizes his own homosexuality, he performs a variety of wicked acts, including driving Sibyl Vane to suicide and, later, murdering Basil Hallward. While he generally keeps these acts a secret to all but one or two people, he is notorious among his peers for committing other crimes:

> It was rumored that he had been seen brawling with foreign sailors in a low den in the distant parts of Whitechapel, and that he consorted with thieves and coiners and knew the mysteries of their trade. His extraordinary absences become notorious, and, when he used to reappear again in society, men would whisper to each other in corners, or pass him with a sneer, or look at him with cold searching eyes, as though they were determined to discover his secret.[87]

By "brawling…in Whitechapel" and consorting with "thieves and coiners," or those who practice their illegal trades in secret, Gray is not only associated with crime, but is also associated with the underworld, or the seedier subcultures that are kept separate from the respectable society that upholds the gender norm. Although Gray's crimes are performed in secret, those in respectable circles are nevertheless highly aware of Gray's involvement, causing them to "whisper to each other in corners" when they encounter him. This judgment that they pass, by sneering at him and looking at him with "cold searching eyes," illustrates how external forces that uphold the societal norm attempt to police Gray and the criminal life that he leads.

[87] Wilde, *Dorian Gray*, 159.

Specifically, by whispering and glaring when Gray is around, these figures in respectable society illustrate their disapproval of his secret, criminal life, thus marking his actions as deviant.

This external policing is compounded by the conflation of Gray's criminality with his homosexuality. When asking Gray why gentlemen do not want to consort with him, Hallward states, "Why is your friendship so fatal to young men? There was that wretched boy in the guards who committed suicide. There was Sir Henry Ashton, who had to leave England with a tarnished name…What about the young Duke of Perth? What gentleman would associate with him?"[88] In listing those who have been ruined by Gray's "friendship," Hallward links Gray's deviant, criminal behavior to his relationship with men, implying that the friendships themselves deviate from societal norms. Given Gray's homosexuality, this suggests that the friendships are of a sexual nature. Conflating Gray's homosexuality with his criminality naturally draws upon the Foucautian idea that all deviance—from criminality to madness—is linked within the cultural mindset.[89] Yet beyond this, this conflation suggests that the societal policing that Gray experiences is not simply a result of his association with crime, but is rather a result of his deviant homosexual behavior. Furthermore, the fact that Hallward, who is also homosexual, is the one linking Gray's homosexuality with his deviance illustrates the variety of methods by which homosexuals internalize Victorian social norms. Unlike Gray, who acts on his sexual impulses and has "friendships" with young men, Hallward sublimates his sexuality into his art, an idea which is illustrated when he tells Lord Henry that he had "put into it [the portrait] some expression of all [his] curious artistic idolatry" toward Gray.[90] Hallward's sublimation of his feelings toward Gray into art could be seen as a means of re-directing his sexuality toward an

[88] Ibid., 170.
[89] Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 62.
[90] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 12.

innocuous pursuit that does not violate Victorian societal norms. This ultimately illustrates the ways in which Hallward internalized the societal values that say that homosexuality is "criminal" and deviant. His policing of Gray, then, could be seen as a reflection of his own internalization of societal norms, as well as a reflection of the how this internalization of societal norms manifests in different people.

Although society judges his homosexuality as criminal and deviant, Gray counteracts his criminal reputation with his youthful, innocent appearance, which allows him to pass as respectable within Victorian society. Whenever Gray commits a crime, a physical indicator of that act supernaturally marks his portrait, which plays on the idea that one's experiences can physically mark one's person in the same way that age does. For example, when Gray looks at his picture for the first time and realizes that "the life that was to make his soul would mar his body" he acknowledges that the experiences he has that would allow him to live the life he wants will destroy his good looks.[91] The fact that these experiences, in addition to old age, would make him "dreadful, hideous, and uncouth" suggest that the experiences that he would find fulfilling are not necessarily "wholesome," as judged by Victorian society.[92] In terms of the portrait, Gray notices that the subject had "a touch of cruelty in his mouth" shortly after he drives Sibyl Vane to suicide.[93] Other physical markings manifest after he murders Hallward, when his portrait is described as having "red dew" on his hands, as if the canvas had "sweated blood."[94] The fact that his portrait has a cruel mouth and red blood on its hands illustrates the ways in which this supernatural element allows criminality to be associated with a physical and irrevocable alteration of the person. These markings also serve as a visible indicator of deviance that can be

[91] Ibid., 28.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 101.
[94] Ibid., 196.

easily recognized by respectable society long after the sinful act occurred, thus illustrating the ways in which this outward, supernatural manifestation of sin allows society to police something that would otherwise be invisible. In this context, the "cruel mouth" and the "red blood" on the portrait's hands serve as physical markers that readily differentiate criminals from those who adhere to societal norms, thus allowing society to pinpoint those who are deviant and deal with them as it sees fit.

However, because it is Gray's portrait, and not his physical person, that is marked by his crimes, Gray is allowed to pass as respectable within Victorian society, thus deflecting immediate attention away from his deviant behavior. The most ready example of this occurs when James Vane, who plots to murder Gray for his role in his sister's suicide, threatens to kill Gray outside an opium den. Imploring Vane to set him under the light and look at his face, Gray uses his unmarked, youthful appearance to convince Vane that he is not the man he is looking for, thus concealing his underhandedness.[95] Moreover, while the whispers and rumors that punctuate his interactions with aristocrats illustrate that Gray's appearance does not always conceal his criminality, in such cases it does allow him to hide it more easily than he could otherwise. As Hallward notes shortly after Sibyl Vane's death, "You look exactly the same wonderful boy who, day after day, used to come down to my studio to sit for this picture…Now I don't know what has come over you. You talk as if you had no heart, no pity in you."[96] By stating that he does not know what came over Gray, Hallward acknowledges a discernable, internal personality change within his friend. However, because Gray looks "exactly like the same wonderful boy" that he used to know, Hallward is unable to verify that a concrete change has occurred in Gray's person. Therefore, to outsiders this unchanged outward appearance causes

[95] Ibid., 217.
[96] Ibid., 122.

confusion as to whether Gray is still the innocent young man that he used to be, or if he instead is a marked criminal. This confusion ultimately gives Gray room to cultivate doubt in the mindset of respectable society, thus allowing him to pass.

Gray's unchanging youthful appearance is part of a larger performance that allows Gray to conceal his homosexuality. Throughout the novel, disguise and concealment are consistently linked with playing a part. For example, after murdering Hallward, it is explicitly noted in the narration that, "Perhaps one never seems so much at one's ease as when one has to play a part. Certainly no one looking at Dorian Gray that night could have believed that he had passed through a tragedy as horrible as any tragedy of our age."[97] Here, the passage addresses Gray's criminality by alluding to the "horribly tragedy" of Hallward's murder, as well as Gray's consequential performance that hides his criminality. Moreover, the idea that Gray consistently "plays a part" suggests that he constructs an entire persona around his innocent, youthful appearance. Therefore, his youth is not simply a mask that conceals his criminality, but rather is a method that allows him to create a second life that adheres to societally accepted values. Given the link between Gray's criminality and his homosexuality, this idea of his playing a part could also be seen as an extension of his male gender performance, specifically regarding his choice in sexual partners. Shortly after recognizing himself as homosexual, Gray professes to Lord Henry that he is in love with Sibyl Vane, an actress who makes her living by constructing alternate personas and playing parts. As he says to Lord Henry,

> One evening she is Rosalind, and the next evening she is Imogen…I have watched her wandering through the forest of Arden, disguised as a pretty boy in hose and doublet and dainty cap…I have seen her in every age and in every costume. Ordinary women never appeal to one's imagination. They are limited to their century. No glamour ever transfigures them.[98]

[97]Ibid., 198.
[98] Ibid., 57-8.

In confessing his love for Vane, Gray channels his homosexual desires toward a woman, which on the surface adheres to the masculine gender norms upheld by respected society. However, while it is possible that some aspects of his attraction toward Vane are genuine, his "love" for her could ultimately be seen as a "beard" or a false lead that he uses to hide his homosexuality from society. This idea is reinforced by his admiration of Vane dressed as a "pretty boy" in one of her roles, which illustrates that he is truly attracted to those of the same-sex. Therefore, in stating that he loves Vane, he is in a sense playing a part by constructing a heterosexual persona that he can invoke whenever he needs to move within respectable Victorian society. Furthermore, by stating that he loves her because he has "seen her in every age and in every costume," it is implied that he is only attracted to her because she is a performer. This attraction therefore may be part of Gray's greater identification with her ability to perform on a regular basis.

In order to maintain this performance, Gray retreats into the closet, an internal mental space that allows him to police himself according to societal norms, illustrating the ways in which performance simultaneously facilitates and subverts the internalization of societal gender values. Eve Sedgwick theorizes that the closet is a "performance initiated as such by the speech act of silence," or, in other words, an inherent aspect of the homosexual's external performance that is characterized by the decision to pass as heterosexual by omitting to tell people otherwise.[99] However, for Gray, this closet is not simply an aspect of his outward performance, but rather is a space that he creates which allows him to be his true self. After realizing that his deviance—both in terms of his homosexuality and his criminality—physically mars his portrait, Gray moves the picture to his old school room, a confined space that quite literally serves as a "closet" that houses his secret, true self. It is in this room that he would often "sit in front of the

[99] Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 3.

picture" after committing his crimes, "sometimes loathing it and himself, but filled, at other times, with that pride of individualism that is half the fascination of sin, and smiling with secret pleasure."[100] By "loathing himself," Gray invokes the same judgment that those in respectable society pass on him, further illustrating the ways external values have been internalized by the homosexual subject. However, because this is also a space where Gray can "[smile] with secret pleasure" at his sin-marked portrait, the old school room, or the closet, is also a secret space where Gray can acknowledge his true self without having to acknowledge the judgment of society. The closet is therefore a space that permits and accepts Gray's homosexuality, despite the external societal pressures that attempt to regulate his expressions of gender. In this sense, the closet could thus be seen as the mechanism that allows him to outwardly adhere to these societal gender values as well as the mechanism that subverts them by allowing his homosexuality to exist secretly.

While Gray's ability to perform allows him to outwardly adhere to societal norms, the act of performing itself nevertheless contradicts Victorian gender ideals regarding masculinity. As argued in previous chapters, masculinity in late-nineteenth century Britain revolved around the ability to produce, both in terms of a capitalist, industrial economy, as well as sexual reproduction and virility.[101] In order to be productive in a capitalist economy, a man must also be honest so as to illustrate his own integrity and thus secure commercial credit.[102] As H. G. Cocks illustrates, this results in the adoration of traits such as candor and truth as "masculine," while conversely vilifying traits such as deceit and mendacity as "feminine."[103] Undoubtedly, Gray's performance as both an innocent non-criminal and a heterosexual are constructed to conceal his

[100] Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 158.
[101] Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*, 32-41.
[102] Cocks, *Nameless Offences*, 5.
[103] Ibid.

inability to adhere to norms established by respectable Victorian society. More specifically, his performance as a heterosexual, as illustrated by his attraction toward Sibyl Vane, allows him to create the illusion that he can adhere to external patriarchal gender norms, in which men, as part of their gender performance, express sexual attraction toward women. However, because this performance conceals his true self, it could be classified as dishonest, deceitful, and decidedly not masculine, thus contradicting the initial purpose of the performance.

With the anti-masculine aspects of performing counteracting any masculinity Gray attempts to outwardly establish by performance, this contradiction forces Gray into a double bind in which he is both aware of his inability to live up to societal gender norms as well as his inability to adequately "correct" his gender performance. By performing in the first place, Gray illustrates a concrete self-awareness that his true identity contradicts these gender norms, and thus must be concealed in order to move within respectable Victorian society. Furthermore, it is this self-awareness that places Gray in a position where he will never be able to "correct" his gender performance by recognizing his homosexual self as his true self. Because the act of concealing fails to alter Gray's true self, and ultimately reaffirms it by further exemplifying his inability to act like a "respectable" man should, it ensures that Gray's performance functions only as a veneer. Therefore, in order to continue to operate within respectable society, Gray must continue performing, even if this performance is in itself contradictory to the gender norms society established. The ultimate result of this is a double bind, in which Gray is condemned for performing and condemned if he fails to perform, thus making it impossible for the gender inconstancies associated with sexuality to be resolved, or "corrected" by him. Furthermore, the existence of the closet can be seen as an additional acknowledgement that Gray cannot by himself "correct" his sexuality to suit accepted masculine gender norms: he is the one who

perpetuates this space, and it is here that he feels no pressure to change himself according to external norms. As long as he can go into a space where this pressure does not exist, he has no reason to "correct" himself.

This double bind ultimately gives way to Gray's paralysis, in which he cannot conceptualize leaving the safety of his closet unscathed by external pressures nor imagine his sexuality "corrected" by these pressures in any way. This not only suggests that once he becomes aware of his homosexuality, his gender performance can never be resolved according to external norms, but that he also cannot imagine a life in which he is not performing. Gray actively maintains the closet through his own paranoia about being discovered, illustrating his own desperation to keep it a secret space:

> He was afraid. Sometimes when he was down at his great house in Nottinghamshire, entertaining the fashionable young men of his rank…he would suddenly leave his guests and rush back to town to see that the door had not been tampered with, and that the picture was still there. What if it was stolen?...Surely the world would know his secret then.[104]

Here, Gray admits to abruptly changing his plans and going so far as to "suddenly leave his guests and rush back to town" so as to ensure his closet is safe, thus highlighting his fear that his closet will be infiltrated by an outsider and will no longer be a secret. Yet going to such life-disrupting lengths to maintain the space ultimately betrays the idea that, as a homosexual man, there is no feasible alternative to maintaining this closeted, double-lifestyle. In other words, Gray cannot imagine a world in which he could be his true self outside of the closet, and as a result is paralyzed in this lifestyle of perpetual performance by his fear that his actions will be revealed as a performance. The fact that Gray has no alternative to this lifestyle of closets and performances is reinforced by his suicide, during which time he slashes his portrait in order to "kill this

[104] Ibid., 159.

monstrous soul life" so as to "be at peace," or in other words, to escape the paranoia that the closet perpetuates.[105] This idea that he intends his suicide to free him from the closet is underscored by the fact that his physical outward appearance changes to embody his closeted, true self when he destroys the portrait. However, the sheer fact that death is the only alternative to this closeted lifestyle ultimately reinforces the notion that Gray is thrust into a state of paralysis because of his inability to change his homosexuality. Therefore, because his world of performance and closets cannot cease, societal forces cannot "correct" Gray's homosexuality in the same manner that it "corrected" Marian Halcombe's homosexuality.

Furthermore, this paralysis that affects Gray can be seen in the deaths of other characters who perform, thus strengthening the idea that there is no alternative to constantly performing according to societal expectations. For example, Alan Campbell, one of Gray's former lovers, commits suicide shortly after Gray blackmails him into disposing of Hallward's body. Although it is possible that he does this because of his involvement with the murder, Gray's blackmailing of him threatens to expose Campbell's homosexuality, and thus compromises any performance that he may be struggling to uphold. His death could then be read as his inability to imagine a life in which his performance is destroyed. While Sibyl Vane is heterosexual, she nevertheless prized for her ability to perform by Gray and her mother, who, similar to respectable society, serve as external pressures that drives her performance. However, her love for Gray makes it impossible for her to perform because it, as she states, "brought [her] something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection," or in other words, allowed her to recognize that her performances are nothing but a sham reflection of reality.[106] In Gray's mind, Vane is supposed to perform a specific role—and perform it well—each night she takes the stage, thus mirroring the societal

[105] Ibid., 253.
[106] Ibid., 97.

expectations that are placed on him in regard to the masculine gender role he is expected to perform. Because she is no longer able to perform in the way that Gray expects her to, Gray rejects her, driving her to suicide.[107] Although Sibyl Vane's circumstances are different from Gray's and Campbell's, if one were to think of them in terms of performance and homosexuality, by being unable to perform, Vane essentially "comes out of the closet," ending the external acceptance she received from her mother and Gray when performing. Yet while Gray and Campbell's suicides suggest that they cannot imagine a world in which they are not performing, Gray's rejection of Vane ultimately illustrates the realities of not being accepted by "outside society," as represented by Gray and her mother, when her performance stops. Although a murder, Basil Hallward's death follows a similar trajectory as Gray's, Campbell's, and Vane's in the sense that it invokes a perpetuation of performance. After Hallward expresses his concerns to Gray about his immoral behavior, Gray allows Hallward into his closet to see his portrait, thus allowing him to see his secret self. It is only then that Gray murders him, keeping his secret safe and allowing him to continue with his own performance. This illustrates the lengths to which these characters will go in order to preserve their closet and secret self. When coupled with Gray's suicide, the death of these three characters illustrate the ways in which performance must be consistently perpetuated in the context of the novel, ultimately reinforcing the idea that, as a result, homosexuality cannot be "corrected."

In addition to contradicting societal expectations regarding masculinity, Gray's need to consistently perform points to an awareness that his homosexuality fails to live up to the gendered expectations set out for him by respectable Victorian society. It is because of this self-awareness that Gray's homosexuality cannot be resolved, or "corrected" according to societal

[107] Ibid., 98.

expectations of gender performance. Specifically, Gray's awareness of his homosexuality, and his subsequent integration of this into his identity reinforces the idea that he has a "true self" that fails to live up to societal norms. In order to conceal this fact, he must always perform. Furthermore, because he, and other characters that perform such as Alan Campbell, cannot imagine a world in which the performance ceases, there cannot be a world in which homosexuality is successfully integrated into heterosexual society, or a world in which they stop being homosexual. The ultimate result is that homosexuality becomes increasingly un-resolvable, or "un-correctable" as it becomes an integral part of a character's identity.

## V. Conclusion

Between 1859 and 1891 when *The Woman in White* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were respectively published, homosexuality went from being a set of specific sex acts between men to a full-fledged identity that marked one's sexual attraction toward those of the same-sex. As this occurred, greater Victorian society consistently branded same-sex attraction as "unnatural," in the case of Marian Halcombe's attraction toward her half-sister, as well as "criminal," as illustrated by the association of Dorian Gray's same-sex relationships with crime. Both cases illustrate how Victorian society, and the patriarchal forces that accompany it, strove to mark homosexuality as deviant from the expected societal norm. Because one's choice in sexual partner was considered part of one's gender performance during the Victorian era, this societal norm could be categorized as a gender norm, or the performative expectations that society has for members of each sex. Homosexuality could thus be understood as a type of gender dysmorphia during this time period. In describing homosexual attraction in *The Woman in White* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, I illustrated a trend in which homosexual characters internalize patriarchal "corrective" forces that Victorian society uses to regulate deviant gender

performance. In the process of this internalization, these "corrective" forces adapted to the fact that homosexuality is increasingly viewed as an irresolvable aspect of one's identity that cannot be "corrected" by one's self. Furthermore, in moving from the external to internal, this idea of "correction" went from reinforcing the patriarchal values that formed the cornerstone of Victorian society, to subverting them.

This trend of "correction" and internalization rests primarily on the Victorian notion that homosexuality is an issue of gender performance that threatens the existing patriarchal order, an idea that is clearly articulated in *The Woman in White*. Written ten years before the date Foucault and other scholars pinpoint as the emergence of homosexuality as an identity, *The Woman in White* illustrates the "corrective" forces that upheld patriarchal standards through the transformation of Marian Halcombe from a "mannish" woman to a woman who adheres to her societally expected feminine gender role. In addition to being described as physically hermaphroditic, Halcombe's activity and non-submissiveness made her more of a protective patriarch toward her half-sister than a female companion. When coupled with her possessive, "husband-like" feelings toward her half-sister, her hermaphroditic traits mark her as "sexually inverted," or homosexual, thus illustrating the ways in which homosexuality was at this time viewed as a failure to perform according to one's gender. In addition to signaling her homosexuality, Halcombe's hermaphroditic traits threaten to confuse the patriarchal order by blurring the binary that hierarchically separates men from women. In order to account for this, patriarchal forces, as represented by Fosco, emasculate Halcombe, thus "correcting" her gender performance so that it is more feminine. This not only illustrates how homosexuality is an aspect of gender performance in the context of these novels, but it also shows how the patriarchy attempts to "correct" her gender for the sake of preserving itself.

As the homosexual identity solidifies as a concept, the patriarchal forces that "correct" Marian Halcombe's gender change shape due in part to the self-awareness that comes with self-identification. Although Halcombe knows that she is "mannish" in the sense that she rebukes womanly pursuits such as painting, her own understanding of the hermaphroditic and homosexual implications of this "mannishness" is never explored, and thus could be considered non-existent. This compares to Dorian Gray of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, who recognizes his homosexuality and internalizes it as an aspect of his identity when he sees his portrait. However, the fact that Gray is treated as a feminized sexual object in his relationships with Hallward and Lord Henry illustrates that the patriarchal norms that govern heterosexual relationships are superimposed onto homosexual relationships. By pigeonholing Gray into a feminine role instead of "correcting" his gender performance so that it is more masculine, it is possible to see this superimposition of heterosexual values as the patriarchy's failure to "correct" his gender performance. However, the fact that Gray's homosexual relationships mimic the dynamics of heterosexual relationships illustrates how patriarchal values can be internalized within homosexual relationships as a whole. This is, in a sense, a "corrective" measure because it replicates patriarchal gender dynamics between men and women, in which the feminine is disempowered.

While Dorian Gray internalizes some of these patriarchal values in his relationships, his awareness of his own homosexuality makes it impossible for him to completely "correct" his own gender performance. Gray consistently performs a part: he uses his young, innocent-looking face to disguise his criminality and general societal deviance, and uses caprices with women like Sibyl Vane and Hetty to hide his homosexuality. By performing, he by definition can never act according to the Victorian masculine ideal, which prizes openness and honesty. These

performances, moreover, acknowledge the fact Gray knows what the societal norms are, and that he has an aspect of his identity that can never adhere to these societal norms. Therefore, as Gray becomes aware of his homosexuality and his inability to live up to Victorian societal standards, it becomes impossible for him to "correct" his deviant gender performance and his homosexuality by himself. In addition to Gray, other homosexual men in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are also faced with the fact that their homosexuality cannot be "resolved" according to patriarchal norms. Basil Hallward, for example, sublimates his sexual feelings toward other men in his art, thus ignoring and refusing to act upon his homosexuality in a way that will directly offend Victorian social norms. Similar to Gray, Lord Henry also hides his homosexuality by taking a wife whom he never sees, thus hiding his homosexual caprices behind a "socially legitimate" heterosexual marriage. Ultimately, the fact that none of these men are able to "correct" their homosexuality suggests that when internalized, "corrective" patriarchal values do not and cannot work.

In terms of implications for patriarchal society, this trend illustrates the gradual subversion of patriarchal power that occurs after homosexuality was recognized as an identity. In her essay "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Judith Butler argues that patriarchal society labels homosexuality as an "imitation," or a "copy" of heterosexuality, thus making heterosexuality the more legitimate "original" off of which homosexuality is derived. As to the purpose of this, she argues,

> The origin requires its derivatives in order to affirm itself as the origin, for origins make sense to the extent that they are differentiated from that which they produce as derivatives. Hence if there were no concept of the homosexual as a copy, there would be no construct of heterosexuality as the origin.[108]

In other words, in insisting that homosexuality is a secondary "copy" of heterosexuality, heterosexuality, and the patriarchal forces associated with it, reinforces its own legitimacy. In

[108] Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 307.

this sense, the patriarchy consistently reaffirms its own power by insisting that heterosexuality is the one true "origin" of all sexualities. "Correction" could ultimately be seen as an extension of this copy-origin dynamic because it fortifies the patriarchy. For example, Halcombe's hermaphroditism could be seen as a false drag, or a poor "copy" of what it means to be masculine. Furthermore, the "correction" of her gender performance to be more feminine could be seen as a return to the "origin" or the original gender binary, subsequently reinforcing patriarchal gender norms and their legitimacy in society. This can again be seen in Gray's relationships with Lord Henry and Basil Hallward, in which Gray is feminized so as to "correct" his relationships according to a heterosexual dynamic. This reinforces the idea that homosexuality is nothing more than a "copy" of heterosexuality and consequently bolsters the legitimacy of the patriarchal society. However, because "correction" fails to work once the homosexual subject internalizes patriarchal gender values, homosexuality could thus be seen as a means of subverting the patriarchal status quo. For example, after becoming aware of his homosexual identity and his consequential inability to adhere to Victorian gender norms, Gray passes in Victorian society in part by allowing his homosexuality to exist in a secret, closeted space. Because he is aware that his homosexuality is an integral part of his identity, there is no way to "correct" Gray's sexuality back to a heterosexual norm. Because his sexuality cannot be "corrected," or forced to adhere to the patriarchal, heterosexual norm, this undermines the idea that heterosexuality is the origin point. In this sense, Gray's inability to resolve his sexuality illustrates how homosexuality is subversive to patriarchal Victorian norms once it becomes an identity.

There are a variety of factors that shape the subversion of patriarchal norms during the mid to late Victorian period. For example, in the 1890s, the introduction of the New Woman, or

a woman who pushes the boundaries of patriarchal society by obtaining an education or starting a career, subverts the typical narrative of female domesticity, thus challenging the patriarchal Victorian narrative of separate spheres. One could also argue that the subversion presented by homosexuality is the very beginnings of the larger, more dramatic shift away from Victorian ideals toward Modernist ideals, in which traditional gender values are disrupted and in some cases rejected. Regardless, *The Woman and White* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* nevertheless illustrate a trend in which Victorian patriarchal values are gradually subverted with the introduction of the homosexual identity and the homosexual self-awareness that accompanies it.

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