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AMONG the many *bon mots* to outrage Edward Carson, the prosecuting attorney at the second and third Oscar Wilde trials, was Wilde's response to the question, "Have you ever adored a young man madly?" Wilde quipped, "I have never given adoration to anybody except myself" (Hyde 129). For the late twentieth-century reader, the witticism is itself a kind of evidence: the Marquis of Queensbury had charged Wilde with posing as a sodomite, an offence punishable under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, and, as Jeffrey Weeks has shown, this desire to commit an "act of gross indecency" (14) was seen to be a product of "men's sexual selfishness," a manifestation of their pathological narcissism (16). In fact, Michael Warner has argued that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, homoerotics had become "an unrecognized version of autoerotics, or more precisely, of narcissism; both [were] seen as essentially an interest in the self rather than in the other" (190).¹ This burgeoning equation of homosexuality with narcissism, as Warner contends, has given us a legacy that uses their interchangeability to condemn both. (After all, aren't gay men excessively conscious of their looks? How often do gay men seek out partners who look like them? And who can forget the image of Jame Gumb, the murderous homosexual in *The Silence of the Lambs*, visually caressing his own body as it dances in front of his video camera?) "Narcissism" is that spectacularly wide-ranging charge whose moral weight is still often unmitigated, and which still often centres on the designation and condemnation of the modern Western gay man.

As a psychological diagnosis, narcissism arises at an interesting juncture in history, given its relation to sexual inversion. George Chauncey and David Halperin have both argued that the term "invert" was not, in the nineteenth century, synonymous with homosexuality, but rather "referred to a broad range of deviant gender behavior, of which homosexual desire was only a logical but indistinct aspect" (Chauncey, qtd. in Halperin 15). However, in 1892 (the year after the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*), the term "homosexuality" was introduced to the English language through Charles Gilbert Chaddock's translation of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia sexualis*, and marked a distinct differentiation of homosexuality from inversion.² This differentiation, I want to suggest, had much to do with the use of narcissism as

a taxonomic category, one that began to be associated not exclusively but predominantly with homosexual men, one that could increase the horror of a quip like Wilde's during the trial.

I

In his essay "The Conception of Narcissism," Havelock Ellis, that famous liberal advocate of tolerance for the "invert" (except of course for the "invert who flouts his perversion in [society's] face" [Vol. 1, 157]), observed that "after the middle of the nineteenth century, when sexual psychology was beginning to become a recognized study, we find — under one name or another or under no definite name at all — various references which here concern us" — that is, descriptions of the narcissistic "invert," the person who misdirects libidinal energy by turning it on him/herself. Ellis was the first person to refer to a "Narcissus-like tendency" of autoerotics to become absorbed by their own image (Vol. 7, 355). But Ellis's vagueness about the "name" or lack of name under which one categorizes certain suspect behaviours opened up the possibilities for the designating of pathologies where before only moral crimes existed. Ellis himself discovered in his research of the early to mid-1890s that narcissism is a marked feature in both women and "feminine-minded men" (Vol. 7, 355), a behavioural type that had been identified for at least 200 years in the form of the English molly. While Ellis only published this finding in 1898, he had gathered his data much earlier, and may have withheld his "sympathetic" portrayal of homosexuality because of the public vitriol inspired by the Wilde trials. In Volume 1 of *Studies in the Pathology of Sex* (1897), Ellis cites the case of a homosexual male who is "often impelled more by *amour propre* than sexual desire" (41). Thus, part of that famous articulation of the species that Michel Foucault discusses (43) is the characterization and containment of that species in the 1890s within the psychosexual framework of narcissism.

Following his pioneering work, Ellis's "Narcissus-like tendency" got translated in 1899 by the German psychiatrist Paul Näcke into "*Narcismis*" (qtd. in Freud, Vol. 14, 73), which Freud used in his 1910 addendum to the *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sexuality*.³ In 1911, Otto Rank located narcissism in a decidedly homosexual context (Ellis, Vol. 7, 356), paving the way for Freud's full-blown essay "On Narcissism: An Introduction" in 1914, which concerns "the attitude of a person who treats his own body in the same way in which the body of a sexual object is normally treated" (Vol. 14, 73). Freud writes:

We have discovered, especially clearly in people whose libidinal development has suffered some disturbance, such as perverts and homosexuals, that in their later choice of love-objects they have taken as a model not

their mother [a libidinal investment Freud terms "anaclitic"] but their own selves. They are plainly seeking *themselves* as a love-object, and are exhibiting a type of object choice which must be termed "narcissistic." In this observation we have the strongest of the reasons which have led us to adopt the hypothesis of narcissism. (88; emphasis in original)

Freud contrasts this narcissistic object choice with one he calls anaclitic, in which the child takes the mother as a primary site of erotic attraction. The narcissistic invert, Freud suggests, identifies with the mother who had loved him to the degree that he loves as the mother had loved, which is to say, he loves another man, but a man who is really a projected self.⁴ For Freud, as for Ellis, Nücke, and other early theorists of psychosexuality, homosexuality is not the exclusive domain of narcissism, but it is certainly the strongest test case. Thus Isidore Sadger concludes, "We can say of homosexuality that it is the Narcissistic perversion *par excellence*[;] . . . the chief characteristic of inverts is their vanity . . . and they never forgive a wound to their Narcissism" (qtd. in Ellis, Vol. 7, 364).

That the tropes of the Narcissus myth should begin to transform in the mid-1890s into a central taxonomic image in diagnosing homosexuality is interesting in light of Wilde's widespread reputation — both that of his artistic production and of his conviction for indulging in the narcissistic tendencies of sodomy. Wilde himself became a case study in the major treatises on narcissism.⁵ Ellis is referring to Wilde when he scoffs at the invert who "assumes that because he would rather take his pleasure with a soldier or a policeman than with their sisters he is of a finer clay than the vulgar herd" (Vol. 1, 157). Max Simon Nordau, writing the year Wilde was tried, charges that "Wilde has done more by his eccentricities than his works. . . . What really determines his actions is the hysterical craving to be noticed, to occupy the attention of the world with himself, to get talked about" (317). (Wilde here would agree: "there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about" [*Dorian Gray* 2].)⁶ And, ironically, Wilde himself attempts to exploit this body of diagnoses to get him out of prison. In 1896, he twice petitioned the courts for a discharge from Reading by referring to his "offences" as "forms of sexual madness . . . recognized as such . . . by modern pathological science" (*Letters* 402), and to his "absolute madness — the insanity of perverted sensual instinct" (*Letters* 411). (However, unlike his psychiatric counterparts, Wilde does not believe his own diagnosis. In a letter to Robert Ross in 1898, he refused to suggest "that Uranian love is ignoble. I hold it to be noble — more noble than other forms" [*Letters* 705].) Thus did the late nineteenth century, as Foucault and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have shown, articulate the species of the homosexual who could be defined as a psychological type rather than a mere agent; moreover, as Ed Cohen has argued, such articulation used the

figure of Oscar Wilde as a nexus for defining the homosexual (and hence the heterosexual) bourgeois male (see *Talk*). These articulations rose at the same time as the psychopathologizing of homosexuality-as-narcissism as evidenced in the dandiacal behaviour of Wilde. However, to invoke Wilde—both his life and work, as was so notoriously accomplished in the trials—to designate the homosexual as a narcissistic “type” is to do so at great peril, for Wilde’s own use of the Narcissus image is more slippery and paradoxical than his analysts allow. Wilde toyed with the Narcissus myth in his writings and, in an exploratory way, used that myth to clarify and affirm same-sex desire.

II

“To love oneself,” proclaims Lord Goring of *An Ideal Husband*, “is the beginning of a life-long romance” (*Two Comedies* 213). With this joke Wilde registers a playful principle of dandyism that he treats much more bleakly in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. As Rank was the first to argue, *Dorian Gray* is a study in narcissism (71–85). Lord Henry Wotton describes Dorian as a Narcissus—a beautiful boy—early in the novel, but it is Dorian’s relation to the eponymous portrait that marks the infatuation with his own image. When the painting is first presented to him,

Dorian made no answer, but passed listlessly in front of his picture and turned towards it. When he saw it he drew back, and his cheeks flushed for a moment with pleasure. A look of joy came into his eyes, as if he had recognized himself for the first time. He stood there motionless and in wonder, dimly conscious that Hallward was speaking to him, but not catching the meaning of his words. The sense of his own beauty came on him like a revelation. He had never felt it before. (24–25)

Motionless, dumbfounded, enraptured: these are the traits of the original, mythological Narcissus, enamoured of his own image reflected in the pool. Indeed, Dorian quickly establishes with the portrait the kind of erotic relationship that Freud and company would find so troublesome: “I know, now,” he tells Basil, “that when one loses one’s good looks, whatever they may be, one loses everything. Your picture has taught me that. . . . I am jealous of the portrait you have painted of me” (26). This jealousy has, of course, an erotic component as, later in the novel, Dorian remembers how “once, in boyish mockery of Narcissus, he had kissed, or feigned to kiss, those painted lips” (105) as the painting “revealed to him his own body” (106). For Rank, Jeffrey Berman, and, I think, to some degree for Wilde, this scene embodies the palpable ways in which Dorian becomes murderous and selfish. Dorian’s love of his own image is at the heart of his abominable treatment of Sybil Vane and his murder of Basil Hallward. His condition is

what Rank calls a "defective capacity to love" (72), one which the novel kills off in the final paragraphs.⁷ It is similar to the one Freud would elaborate in his definition of clinical, homosexual narcissism, a "megalomania [that] no doubt came into being at the expense of the object-libido. The libido that has been withdrawn from the external world has been directed to the ego and thus gives rise to an attitude which may be called narcissism" (Vol. 14, 74-75). Given this seeming harmony between Wilde's and later psychoanalysts' descriptions — and given the regulatory weight accompanying both — one wonders how the moralizing *Dorian Gray* could have been used so successfully as a symptom in Wilde's diagnoses, or as evidence against him in his trials.

However, the moral condemnation the novel seems to heap on Dorian does not preclude the possibilities for an important energy moving between Dorian's portrait and his desiring ego. For Eve Sedgwick, the beautiful portrait of the beautiful boy invokes, through its classical allusions, the Greek aesthetic of the male body on display, a body that can be looked at without shame; the portrait, she says, presents "a body whose surfaces, features, and abilities [are] the subject or object of unphobic enjoyment" (136), or are so initially at any rate. Dorian's early experience of the portrait emphasizes the erotic pleasure of the (specifically gay) male look in which the displaced body — and particularly the displaced body of one's own "self" — is safely made an object of view, protected from the dangerous arena of cruising or of enjoying the spectacle of another man's body, a man who may violently fear the look of the desiring male. But what is even more striking in this opening scene is the pedagogical importance of the viewer's relation to the painting. The ingenuous Dorian blushes as "the sense of his own beauty came to him like a revelation" (25); the painting "revealed to him his own body" (106). To watch oneself here is to affirm that one is both desiring and desirable; it is to allow oneself the all-important moment of self-affirmation, of the validity and strength of one's unspeakable desire. As Sedgwick says, "not everyone has a lover of their own sex, but everyone, after all, has a self of their own sex" (161). What Wilde achieves in this early narcissistic moment is the self's knowledge of its own sexual beauty and libidinal power, a knowledge whose lack is, in the Wilde canon, synonymous with puritanism and bourgeois sincerity. Dorian finds here what Truman Capote would articulate much later, in 1948: "Narcissus was no egotist, . . . he was merely another of us who, in our unshatterable isolation, recognized, on seeing his reflection, the one beautiful comrade, the only inseparable love" (144).

The eventual diagnosis of Dorian's narcissism as a "defective capacity to love" (Rank 72) parallels the normalizing forces that accompanied treatments of Narcissus in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,

treatments that centred on the reprehensible self-enclosure, the refusal to recognize the outside world, that constitutes the narcissistic circle of self-absorption. The very terminology used to characterize this disorder — Ellis's "inversion," Freud's narcissistic versus anaclitic object attachment, Nordau's "egomania" (318) — invoke images of exclusive circularity in which the world outside one's own perception and appreciation is ignored, refused, and consequently transgressed. Such a use of the Narcissus story, however, misreads and simplifies most of the versions with which Wilde, as a classical scholar, would have been familiar. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, for example, Narcissus refuses the love of "many lads and many girls" out of "pride so unyielding" (83), but his eventual libidinal investment does more to overturn pride than to cement it:

Narcissus, wearied with hunting in the heat of the day, lay down here: for he was attracted by the beauty of the place, and by the spring. While he sought to quench his thirst, another thirst grew in him, and as he drank, he was enchanted by the beautiful reflection that he saw. He fell in love with an insubstantial hope, mistaking a mere shadow for a real body. . . . Unwittingly, he desired himself, and was himself the object of his own approval, at once seeking and sought, himself kindling the flame with which he burned. (85)

The prototypic scene of self-absorption, this moment actually turns on distinctions between the desiring self and the desired object. Narcissus is "attracted by the beauty of the place," seeking for his pleasure some other beauty that can provide that pleasure. He falls in love not with himself, but with another image, an "insubstantial hope" of whose real identity he is "unwitting." Like Dorian before the portrait, he is both desiring subject and "the *object* of his own approval," "seeking *and* sought." Narcissus does not fall in love with himself here, but with another man. As Yves Bonnefoy says, "Narcissus must first believe that he loves another in order to be able to love himself" (493), and it is this subject-object distinction that underlies the classical versions of the myth.⁸ Bonnefoy argues that, in all but one of the Greek versions of the myth, Narcissus does not recognize his own image in the water; he does not know the beloved is himself. And when he does figure it out, says Bonnefoy, he sees the image not as a reflection of his own moral fault, but rather as a punishment for scorning the gifts of the gods. Thus, in the originating myth, we have a tale that not only obliterates the distinction between self and other but also emphasizes that distinction profoundly.⁹ Narcissus is unable to identify the other precisely because he is so intent on the other *as* other.

For Bonnefoy, the longevity of Narcissus's life depends upon his inability to see himself and to know himself: "Insight is the ruin of Narcissus" (493–94). When Dorian confronts his beautiful image — a moment that Jacques

Lacan would call the "jubilant assumption of his specular image by the child" (2) — he combines his love of the beautiful with the knowledge that the beautiful is himself. For Lord Henry, this awareness only increases Dorian's attractiveness: the "pulse and passion of youth were in him, but he was becoming self-conscious" (57). Yet, for Rank, this moment of self-recognition is also the moment at which the narcissist recognizes that he cannot obtain the object he desires, that his passion is destined not to be fulfilled, that what is at the centre of his desire is death, not love (77). Such insight is ruin for Dorian, as it was for Narcissus:

"I wish I could love," cried Dorian Gray [to Lord Henry], with a deep note of pathos in his voice. "But I seem to have lost the passion, and forgotten the desire. I am too much concentrated on myself. My own personality has become a burden to me. I want to escape, to go away, to forget."
(205)

And with this self-knowledge — a knowledge of the desire to escape the self, a knowledge whose contents are themselves inescapable — the self-adored becomes the self-loathed. The picture of Dorian Gray becomes not an erotic self-affirmation — no jubilant assumption — but rather a haunting *Doppelgänger*, a constant reminder of sin and eros gone wrong. In the latter part of the novel, Dorian becomes increasingly afraid of the portrait, and of anything that might reflect him to himself. Like his Parisian double in the infamous "yellow book" (Huysmans's *À Rebours*), Dorian assumes a "grotesque dread of mirrors" (127). His decision to destroy the portrait follows from a horrifying reflection:

The curiously-carved mirror that Lord Henry had given to him, so many years ago now, was standing on the table, and the white-limbed Cupids laughed round as of old. He took it up, as he had done on that night of horror, when he had first noted the change in the fatal picture, and with wild tear-dimmed eyes looked into its polished shield. . . . Then he loathed his own beauty, and flinging the mirror on the floor crushed it into silver splinters beneath his heel. It was his beauty that had ruined him. (220)

Dorian destroys the otherness of the reflected image in much the same way that he will drive a knife into the painting. And these acts of destroying the other ultimately destroy the self, as Dorian falls dead before the freshly restored portrait. The narcissist meets his palpably moral end, but does so by reuniting the division between the self and other that narcissism had facilitated. It is not narcissism that heralds death here, but rather the end of narcissism: the crucial moment when the boy flings himself into the pool because his desire can no longer be sustained.

If Dorian's relation to his portrait is initially homoerotic, and if, in the character of Dorian, Wilde turns an initial scene of homoerotic attraction

into a moral triad including narcissism, homosexuality, and evil, he takes care to undo such an equation elsewhere in the book. He achieves this undoing in the character of the painter, Basil Hallward. In an essay entitled "Writing Gone Wilde: Homoerotic Desire in the Closet of Representation," Cohen argues that Dorian Gray's body is the site of homoerotic attraction for Basil and Lord Henry, and that the portrait represents the ever-present, ever-concealed "symbolic displacement of the erotic onto the aesthetic" (806). If this is the case, then it is not only Dorian who becomes a test case for narcissism, but Basil as well. For Basil, the character in the novel with whom Wilde most closely identified,¹⁰ the painting of the portrait is itself a narcissistic act. As Lord Henry encourages him to exhibit the painting at Grosvenor, Hallward explains why he can't: "I know you will laugh at me," he replied, 'but I really can't exhibit it. I have put too much of myself into it'" (2). Echoing A.W. Schlegel's proclamation that all poets (Romantic and post-Romantic) must perforce be narcissists (qtd. in Vinge, 305-06),¹¹ Basil argues that

every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself. The reason I will not exhibit this picture is that I am afraid that I have shown in it the secret of my own soul. (5)

Later, Basil makes the same point to Dorian, and in terms that clearly convey his erotic desire:

[A]s I worked at it [i.e., the portrait], every flake and film of colour seemed to me to reveal my secret. I grew afraid that others would know of my idolatry. I felt, Dorian, that I had told too much, that I had put too much of myself into it. (114-15)

Basil's painting is a narcissistic reflection of his own desire. Yet at the same time that it obliterates the object (the "sitter"), it telegraphs its desire *for* the object. For Dorian and for fin-de-siècle psychoanalysis, narcissism is self-enclosure; for Basil Hallward, narcissism is self-*disclosure*.

Basil's aesthetic narcissism appropriates Dorian's and uses it to reveal an aesthetic/erotic identity. Basil's coming-out speech to Dorian transforms the previous narcissistic triad (desire/narcissism/evil) into desire/narcissism/art:

I worshipped you. I grew jealous of every one to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself. . . . You had leant over the still pool of some Greek woodland, and seen in the water's silent silver the marvel of your own face. And it had all been what art should be, unconscious, ideal, and remote. (114)

Dorian is at once completely present to Basil and "ideal and remote." Basil describes to Lord Henry the curious dialectic that makes Dorian always present and never present: "I see everything in him. He is never more present in my work than when no image of him is there" (11). This complex negotiation of self-love as other-love (an other-idolatry as narcissism) is a familiar theme for Wilde, one which he uses in his short tale, "The Disciple." The story, which André Gide quotes in his *Memorial*, takes place at the death of Narcissus. When the pool bemoans his death by becoming a well of tears, it explains to the Oreads that "I loved Narcissus because, as he lay on my banks and looked down at me, in the mirror of his eyes I saw ever my own beauty mirrored" (*Complete* 255). Like Basil Hallward, the pool seeks out the beautiful narcissist to proclaim and to mirror the speaker's own eros. Both Basil and the pool register a curious mixture of passionate desire and selfishness; they neither surrender their identities to the all-consuming love of the other (the love of a narcissistic Dorian, for example), nor do they obliterate that other through the all-consuming narcissistic self-love that early psychoanalysis—and indeed much of Western culture—has exploited for diagnostic regulation. Indeed, as Gregory Bredbeck argues in his extended analysis of "The Disciple," Wilde takes the traditional wisdom of the classical myth and re-makes it, "succinctly *inverting* the received morality of the myth by turning the gazer into the gazed, the subject into the object" (54).¹² Instead, Wilde locates in the self the knowledge of the desire for the other; and, in the desire for the other, he inscribes the desiring self. In the eros of Wilde's fin-de-siècle narcissism, it takes one to know one.¹³

For Sedgwick, this phrase, appropriated from the vitriolic school-yard chant, is at the heart of homosexual panic. Sedgwick argues that homosexual panic is a post-Romantic phenomenon turning on the "transmutability of the intrapsychic with the intersubjective . . . where one man's mind could be read by that of the feared and desired other." Hence, in this fear that one man might "know" another, in all the possible meanings of that word, we have a literature (the paranoid Gothic) that presents "two potent male figures locked in an epistemologically indissoluble clench of will and desire" (187). In *Dorian Gray*, the paranoid plot is reproduced in Dorian's fear of James Vane, Sybil's brother, who inhabits Dorian's imagination as an agent of violence and terror. However, while this clench of will and desire is undoubtedly the product of the closet, whose defence mechanisms are always demonstrating themselves, Wilde is also doing something different with the possibilities for knowledge. In the speeches of Basil and the pool, the knowledge of self as a nascent gay subject can only be produced through the reflection of the desiring/desired other. Taking one to know one here is not an ontological threat so much as it is an affirmation of identity. Thus, while *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is in many ways an extension of

the Gothic tradition,¹⁴ it is also a re-writing of that tradition through the Romantic lens of narcissistic productivity. Dorian's plot in many ways reproduces the Gothic; Basil Hallward's revises it by revising the implications and possibilities for homosexual "panic."

III

For Wilde, then, the representation of the narcissist is richly textured and problematic, exploiting both the Schlegelian and the erotic implications of the desiring self and the constructed projections of the other. It represents what Herbert Marcuse calls the "Great Refusal" in fin-de-siècle aesthetics. In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse defines narcissism in the works of Paul Valéry and André Gide as the "refusal to accept separation from the libidinous object (or subject). The refusal aims at liberation — at the re-union of what has become separated" (154). Liberation as Wilde defines it is essential not only to the modern artist, but also to the homosexual subject as Wilde is trying to articulate him in the mid-1890s. This subject, as we have seen, is hinted at in the figure of Basil Hallward, and it is given its fullest expression in *Teleny, or The Reverse of the Medal*, a pornographic novel associated with Wilde and his circle.¹⁵ First surfacing in 1890 (the year before *The Picture of Dorian Gray* appeared) and then published in 1893, *Teleny* is a rather conventional pornographic novel — if homosexual pornography of the late nineteenth century can be said to have conventions — in which two male lovers move through compulsory heterosexual escapades arranged in increasing intensity, until they finally enjoy each other in every possible bodily configuration. But what is most interesting about *Teleny*, especially as a contemporary of *Dorian Gray*, is its invocation of the Narcissus image and the way it uses that image to say what *Dorian Gray* does not or cannot.

Whereas *Dorian Gray* bifurcates the Narcissus image into erotic self-absorption (Dorian) and artistic creativity (Basil), *Teleny* foregrounds and celebrates the erotic foundations of narcissistic sameness. Camille Des Grieux, the novel's narrator, notes his similarities to René Teleny, similarities physical as well as intellectual: "We are alike in looks as well as in tastes" (136). When Camille first meets Teleny, he is aroused by the pianist's "magnetic hand, which seems to have a secret affinity for [my] own" (33). Teleny's fascinating erotic power resides in that familiar image of the pool: he has eyes "as unfathomable as the dim water of a well" (69), a well not dissimilar to that of Narcissus. This narcissistic imagery then culminates in an undifferentiated blending, an obfuscation of self and other. Camille remembers:

The image of Teleny haunted me, the name of René was ever on my lips. I kept repeating it over and over for dozens of times. What a sweet name it was! At its sound my heart was beating faster. . . . I stared at

myself within the looking-glass, and I saw Teleny in it instead of myself; and behind him arose our blended shadows, as I had seen them on the pavement the evening before. (46)

Unlike the true narcissist — or perhaps *precisely* like him — Camille sees another's face in his reflection. Like Basil and the pool in "The Disciple," the desired object is at the same time an erotic other and a desiring self. In fact, at one point in the novel, Teleny sires a child that, straining medical credibility as pornography often does, turns out to look not like the father Teleny but like the father's lover Camille (84). What the text accomplishes here, at least temporarily, is a divestment of the moral implications of narcissism that were beginning to take shape at the end of the century. Instead, the text conflates self and other in that Great Refusal of compulsory separation, and uses that refusal to signify erotic knowledge and power.

For Dorian Gray, the erotic charge of the specular body was necessary to self-affirmation and to the knowledge that one is homoerotically attracted. In *Teleny*, the love of sameness is essential to the pedagogy of love-making itself. Camille explains while reflecting on their mutual masturbation:

The most skilled of prostitutes could never give such thrilling sensations as those which I felt with my lover, for the tweek is, after all, only acquainted with the pleasures she herself has felt; whilst the keener emotions, not being those of her sex, are unknown to and cannot be imagined by her. . . . The quintessence of bliss can, therefore, only be enjoyed by beings of the same sex. (167)

The quality of sameness here is highly functional. In pornographic convention — and indeed, in the heterosexual scenes of *Teleny* — desire is always instructed, a product of imitation. (One need only think here of the writings of the Marquis de Sade, or Cleland's *Fanny Hill* and her tutelage.) But for a homosexual subculture, there are no imitable models; there is no convention from which to imagine a sexual behaviour combined with and inseparable from identity. The philosophy of Platonism to which Wilde's work owes such a debt displaces male homoerotic desire into tropes of friendship, the disembodied, transcendent negotiations of the male citizens. But sexual pleasure always depends to a degree on sexual knowledge, a knowledge that, in this text, must begin in the self and in the registers of sameness. What we see in *Teleny* is a conscious use of the Narcissus myth — and its burgeoning homosexual connotations — to represent the richness of desire for the other. Narcissism is not a pathology or inversion of sexuality; it is its foundation.¹⁶

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the narcissistic circle of self-affirmation that comprised Dorian and his portrait was shattered by self-consciousness. Dorian's knowledge of his own beauty was that which constructed of his

portrait the dangerous other; and that knowledge, according to Rank, introduces repression into the narcissistic circle. *Teleny* too registers such repression. As the novel progresses, René Teleny begins to be haunted by "ghosts," a "horrible fate" that he feels hangs over him and his love-affairs (28). In a kind of conventional paranoid Gothic plot, this ghostliness takes the palpable form of the *Doppelgänger*, whom Teleny defines clearly as his lover, Camille: "You are, perhaps, my *Doppelgänger*?" he says to Camille. "'Then, woe to one of us! . . . In our country they say that a man must never meet his *alter ego*, it brings misfortune to one or to both;' and he shivered as he said this" (136). As a hateable twin, Camille represents René's fear of having another man too close to him, of being too fully known by him, of sharing an erotic community that is both exciting and terrifying. The pervasive pathologies of narcissism invade and disrupt the erotic union and construct of the loved other/self a dangerous double.

Or so it would read in the conventional paranoid plot. But the dangerous *Doppelgänger* that disturbs the narcissistic bliss is not the product of some psychological maladjustment, as Rank would have it; nor is it the logical extension of the narcissistic infatuation. In fact, the root of the *Doppelgänger* fantasy in this novel is not psychological at all. Rather, Teleny's fear, the ghost that haunts him, is a fear of a specifically external, extras psychic social force. The novel introduces Camille's mother whose role, while tangential to the love-plot, serves a number of important functions. The mother, as we find out, has become Teleny's lover, and it is she whom he is trying to hide from Camille. Thus, the mother establishes a kind of family romance that reminds us of the "normal" sexuality to which we should always be attracted. But, more important, the mother in this book establishes a kind of financial regulation within the homosexual/narcissistic union. Teleny has amassed great debts which Camille's mother has paid off, and her resulting blackmail scheme is the reason for Teleny's infidelity to Camille. She becomes a kind of panther with whom Teleny has to dine, a Mrs. Chevely to Teleny's Robert Chiltern. If Teleny had reneged on his sexual favours to the mother, she would have destroyed him. This plot twist, thrown in at the end of the novel, is not only a convenient and sensational way to end (and isn't the ability to end the generic problem that pornography faces?), but it also makes an important point about gay love in the novel. While the imagery figuring same-sex desire has suggested a kind of narcissistic self-love, the novel ultimately suggests that it is not narcissism that intrudes upon and inverts love, but rather money and the regulatory powers of compulsory heterosexuality. The double here does not represent narcissistic guilt, but rather the impossible attainment of desire in a world where the gay man is vulnerable and blackmailable. Doubleness interrupts the otherwise blissful narcissistic union by inserting into the love relationship a crass, bourgeois

power-struggle over money. In *Teleny*, the real impediment to same-sex relations is material, rather than psychological. Oppression comes from the outside, and forces the homosexual man away from sameness and into the tyranny of the other.

This material regulation is part of a larger critique of the bourgeoisie for which Wilde's major writings are now famous. For in *Teleny*, as in the comedies, the bourgeois public is incapable of appreciating art. At the concert hall Teleny, who is a pianist, bemoans, "The young men are obliging the ladies, these are scrutinizing each other's toilette; the fathers, who are bored, are either thinking of the rise and fall of the stocks, or else counting the number of gas-lights, and reckoning how much the illumination will cost" (34). What the audience cannot provide, he claims, is a "sympathetic listener": "someone who feels, while listening, exactly as I do whilst I am playing, who sees perhaps the same visions as I do—" someone, in short, like Camille (34-35). This familiar artistic petulance is itself a form of narcissism, for it requires that the listener see the world solely through the artistic lens of the artist. And here, of course, we remember Basil Hallward, for whom all art was a creation of the artist rather than the object represented or the audience who appreciated it. Art is a form of eroticism in which sympathetic individuals—narcissists all—see each other's world by having each other see his own.¹⁷ In effect, art returns us to the narcissistic unity that constitutes sexual relations between men in the novel and in other Wildean moments. *Pace* psychoanalysis, art here is destroyed by the preoccupation with otherness, with being outside the narcissistic circle of production and reception. In art as in erotics, bourgeois productivity replaces identification and pleasure. Production is reified along with re-production, so that those who have refused to use their genitalia as "baby-making tools" (*Teleny* 71) are tyrannized over. In both art and sex, the narcissistic community of self and otherness risks being shattered by the conventions of Victorian (re)productive morality.

Perhaps then the real site of pathological narcissism in Wilde's texts is in the heterosexual, bourgeois public rather than in the homosexual bond. "The nineteenth century dislike of Realism," he tells us in the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, "is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass" (xxiii). It too is fascinated by looking at itself. The difference is that it doesn't like what it sees. The problem with narcissism is not that one looks—for in a post-Romantic culture we are all too aware that we must look and that we may only see our own faces. Nor is the problem that when we look, we only see surfaces, as did Narcissus. Self-doubling and self-representation are for Wilde "a method by which we can multiply our personalities," and experience more fully the "myriad lives and myriad sensations" that constitute the modern (*Dorian Gray* 142-43). Rather, the

problem with narcissism is the way the viewer interprets what is found in the pool. One can, like Wilde, see in conscious narcissism the possibility of finding the beautiful, and the beautiful that is synonymous with the homoerotic. Or one can see the reflection of sameness as testimony to a stifling homogeneity and, like Basil Hallward, feel keenly the temptation to capitulate to late-Victorian hegemony, itself a form of narcissistic similarity: "It is better not to be different from one's fellows. The ugly and the stupid have the best of it in this world" (3). Late-Victorian culture insisted on pathologizing that act of looking by emphasizing the distortions of its self/other dichotomies, dichotomies which desire and *jouissance* obfuscate.¹⁸ Thus, Wilde continues his point: "Those who find ugly meanings in beautiful things are corrupt without being charming. This is a fault," says the preface. And, ultimately, that need to find otherness in one's look is tantamount to loathing the self. It is to make the homoerotic into the homophobic, the hatred of self through the hatred of sameness. "The nineteenth century dislike of Romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass" (xxiii).

But art need not merely reflect Narcissus, it can also create him. The ideal aesthetic posited by Teleny, "The Disciple," and Basil Hallward in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a narcissistic identification between the producer of art and the viewer of that art. As Berman has pointed out, reading itself is a narcissistic act in which we search for ourselves within the text in a kind of reconciliation of the self with the literary other (149). Such is Dorian's reading of the yellow book:

The hero, the wonderful young Parisian, in whom the romantic and scientific temperaments were so strangely blended, became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it. (127)

This theory of reading has particular implications for gay texts and textuality. The narcissistic narrative, to skew Linda Hutcheon's phrase, allows an unspoken identification with the other in the text, a place to find a gay discourse that has always been silenced. By engaging us in an act of narcissism, Wilde invites us into a moment of pleasure that belongs to us and to the other, but that seeks its privacy from the world outside the narcissistic union. As he tells us in the preface to *Dorian Gray*, "It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors."

- ¹ Similarly, Sedgwick has said that, by the end of the nineteenth century, "man's love of *other men*" became synonymous with "a love of the *same*" (160; emphasis in original). This slippage is, for Sedgwick and Warner, a significant place to interrogate the paradoxes that surround the contemporary construction of the "homosexual."
- ² Bredbeck notes "the way in which the progression of sexology (especially as it culminates in Freudian psychoanalysis) increasingly consolidates inversion, narcissism, and homosexuality" (70).
- ³ While Nücke used the word "*Narcismus*," Freud, in his discussion of Schreber, uses "*Narzissmus*," which he found more euphonious than the technically correct "*Narzissismus*" (Vol. 12, 60).
- ⁴ For Bredbeck, this explanation allows Freud to use narcissism to ground a heterosexual, binaristic narrative of desire:

[B]oth narcissism and inversion become, first, ensnared by an anacletic division that replicates the *form* of heterosexual union, and thereby both narcissism and inversion seem to make that form inevitable and universal. Second . . . the *difference* of narcissistic and inverted cathexis is erased by rewriting the potentiality for both as a universalized subject. (65-66)

By arguing that inverts mimic the heterosexual desire for otherness, Freud can make homosexual desire as difference fit "a socialized and reproductive tale" that denies sexual difference at the same time that it pathologizes it.

- ⁵ The list of psychoanalytic treatments that follows here should not be seen as a historical curio: Wilde has continued throughout the twentieth century to inspire discussions of his life and work through the lens of narcissism. Berman lists the following discussions: Grinskin, Kavka, Green, and Ragland-Sullivan. These studies, moreover, are not without their taxonomic weight. Berman himself ignores his own premise that the "richness of the [Narcissus] myth is inexhaustible" (1) and exhausts it (and us) with a stereotypic reading of Wilde's narcissism as reflecting "the child's deep disappointment with the mother. One senses, here [in *Dorian Gray*] and elsewhere, early childhood loss—not necessarily the death of a parent or sibling, but the absence of a good enough mother to create a sense of basic trust" (154). Wilde's narcissism is, for Berman, pathological, and ultimately points to the "cause" of Wilde's sexual object-choice (the "cause" being for Berman, like most psychoanalysts, both discernible and of paramount importance). Berman argues that because Lady Wilde, the writer's overbearing "phallic" and "narcissistic" mother, dressed the young Oscar in girl's clothes for longer than the normal period for such Victorian convention, her "treatment of her son went far beyond the bounds of what was culturally acceptable, and in light of the current research on gender identity, it is impossible to believe that Wilde's 'female' childhood did not play a decisive role in his personality development" (170). Wilde was a victim, then, of his narcissistic mother (171). Space limitations do not allow me to address all the flaws in this argument, and so I shall leave them for my forthcoming book-length study on the history and agency of narcissism in queer writing. I will only say here that Berman's understanding of "current research on gender identity"—by which he means Stoller's 1968 book *Sex and Gender*—ignores and thus misreads the whole question of agency and parody that theorists like Butler and Case might read into the use of psychoanalytic assumptions. In other words, Wilde may have known what he was doing in employing the figure of Narcissus, and the analyst may be conducting his own countertransference.
- ⁶ In a much more positive light, poet Marc-André Raffalovich includes a chapter on Wilde in *L'Uranisme*.

- ⁷ I will refrain here from giving a full reading of *Dorian Gray* and its pathological narcissism, as such a reading would merely repeat that of Rank and Berman.
- ⁸ While Ovid's is the earliest and best known of the Narcissus stories, later versions make the distinction between the observer and the reflection even sharper. In Pausanias's version of the tale, the split is so profound that Narcissus sees in his own image the twin sister who had predeceased him (376). Conon (36 B.C.–A.D. 17) makes the reflection into a male lover, Ameinias, who receives a sword from the haughty Narcissus for the purpose of committing suicide. To atone for this cruelty, Narcissus then commits suicide himself (see Graves, Vol. 1, 287; also cited in Berman 5). As Berman points out, "Unlike Ovid, both Pausanias and Conon replace Narcissus' specular reflection with a real lover" (5), but they share with Ovid the notion that the reflection is another person, separate from the observing boy.
- ⁹ Moreover, as Warner argues, this desire for otherness is reciprocal: "Ovid tells us that Narcissus rejects not just the girls who love him, but also the boys. These boys, then, have an interest in other persons, if not in the other gender, and the myth of Narcissus does not collapse the two" (193). Warner goes on to read this alterity through Freud's discussion of the homosexual as narcissist in "On Narcissism."
- ¹⁰ Wilde wrote to Ralph Payne about *Dorian Gray*: "I am so glad that you like that strange coloured book of mine; it contains much of me in it. Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks of me: Dorian what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps" (*Letters* 352).
- ¹¹ A.W. is not the only Schlegel to make the point: Friedrich employs the myth positively as well. In *Lucinde*, Narcissus becomes a divine image of creation. When the soul looks upon itself, says Schlegel,

Then the moment of graciousness has come, then the soul once more constructs its shell, and blows the last breath of perfection through its form. The spirit loses itself in its translucent depths and, like Narcissus, rediscovers itself as a flower. (105–06)

For further discussion of the Romantic revision of the Narcissus myth, see Zweig.

- ¹² For Bredbeck, this obfuscation of subject and object—this balancing of the moral import of the anacletic and the narcissistic—is at the heart of a definition of Camp as inscribed by Wilde. Bredbeck writes:

Wilde's poem might be thought of as a mimetic dis-play of the cultural supremacy of the anacletic. "The Disciple" . . . can be read as neither entirely anacletic nor narcissistic, but at the same time must be read as both—or, more precisely, as the *difference* of both. . . . [T]his strategy involves *unwriting* the dominance of the ontological base—the heterosexual narrative—and *refusing to rescript any base as dominant*. . . . Narcissus in the Wilde, then, seems to display the idea of identity as difference—as subject to difference(s) and the subject of difference(s)—and, in the process, to dis-play the cultural narratives that seek to legislate what this difference should or should not be. (67, 69; emphasis in original)

While I agree completely with Bredbeck's take on Wilde's treatment of the self/other distinction, I would take it further, locating it not only in the (anacletically?) distanced textuality of "The Disciple," but in Wilde's representation of the homosexual man. Wilde's other writings on men—writings Bredbeck chooses to ignore by his curious reference to "Wilde's *brief* tribute to Narcissus" (66; my emphasis)—are much more explicit about and materially engaged in the analysis of physical desire within/between men.

- ¹³ Another, more insidious version of this self-projection appears in Lord Henry's musings on influence:

There was something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence. No other activity was like it. To project one's soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one's own intellectual views echoed back to one with all the added music of passion and youth; to convey one's temperament into another as though it were a subtle fluid or a strange perfume: there was real joy in that. (35)

Henry's projection of self onto another obliterates that other, a narcissistic projection that has much to do with the dangerous solipsism of the novel. Such a connection between narcissism and influence is important to Wilde but is beyond the scope of this study.

- ¹⁴ One particular trajectory leading from the Gothic is the use of the *portrait vivant*, which occurs in Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, Godwin's *Travels of St. Leon*, and *Melmoth the Wanderer*, the Faustian adaptation written by Wilde's great-uncle, Charles Robert Maturin.
- ¹⁵ There is some debate as to whether Wilde wrote major sections of *Teleny*, or had any hand in its editing. Gagnier asserts that "it is fairly certain that he was neither the author nor a major collaborating author" of *Teleny* (60). Conversely, McRae, the editor of the Gay Men's Press edition of *Teleny*, argues that the novel "certainly reflects many of the aesthetic, moral, and sexual concerns of Wilde; it certainly contains more than just echoes, touches, or influences of Wilde" (15). Absolute authenticity is not my concern here. I do think that Wilde had a hand in the writing of the novel, and I find McRae's stylistic analyses convincing. However, my concern in this essay is to discuss the historical moment that saw the construction of the homosexual as narcissist, and to use the constellation of Wildean words and identities as a test case. That Wilde may have "influenced" more of *Teleny* than he composed is not germane to my argument.
- ¹⁶ Warner locates extremely wide-ranging narcissistic foundations in Lacan's revision of Freud's theory of narcissism:

Where Freud initially argued that an intricate confusion of the desired object with the image of what one would like to be is just the pathological derivation of homosexuality, Lacan shows [in the first *Seminar*] that such an investment always structures the erotic. . . . Homosexuality may indeed be a way of loving one's own ego, but so is heterosexual romance. (198)

- ¹⁷ Interestingly, Krafft-Ebing uses the image of the "sympathetic man" to discuss the sexual partner that the homosexual seeks out (308). Once again regulatory psychological discourse gets translated into homoerotic union.
- ¹⁸ For Warner, this pathologizing is itself narcissistic: "the theorization of homosexuality as narcissism is itself a form of narcissism peculiar to modern heterosexuality" because it allows heterosexuality to posit the very existence of self- and other-object choice, and thereby "allows the constitution of heterosexuality as such" (202; emphasis in original).

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