

**The Utopian Aestheticism of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*  
and Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives***

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate faculty of  
Auburn University  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama  
May 7, 2012

Keywords: utopia, aesthetics, Wilde,  
Stein, Cézanne, individualities

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## Abstract

This study reads Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, 1891) and Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* (written 1905, published 1909) through Paul Cézanne's radical aesthetics of surface, and is grounded in H. G. Wells' radical account of utopianism as the "interplay of individualities." The utopianism of Wilde and Stein derives from their aestheticism. Wilde's writing recapitulates the tension in aestheticism between totalistic and pluralistic impulses, and Stein's literary stress on surfaces extends Cézanne's aesthetics that treats each surface as a recalcitrant individuality. This study explores the emergence of images of individualities whose stress on surfaces resists reduction to any final assertion. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Cézanne's pictorial art breaks down the Renaissance perspective's distinction of figure and ground, while Wells' utopianism asserts the interplay of individualities and implies a critique of totalization. The disruption of totalizing form moves thought from a model of reconciliation and unity, in which the "idea of one" is contested. In their portrait metaphors and techniques, Wilde and Stein ally themselves with Wells' figuration of utopia as an ever-inventive process, thus placing their narratives in the critical context of twentieth century novel theory of Mikhail Bakhtin that critiques monologism, and occupies a position similar to the anti-totalizing ethics of Derrida, Adorno, and Levinas that affirm difference, individuality, and Other. The utopian narratives of Wilde and Stein break from the monolithic explanations sought by other early modernists, who seek to return to an old Eden rather than turn toward an ever-unfolding world.

## Acknowledgments

I thank and am grateful to Dr. Jonathan Bolton for his support of and faith in my dissertation ideas and their development, and to Dr. Jeremy Downes, Dr. Christopher Keirstead, and Dr. Cathleen Giustino for their ready willingness to read and thoughtfully respond to my dissertation work. My special appreciation to Christopher Newport University's English Department Chair Dr. Jean Filetti and Dean of Arts and Humanities Stephen Breese for a generous grant award and former Provost Richard Summerville who supported my continuing work. I am especially grateful to my three children, Teresa, Anthony, and Allan Teravainen, for their continued, enthusiastic encouragement that has been a continuing source of inspiration. On the long course of my dissertation writing, I have been especially thankful for the steady companionship of Phrog, my dog. To more than anyone, I am grateful to Douglas Kirke Gordon, my husband, whose love, encouragement, and support has helped me see this project to completion.

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Chapter One:  
Art, Literature, and Utopia in Context

Aesthetics, like sexual selection, make life lovely and wonderful, fill it with new forms, and give it progress, and variety and change. Oscar Wilde *The Critic as Artist* 1058

I shall not speak for anybody. I shall do my duty. I shall establish that mile. I shall choose wonder. Be blest. Gertrude Stein "Pink Melon Joy" *Geography and Plays* 374-375.

As Oscar Wilde and Gertrude Stein indicate, art and literature are the places of change, places that reveal the human capacity to conceive of something better. In this context, art and literature play a vital role in the development of the nature of our lives. As Wilde argues, aesthetics fill life "with new forms." As Stein indicates, to choose is to "Be blest"; art is the place for world constructing, not for mere recollection of what exists. The human capability to conceive of the "new" produces the utopian imagination that develops alternative perspectives to help us rethink our existence. In art the utopian imagination reaches toward an ideal: "I shall choose wonder." But to achieve an ideal, "to establish that mile," is not to be fulfilled permanently. Fulfillment is temporary, even momentary: to "make life lovely and wonderful," as Wilde writes, is to "give it progress, variety, and change." To stay in utopia represents the end of utopia: utopia is a place to reach and recreate: "I shall not speak for anybody."

“I agree that two times two makes four is a splendid thing; but if we’re going to lavish praise, then two times two makes five is sometimes also a very charming little thing,” the underground man contends in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Notes From Underground* (1864) (1325). Dostoevsky’s main target appears to be the utopian optimism of Nikolay Chernyshevsky’s novel *What is to Be Done?* (1863), a social vision based on scientific positivism and enlightened self-interest. The underground man’s comment broadens the perspective, however. The “very charming little thing” of “two times two makes five” reveals fault lines in the comprehensive view provided by the image of the formula “two times two makes four.” Dostoevsky doesn’t replace the ideal unity of two times two makes four but argues for another view, in dialogue with the other. *Notes* simultaneously contests repressive totalities that press individual experience Underground and signals something other than the unified concepts of identity that, historically, complement such constructions. In totalizing, harmonious images of unity between society and individual, order and disorder, intelligence and sensuousness, what is lost, Dostoevsky’s underground man argues, “preserves for us what’s most important and precious, that is our personality and our individuality” (1322). Dostoevsky’s *Notes*, called “probably the most important single source of the modern dystopia” (Morson 130), portrays the loss of individual freedoms and human personality under controlling, synthesizing universal systems that attempt to unite all humankind in a single form of expression. Such systems exclude the unruly desires and particularities of individuality, “all of life’s itches and scratches” (Dostoevsky 1321).

From his position, the underground man argues that “all utopian schemes seem to him devices to lure us into the yoke of slavery,” a stone thrown at the utopianism that could be represented by London’s Crystal Palace, an optimistic symbol of a perfectly rational “ant heap” (1305). Dostoevsky does not merely portray a “sick man” railing against a rational world that

cannot admit difference and indeterminacy. He exposes cracks in a utopian image of harmonious, unified image. For the underground man, the term utopia defines totalizing systems: all repressive totalities, social, political, or aesthetic that desire a single form of expression that dominates, underlies, or expresses such designs. By the turn of the century, the artistic innovations of early modernist writers and artists challenged such totalizing cultural foundations. Exploration of such modernist decentering is extended in Karen Jacobs' study *The Eye's Mind*, in which she explores the changing relations between the traditionally disembodied subject and its subjected other in the context of modernism's changing visual culture (4). The dominating, traditionally disembodied subject's relation with the other is a relation of totalization, a suppression of the individual experience of the Other. Modern rejection of the authority of the central image opened space for "those Others who had been historically conceived as cultural bodies or objects" and whose experiences, like Dostoevsky's character, had been confined "underground." Exploring vision's role in the "unfolding narrative of modernity," Jacobs notes that "Cartesian perspectivalism is characterized by a monocular, disembodied, objective, and ahistorical vision. . . . [t]aking its bearings from art and philosophical history and, specifically, from challenges to Renaissance notions of perspective and Cartesian ideas of subjective rationality" (7). Turn of the century pictorial art challenged perspectival objectivity and a movement from foreground to background, and modernist literature attempted escape from the detached, neutral observer that dominated linear narration, beginning, middle, and end. The refusal of depth, "the freighting of things with meanings," and the consequent bringing to the surface of things is, as Charles Taylor explains in *Sources of the Self*, "to make the particular thing come alive before us" and to "retrieve genuine experience" (466-67).

The problem lies, however, in how meaning is made through the images at the surface of things. Ezra Pound's emphasis on the "hard-edged presentation of the thing, its clear delineation" totalizes an "Image" presented in "an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." Pound's aesthetic presentation of a clearly delineated, enclosed "thing" directly opposes Oscar Wilde's earlier modern directive in *Dorian Gray* "to destroy the thing" (172). Early twentieth century modernist literature explores the changing relations between traditional "repressive totalities of meaning" (Taylor 478) and the individual experiences that such totalities cannot allow. What "defines the success of modernism," Richard Shiff contends, "is its standard of individual 'quality,' rather than some standard quality to which it aspires" (66).

This study explores the emergence of new images of individualities whose stress on individual surface resist reduction to any final assertion, as represented in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, 1891) and Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* (written 1905, published 1909). It does so primarily through an engagement with and in relation to two related cultural innovations contemporary with the two texts, the radical utopianism of H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (1905) and the late nineteenth century disruptive, new pictorial language of Paul Cézanne's pictorial art. At the turn of the century, Cézanne breaks down Renaissance perspectivism's distinction of figure and ground. Wells' utopianism as "individualities" implies a critique of totalization. Oscar Wilde undermines unifying tendencies of traditional aestheticism, and Gertrude Stein develops a literary version of Cézanne's pictorial techniques that disrupts narrative unity and yields an image/dialogue. Each moves thought from a model of reconciliation and unity: single point perspective in visual art; stasis, totalization in utopian thought; controlling image or ruling myth in narrative and literary criticism. In other words,

these texts contest the idea of one. If the idea of one is no longer useful to describe the way things are or ought to be, then how artists, writers, and thinkers configured the parts mattered. Wells, Cézanne, Stein, and Wilde configure their works similarly but with differences, and their schemes may be described in Wells' utopian terms as "interplay of individualities." In their model of interplay of individualities, meaning is created in interaction, between parts—different points of view, different ideas, and different forms. In a model of unity, things are more confined or fixed; in a model of interplay of individualities, while there is uncertainty, there is also opportunity for difference, movement, and growth. The boundaries, therefore the possibilities, change. Because different kinds of interactions can take place, change occurs. Something new can be produced. Also, in a model of interplay of individualities, there is no authority of one idea, but the model allows recognition of others, or other things, outside of the usual privileged things. This allows for a different kind of communication, a different way of living. In Wells' utopian terms, emancipation is not merely from habit, custom, the way things have been done, but liberation of thought, or voices, from any suppressive or totalizing structure, in a utopian scheme of individualities in interplay. Historically, the perspective "picture" constructed according to a single viewpoint has been correlative and complement of subjectivity itself. Likewise, the image of interplay reveals a change in how the individual self is created. Self may be formed in relation to the processes by which art is made. In the model of interplay of individualities, a self may be formed not only through the self's own consciousness of the world, but the self is formed through interplay with others. There is not a reconciliation or alignment of self or of self and other, subject and object, subject viewer and outside world. The self does not live life for a totalizing ideal; through relationships with others self is developed.

The structure of Wilde's and Stein's narratives appears to resemble the literary tendency to develop a pictorial analogy. Rather than an illustrated likeness, however, the narratives' pictorial-literary structures develop in dialogue form that values difference and exchange. Aesthetic efforts have traditionally tended to balance and reconcile the confrontation of opposing forces. In the narratives of Wilde and Stein the structural interplay of pictorial art and literature develops and engages opposing forces, thus creates new meaning. The difference lies in the referential function. Rather than a paradoxical status as sign of reality and a thing in its own right, their narratives portray an "unreality" that paradoxically refers to a larger social project. More than a juxtaposition of parts, their narratives develop a dialogue of parts; individualities interplay. Their other, unreal reality sets them outside conventional structures of identification; the "other" in dialogic exchange with what exists returns their referential function to social existence. Their narratives can be understood in relation to the notion of "diversity of differences" (Schoolman 3-4): compositions that contest

cognitive strategies that render the unknown world known by representing it in ways that identify only those elements each thing belonging to it shares with everything else, while omitting those qualities which differentiate them. Each thing, unknowable in-itself and essentially different from thought's every representation of it, and thus different from everything else represented in thought, is represented in terms of its commonalities with other things, through which it appears to be the same.

Wild's and Stein's narratives understood in relation to the notion of "diversity of difference" places the narratives in an "outside" position that allows for the constitution of "other" realities for individual and cultural change. In their capability to project other realities, the narratives

transgress a modernist form T. S. Eliot would call the “mythological method,” a method to control and order, “the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history” (27).

*Dorian Gray* and *Three Lives* develop and engage opposing forces that create new meanings through pictorial art and literature in interplay. Rather than an illustrated likeness of the painting-literature analogy that Henry James advocates in “The Art of Fiction” (1884), the interplay of the pictorial-literary processes of these narratives resists aesthetic efforts to balance and reconcile the confrontation of opposing forces. Wilde and Stein, instead, develop the implications of Cézanne’s dynamic view of painting for their literary art. Their narratives are not a direct reflection of Cézanne’s techniques, but show how the dynamic and active nature of Cézanne’s pictorial language of recalcitrant surfaces could give expression in literature. They stress not the way narrative reflects social life, but rather the way literary versions of Cézanne’s surface aesthetics can disrupt the authority of controlling idea and liberate the other, individual elements of experience, alternative voices and points of view, that had been subsumed to narrative styles of aesthetic “wholeness.”

The narratives’ turn from an aesthetic preference for unification toward difference and exchange more closely resemble the free play of different value systems and individual viewpoints of Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogic form. The images emerging in these two narratives have some affinity with the modernist poetics of juxtaposition, the term Charles Taylor, Roger Shattuck, and others settle on to “convey the idea of how the parts of a modern work of art are put together” (Taylor 466). Shattuck notes that the “twentieth century has addressed itself to arts of juxtaposition as opposed to earlier arts of transition” (qtd. in Taylor 466). The images of Wilde’s and Stein’s narratives relate to the term juxtaposition in the tensions between

individualities. Wilde and Stein would, however, oppose unifying efforts, such as Pound's Imagist demands of "an intellectual and emotional complex," that draw difference into one "instant of time." The narratives' individualities engage opposing forces in interplay. *Dorian Gray* is, in part, a playing among the parts of Wilde's critical ideas; for Wilde the continuing interplay of personalities, in art and criticism, is vital. Stein's *Three Lives*, written under the influence of Cézanne's new idea of composition that "each thing was as important as another thing" places in question Pound's Imagist rule "to use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation" that reduces possibilities in literature, language, and life.

Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Stein's *Three Lives* initially fail critically because they preserve the "itches and scratches" of individualities. But their success ultimately relies on a critical reception of the individualities of multiple value systems and individual points of view these two narratives keep in play. "Art is Individualism," Wilde argues in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, "and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine" (1091). Wilde's late nineteenth century desire for aesthetic disruptions is more familiar to twentieth century readers, schooled in Bakhtin's and Roland Barthes's pluralities of texts. Bakhtin's readings of Dostoevsky's novels as a new dialogic form that resisted unification promotes the idea that literary texts may be multileveled. Modern readers have been a more critically receptive audience for the "itches and scratches" of the narratives of Wilde and Stein. Placing literary stress on individualities, Stein writes *Three Lives* under the influence of Cézanne's idea that "in composition one thing was as important as another" ("Transatlantic Interview" 15). At the time of Wilde's and Stein's writing of their narratives a literary narrative scheme of getting rid of the central image, dominant

symbol, or ruling myth to which everything else was subordinated was a radical concept. These narratives precede modernist experiments most often investigated. It also seems important to note that Stein's *Three Lives* is simultaneous in its construction with Wells' exploration of utopian indeterminacy and interplay, but Wilde's *Dorian Gray* precedes Wells' *A Modern Utopia* by fifteen years.

Along with Dostoevsky, late nineteenth century artists and writers contested totalizing systems constructed according to fixed points of view. H. G. Wells' remark that "Queen Victoria was like a great paper-weight that for half a century sat upon men's minds" seems off-handed; it seriously addresses, however, what he perceives as the repressive weight of nineteenth century Victorianism. By the twentieth century, artists and writers had taken a modernist turn, a turn Charles Taylor has spoken of as a "modernist retrieval of experience [that] involves a profound breach in the received sense of identity and time, and a series of reorderings of a strange and unfamiliar kind" (465). Throughout the modernist period the abandonment of traditional ordering, unifying images shifts the notion of a central figure: displaced from unified image "to the flow of experience, to new forms of unity, to language conceived in a variety of way" (465). The turn may be explored in the relation of the pictorial unity of figure and ground: Traditionally aesthetic unification depended on the central figure's support by the rest of the parts. Its beauty was manifest in its totalizing form, harmonized because all parts contribute to its completion or "wholeness." A turn from the single, central "stand out" figure suggests a turn of attention to include undifferentiated "ground" or "surface." Getting rid of the distinction between figure and ground focuses attention to the relation of "parts" that had been subsumed by a central image.

In her writings and interviews, Stein indicates a direct relation with Cézanne's art. In the "Transatlantic Interview," Stein explains her new, modern compositions: "Cézanne conceived the idea that in composition one thing was as important as another thing. Each part is as important as the whole, and that impressed me enormously" (15). From Cézanne's new idea of pictorial composition, Stein develops three compositional principles that first appear in *Three Lives*. As Stein explains in her essay "Composition as Explanation," her "modern composition" depends on "using everything," "beginning again and again" and the "continuous present." In narrative, "using everything" means no central image, no ruling myth. This is a radical literary equivalent of Cézanne getting rid of the distinction between figure and ground, a unifying perspectival mechanism since the Renaissance, and of his recalcitrant surfaces that relate the parts and resist reconciliation.

Wilde's connection to Cézanne is less direct, but situated in a larger constellation of ideas, changes in visual arts and aesthetics. Wilde, like Cézanne, transforms what he takes from Impressionists and old "masters." Cézanne took "liberties with ordinary visual experience [that] were surprising and often shocking. Few major painters of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century were so violently attacked—'madman' and 'anarchist' were among the epithets applied to him" (Murphy 8). Wilde attributes to himself an "anarchist" attitude, telling "an interviewer in the spring of 1894 . . . I think I am rather more than a Socialist. I am something of an Anarchist" (qtd. Ellmann, *Artist as Critic* 290). What may be Wilde's self-advertising is not the final word; his critical writings and his narrative *Dorian Gray* give their own evidence of Wilde's willingness to throw over the rules. Certainly, Wilde, too, was attacked for the artistic "liberties." Perhaps tongue-in-cheek, Wilde responds to editorial "insinuations" about *Dorian Gray*'s grammar, writing "To the Editor of the 'St James's Gazette,'" 26 June 1890, that "correctness should always be subordinated to

artistic effect . . . and any peculiarities of syntax that may occur in *Dorian Gray* are deliberately intended, and are introduced to show the value of the artistic theory in question” (239). Like Cézanne, Wilde is serious about his role in the making of modern art: “the mission of the aesthetic movement is to lure people to contemplate, not to lead them to create, yet,” Wilde writes, “as the creative instinct is strong in the Celt . . . it is the Celt who leads in art” (Wilde, *Critic as Artist* 1051). Wilde and Cézanne connect most importantly in Wilde’s literary efforts to decouple narrative from aestheticizing wholeness, his attempt to get rid of the distinction between the figure Dorian and the perspectival ground on which Basil tried to “fix” him.

The images of interplay portrayed in the early modernist texts of *Dorian Gray* and *Three Lives* indicate simultaneously an awareness of accepted categories of thought and the development of alternatives for ordering existence. Transgressive in nature, the narratives’ portraits of potential for individual and cultural change place them outside accepted, existing form: outside the mainstream realism or naturalism, outside “the circle of single, unitary identity” and modes of narrative endorsing comprehensive, ordering views (Taylor 463). Their narratives produce an aesthetic awareness of something else, an “outside” described by author of *Reason and Horror* Morton Schoolman as “an identity that escapes representation (or identification), that is unknown and remains unknown, which Adorno introduced as the ‘nonidentical’” (166). The narratives’ particular stress on individuality resists traditional aesthetic schemes that drive toward images of unity. Their non-totalizing positions do not aim to reconcile contradictions and create unity. What they lose in unities they gain in conflict. The interplay of individualities allows difference and change. This cannot take place when contradictions are reconciled, producing shared ground and excluding individual experiences. What these narratives allow is an exploration into what Dostoevsky called “all of life’s itches

and scratches,” non-totalizing approaches more fully explored in the non-totalizing positions of later twentieth century thought of Bakhtin’s dialogue, Adorno’s non-identity, Derrida’s difference, and Levinas’ “face” of the other.

The connection between visual and literary art in the narratives of Wilde and Stein is more than just a comparison of techniques. The communication develops between the two arts, and within the two works. Wilde and Whistler, Stein and Cézanne, visual art is part of their whole experience. Each influences the other. Rather than a transposition of the visual onto the literary art, it is a communication between the visual and the literary that allows their “outside” literary art to come into being. A reference to “Lessing” in *The Critic as Artist* suggests Wilde knew of and rejected G. E. Lessing’s formulation of the separation of visual and verbal art and their singular categorization by medium, space and time.<sup>1</sup> Bringing the arts into interplay, Wilde and Stein attempt to free literary time from linear spatialization, beginning, middle, and end; they free spatial art from the imposition of literary themes, arrested in a moment of time. Time for Stein follows one of her composition principles, the “continuous present.” She allows her images no Poundian Imagist “instant of time,” but makes language visual “on the page.” Time for Wilde is oddly organized; it is suspended, expanded over eighteen years, collapsed into a long chapter,

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1. Wilde refers to Lessing in the context of ethics-and aesthetics. Wilde argues for concrete manifestations of art and cleansing or catharsis “as Goethe saw, essentially aesthetic, and is not moral, as Lessing fancied” (*Critic as Artist* 1018). Rather than a rationalistic interpretation of catharsis, Wilde, like Goethe, saw the aesthetic interpretation as at least equal with the moral, transformative approach in which passions are transformed by reason. See Semerdjiev; see Grafton, Most, and Settis 519-520. Jonathan Freedman, in *Professions of Taste*, accounts for nineteenth century aestheticism’s tendency toward *ekphrasis*, creating verbal descriptions of visual works of art; although problematic this was a desire for unity, “after Lessing, as visual art’s defining characteristic: its ability to freeze action, its existence in a state of perpetual—and silent—stasis” (19). Thus ekphrastic verbal fictions “achieve the kind of synthesis aestheticism yearns for.” See Freedman 19-24.

dips into contemporary London, and multiplies experiences by drawing on classical Greece (Elfenbein xviii-xx).

The challenge to the model of unity, the single point model, had already begun with the Impressionist painters. The Impressionists were concerned with visual emphasis and the “fleeting moment.” They painted an experience of color and light, often dissolving the objects we find at the surface of things. The Impressionists, Richard Murphy writes, “believed that there were no essential and unchanging forms in nature—only passing impressions of form, subject to continual modification by changing atmospheric and light conditions” and used broken-color technique to blur outlines, so “forms seemed to be partly dissolved” (58). The Impressionists explored the way “painting can shape our perception” (Taylor 468). Cézanne, however, “brought to expression the meaningful forms and relationships which undergird our ordinary perceptions, as they emerge and take shape from the materiality of things.” Maurice Merleau-Ponty understands Cézanne’s modulations of color as recapturing and converting “into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibrations of appearances which is the cradle of things” (17-18). These writers and artists are looking for a way that relationships, connection, and communication can take place. It is a search for new models of individualities that Wells sets out in *A Modern Utopia*. It is a new understanding how we are living. Stein writes in “Portraits and Repetition” (1930), repeating, with a difference, what she had explained in “Composition as Explanation” (1926), “nothing changes from generation to generation except the composition in which we live and the composition in which we live makes the art which we see and hear” (“Portraits” 99). In modern utopian terms of time and movement, Wells writes, “[n]owadays we do not resist and overcome the great stream of things, but rather float upon it. We build now not citadels, but ships of state”

(5). In their literary works Wilde and Stein develop literary processes working in the surface aesthetics of Cézanne's pictorial art. The two systems play in literary art; not just visual or literary, but interplay between them. Rather than an appropriation of one for the other, it is experiencing art in a different way.

In relating utopia and art, Douglas Davis separates visual art from literature. Both art and literature begin in the mind, he argues, but literature ends in “abstraction—words typed on paper. [Visual art] ends in a physical act, and in an object, in the face of intense resistance” (145). But in their artmaking, Wilde and Stein exceed Davis' distinctions. In structure, their literary “portraiture” attempts to bring together the physical-visual form with innovative language models. These are active models, taken “in-hand” by agents of change whose texts have shaped practical activity and intellectual attention of artists and readers. The startling quality of these artistic configurations requires principles of observation and understanding and some degree of tolerance. Rather than a mimetic mirror that produces a static representation, the literary portraiture of *Dorian Gray* and *Three Lives* defines the existence of individuals as a matter of the composition process.

The narratives' exploration of the engagement of pictorial and literary art opens a space for interplay of individualities. In this lies their emancipatory potential. Their emancipation anticipates Adorno's contribution to emancipatory thought: “to free thought of the obligation to envision reconciliation . . . to free those who are divided within and from the world of the identities imposed upon them by the images and ideals conceived to reconcile different forms of life, different forms of being” (Schoolman 118). The critical constitutive element of the cultural imagination for alternative, better ways of living is identified, in Western thought, as the utopian imagination. Reconciliation, the traditional utopian goal, was by the end of the nineteenth

century challenged by the aesthetics of Wilde, Stein, Cézanne, Wells, and others. Such reconciliation had been achieved, as Wells argues in *A Modern Utopia*, “by the suppression of individualities to some common pattern, . . . by assimilation” (38). Modern utopian thought must, however, “consider where the line of reconciliation comes” (37). As Wells describes it, “[t]he ideal community of man’s past was one with a common belief, with common customs and common ceremonies, common manners and common formulae” (39). Traditional utopian ideals of reconciliation and commonality impose universal identities, by the impositions of “images and ideals conceived to reconcile different forms of life, different forms of being.” For Wells the universal is “a universal becoming of individualities, . . . There is no abiding thing in what we know” (21). The Wellsean “modern” utopia of “individualities,” schemes for bettering their interplay, challenges the totalizing, reconciling structures of traditional utopias. Interplay of individualities introduces open-endedness, producing indeterminacy and non-identity that subverts the power of authority, of narrative, of relations, of the subject. In this utopian framework, the works of Wilde and Stein, Wells and Cézanne critique what exists, dream of a better life, and rethink human existence. Not reading Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* and Stein’s *Three Lives* through the framework of Cézanne’s recalcitrant surfaces and Wells’ individualities, early, initial responders labeled the narratives decadent, degenerate, and feeble-minded. However, these early responses indicate recognition of something beyond the usual unified concepts of identity. The transgressive nature of the narratives distinguishes them from accepted forms of literary art; the “outside” images portray potential for individual and cultural change.

The utopian genre’s “essential value,” in which all utopian speculation lies, is the hypothesis of the complete emancipation of a community of men from tradition, from habits,

from legal bonds, and that subtler servitude possessions entail (Wells 9). In Western tradition, the standard utopian structure is characterized by H. G. Wells as utopian thought “before Darwin quickened the thought of the world”: “all perfect and static States, a balance of happiness won for ever against the forces of unrest and disorder that inhere in things. . . . Change and development were dammed back by invincible dams for ever” (Wells 5).

The dynamic image/dialogue structures of *Dorian Gray* and *Three Lives* differ from traditional utopian static structures. Reshaping language and form, the narratives develop alternative possibilities in human experience. Their emphasis on individualities as a better way of living finds support in H.G. Well’s *A Modern Utopia* (1905). Wells overtly constructs a utopian socialist state, in contrast to the narratives’ implicit utopian imagination, but his emphasis on conflicting individualities as means to social regeneration provides a utopian context for evaluating the narratives’ interplay of individualities as utopian. Wells’ overtly utopian argument links these narratives to the utopian imagination:

The fertilising conflict of individualities is the ultimate meaning of personal life, and all our Utopias no more than schemes for bettering that interplay. At least, that is how life shapes itself more and more to modern perceptions. Until you bring in individualities, nothing comes into being. (10-11)

Wells’ call for a change in the way we imagine human life and experience parallels the narratives’ stress on individualities. In *A Modern Utopia*, Wells reconstructs utopian thought along the lines of modern perception. In *Cezanne and the End of Impressionism*, Richard Shiff argues, “if anything defines the success of modernism, it is its standard of individual ‘quality,’ rather than some standard quality to which it aspires” (66). The modernist artist, for Shiff, “resists the fix of familiar stylistic constellation. . . . His willful individualism often leads to the

use of techniques which, in their peculiar resistance to configuration, translation and interpretation, risk a wanderer's incomprehensibility." A modern utopian search for a better way of living concerns itself, then, with the problem of freedom rather than happiness, it is dynamic rather than static, imagination is its finest quality, individualities inform generalities: "In a modern Utopia there will, indeed, be no perfection; in Utopia there must be friction, conflicts" (Wells 262):

So long as we ignore difference, so long as we ignore individuality, and that I hold has been the common sin of all Utopias hitherto, we can make absolute statements, prescribe communisms or individualisms, and all sorts of hard theoretic arrangement. But in the world of reality, which . . . is nothing more or less than the world of individuality, there are no absolute rights and wrongs, there are no qualitative questions at all, but only quantitative adjustments. Equally strong in the normal civilized man is the desire for freedom of movement. . . . (36-37)

Similar to the construction of critical thought in the narratives of Wilde and Stein, Wells' reconstruction of utopian thought as process values a discourse of individuality of women and men in their continual oscillation between social and individual concerns.

Ancient and modern, utopian discourse is shaped in dialogue form. In dialogue form, meaning emerges from the exchange of different views. Modern dialogue differs, Wells contends, from the ancient form. Writing a "Note to the Reader" in *A Modern Utopia*, Wells explains his rejection of previous utopian methods, the "development of the ancient dialogue" the "interplay between monologue and a commentator"; instead he aims at "philosophical discussion on the one hand and imaginative narrative on the other (xxxix). He aimed at "a sort of shot-silk texture," a narrative that is variegated, streaked through, and flecked throughout with

other colors, a narrative woven with various and different threads of thoughts (xxx). It is a balance Wells tried to achieve “throughout his life, in his novels as well as his sociological writings, and . . . never found that balance satisfactory, and increasingly failed to succeed even in part” (Kumar 191). Wells’ failure is his success: “the whole trend of modern thought is against the permanence of any such enclosures,” Wells states (Wells 11). The fundamental ideas of Wells’ “modern Utopia imply everywhere and in everything, margins and elasticities, a certain universal compensatory looseness of play” (Wells 270). In “Discourse in the Novel,” Bakhtin explains concrete discourse (utterance) as “entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments, and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group” (276). Since Bakhtin’s readings of Dostoevsky’s novels as a new dialogic model of the world, the novel has been considered multileveled, a dialogue of individualities disruptively creating a productive interplay of parts that “fertilises” society. Although he resisted, refused traditional utopian structure because of his “dislike of systems” and his “distrust of final answers,” Bakhtin’s vision of dialogue and the dynamics of language offers a utopia of an anti-utopian thinker (Morson 94). His preference for dialogue, like Wells’ “fertilising conflict,” produces productive exchange of individualities. Wells’ account of utopia as the interplay of individualities implies a critique of monologism and totalization consistent with Bakhtin’s novel theory.

In Wells, critical ideals and imagination interplay, and the productive, “fertilising conflict” between the parts resists the subordination of individuality to any totalizing, static concept. This accounts for the experience of “qualities to mingle and vary in every possible

way” (270). It is not a classification for Truth; Wells, skeptical of “the objective reality of classification,” accounts for difference by accounting for individualities, similar to Adorno’s “nonidentity.” In the “Appendix” to *A Modern Utopia*, Wells’ “Scepticism of the Instrument” establishes his utopian ideas of individualities against thinking merely in classifications:

whatever boundary you draw, straight away from that boundary begins the corresponding negative class. . . . You talk of pink things, you ignore, if you are a trained logician, the more elusive shades of pink, and draw your line. Beyond is the not pink. . . . Not blue, not happy. . . I am persuaded that knowing is the relation of a conscious being to something not itself, that the thing known is defined as a system of parts and aspects and relationships, that knowledge is comprehension.

(386-87)

Wells’ account of utopia is recognition of “forces of unrest and disorder,” understood as the productive “fertilizing conflict of individualities” that evolve in interplay of unique individualities (Wells 10, 33). Wells’ individual is the method of “initiative,” a new means for expressing the texture of its “shaping body.” In his utopia, “Each man and woman, to the extent that his or her individuality is marked, breaks the law of precedent, transgresses the general formula, and makes a new experiment for the direction of the life force” (88). In the book’s form, “Wells is eminently successful in infusing life into abstractions,” Mark Hillegas writes in his “Introduction” to *A Modern Utopia*’s 1967 edition (ix).

Wells’ account of individualities’ disruption of static utopianism, in different ways, parallels the utopian philosophy of Ernst Bloch’s “not-yet” principle of hope and Paul Ricoeur’s

account of how the utopian frees imagination and fiction from ideological picturing.<sup>2</sup> Significant for this study, both Bloch and Ricoeur value art and literature as vehicles for the utopian imagination, and each argues the essential role of the utopian function to change the reality of human existence. For Bloch, like Wells, images of “anticipatory illumination” refuse ideological holds and illuminate possibilities for human being’s personal and social change; the “anticipatory illuminations” consist of artistic images and configurations of the “not-yet” that are on the frontal margins of reality: beyond the ordinary modes of perception, expressing hope and indicating what is necessary for human fulfillment. Bloch’s illuminations brought to the surface reveal the “not-yet,” just as Cézanne’s pictorial art brings to the surface forms that have been hidden by perspective’s totalizing structure. But Bloch’s modernist utopianism does not work at the surface level; the “anticipatory illuminations” are often disguised and displaced in artistic-configurations. The critic’s task is to trace the expressions of hope hidden within the works of art, the New, something mediated in what exists in motion (*Principles of Hope* 1. 4-5).

In historical-philosophic utopian thought, Ricoeur replaces Bloch’s utopia as revelation with an account of utopia as refiguration. In refiguration, redescribed reality occurs in an ever-unfolding process and replaces the notion that the meaning and vision of utopia is given.

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2. In his “Introductory Lecture,” in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, Paul Ricoeur proposes “to move beyond the thematic contents of utopia to its functional structure. I suggest that we start from the kernel idea of the nowhere, implied by the word ‘utopia’ itself. . . . What must be emphasized is the benefit of this special extraterritoriality. From this ‘no place’ an exterior glance is cast on our reality, which suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted. The field of the possible is now open beyond that of the actual; it is a field, therefore, for alternative ways of living. This development of the new, alternative perspectives defines utopia’s most basic function. May we not say then that imagination itself—through its utopian function has a *constitutive* role in helping us *rethink* the nature of our social lives? . . . Utopia introduces imaginative variations on the topics of society, power, government, family, religion. The kind of neutralization that constitutes imagination as fiction is at work in utopia. Thus I propose that utopia, taken at this radical level, as the function of the nowhere in the constitution of social or symbolic action, is the counter part of our first concept of ideology. There is no social integration without social subversion, we may say” (16-17).

Bloch's utopian imagination differentiates itself from ideology, developing in contrast to reality or waiting for the recovery of ciphers that will reveal what is to come. Ricoeur places utopia as complement to ideology. Ricoeur's dialectic of utopia and ideology produces "new, alternatives perspectives" that expose what exists and redescribes reality in an ever-unfolding process. The two sides of the cultural imagination imply each other, similar to Wells' disruptive interplay of philosophical discussion and imaginative narrative. Utopia functions, for Ricoeur, to redescribe reality against ideology's imaginative social function of the integration and the legitimation of what is given: "There is no social integration without social subversion" (17). Without the interplay and the "friction," Wells argued, "we can make absolute statements" and ignore difference and individuality. Ricoeur's account of the disruptive interplay of utopia and ideology thematically parallels Wells' "fertilising conflict of individualities" that critique totalization. These "frictions" allow for difference and change, the center component of Wells' utopianism. Similar in a process of interplay rather than static state, Ricoeur's and Wells' schemes better interplay by stressing individualities and disrupting totalization.

The interconnections between Wells and Ricoeur provide utopian understanding of Cézanne's treatment of each surface as a recalcitrant individuality contesting the "totalizing" effect of perspectivism. From the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century, pictorial art had distinguished between figure and ground, a perspectival projection defined by Leon Battista Alberti in the treatise *De pictura* (1435) as "the intersection of a visual pyramid at a given distance, with a fixed center and certain position of lights, represented by art with lines and colors on a given surface" (qtd. in Wood 478). Cézanne's technique of painting from part to part displaces the fixed center and positions, regulated by lines and graduated shading of color. In painting from part to part, Cézanne avoids "the sense of a preconceived compositional

hierarchy,” and defines the parts by contrasts of color or contrasts of warm and cool hues. In the contrasts of warm and cool hues, Cézanne’s every part has its complement. The parts “[d]efined by juxtapositions [contrasts] of color, rather than by line or chiaroscuro,” resist the law of “*differentiation*—all parts of the composition must be rendered intelligibly distinct from one another and ordered hierarchically according to some principle,” of linear or aerial perspective (Shiff 116, 83). A description of Cézanne’s second portrait of art collector Victor Chocquet illustrates the artist’s transgressive surface aesthetics:

Cézanne’s aim in this strong, mosaic-like canvas was clearly to force all forms, whatever their theoretical position in depth, to play a part in the surface pattern. Nothing, therefore, remains in a single plane. By linking colors and forms of one plane with those in another, Cézanne created almost the impression of a single, vertical plane at the picture surface. Carpet, floor, wall, Chocquet himself—no one is more prominent than the other. (Murphy 99)

By linking colors and forms of one plane with those in another, Cézanne consequently created an interplay of parts that resists single point perspective. The treatment of each surface as a recalcitrant individuality allows one form to define an adjacent one: each color plays. The “many parts” are painted, Shiff writes, “with equal attention and intensity, denying them any differentiating hierarchy” (116). Cézanne’s non-totalizing techniques do not unify his objects; they are not merged into an underlying, unifying pattern, nor are they subordinated to Cézanne’s subjective “gaze.”

The process may be described as interplay of artist (subject) and the world (objective view). Cézanne said, “the reading of the model and its realization are sometimes very slow in coming” (qtd. Murphy 76). The reading was an effort to “get to the bottom of what you find in

front of you,” and the painting’s construction must be from components in the model—colors, forms, and spatial relations. One consequence of his approach is “an inordinate amount of looking,” in contrast to the centered Cartesian cogito that could “grasp” the world as picture (75). Cézanne’s treatment of each surface is analogous to how individual scenes and characters may contest the tendency of narrative to yield, in Bakhtin’s words, a “finalizing” monological perspective or closure, and analogous to how difference in Derrida, the non-identitarian in Adorno, the face in Levinas contest cognitive, conceptual, linguistic forms of totalization on ethical grounds: affirming difference, recognizing individuality, doing justice to the Other. In Cézanne’s process a similar non-totalizing, “flow of experience” as a “free process” presents itself; its end is unforeseen and without the resolution associated with spatial hierarchy.

The implications of difference, individuality, and otherness of Cézanne’s treatment of surfaces to challenge perspectivism open a space for understanding Stein’s literary version of Cézanne’s technique and its narrative anticipation in Wilde. The narrative composition of *Three Lives* is an exemplary sign of a creative and critical consciousness, and example of the integrity of equality toward the fulfillment of “evenness of everyone having the vote” (Hass 17). Everyone having the vote does not necessarily mean all votes are cast equally wisely; it means each one carries equal importance, and difference of voice. In her scheme of interplay, Stein’s ideas find fuller explanation in the subtitle “Each One As She May” to her story “Melanctha.” As each color plays in Cézanne, each voice, idea, and system of value plays for Stein. In “Composition as Explanation,” Stein argues aesthetically that “The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything” (21). Compositionally for Stein, the ‘different thing’ seen is evenness of individuality and the interplay between individuals rather than a comprehensive, linear view of

things. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein writes that the composition of *Three Lives* develops from her “looking and looking” at a portrait by Paul Cézanne: “The Cézanne portrait [of *Madame Cézanne in the Red Arm Chair*] had not seemed natural, it had taken some time to feel that it was natural” (34-35). Stein contends that in her “first book,” *Three Lives*, “there was a groping” to get to the “bottom nature.” As in Cézanne’s “looking,” this is no longer a subjective “gaze” according to a fixed or single point perspective. In *Perspectives as Symbolic Form* (1927), Erwin Panofsky explains that linear perspective was to have effectively achieved reconciliation between the objecthood of the scene and the subjecthood of the beholder. Stein, reading Cézanne, is unable, however, to effectively negotiate her way and finds herself a wanderer among the parts.

Wells’ account at the close of his modern utopia helps to explain such “wanderings” in a world where the comprehensive view no longer exists. In his conclusion, Wells writes,

this Utopia began upon a philosophy of fragmentation, and ends, confusedly, amidst a gross tumult of immediate realities, in dust and doubt, with, at the best, one individual’s aspiration. Utopias were once in good faith, projects for a fresh creation of the world and of a most unworldly completeness, this so-called Modern Utopia is a mere story of personal adventures among Utopian philosophies. (372)

Wells’ utopian scheme of individualities is one perspective on utopia, and Wells an individual wandering among the individual parts. Along with individual vision, Wells explains, comes “glimpses of a comprehensive scheme . . . . But the two visions are not seen consistently together. . . . Nevertheless, I cannot separate these two aspects of human life, each commenting on the other. In that incongruity between great and individual inheres the incompatibility I could not resolve, and which, therefore, I have had to present in this conflicting form” (373). Wells stresses

the desire for individuality and an awareness of the drive toward totalization that his scheme of interplay maintains, “each commenting on the other,” unresolved.

This has implications for Cézanne’s treatment of individual surfaces and helps read Stein’s *Three Lives* as a scheme for the interplay of individualities. The transposition of Cézanne’s pictorial techniques and aesthetics into literature creates, for Stein, a “realler” reality, not “in making the people real but in the essence or, as a painter would call it, value” (Hass 16). Stein refers not to a higher order mirroring of the Real, a totalizing form or image. Her insistence on the essence of “each one to have the same value” is distinctive of Stein’s image/dialogue, each one as important as the other, and illustrates Wells’ concept of utopia as a scheme for bettering the interplay of productive, “fertilising conflict between individualities,” anticipating Bakhtin’s dialogism. In bettering the interplay of individualities, *Three Lives* redescribes individual value, thus refigures hierarchical systems. In Cézanne’s pictorial art, this is surface.

The narrative design of Wilde’s *Dorian Gray*, like Wells’, presents “conflicting form.” Tensions between a desire to stress individualities akin to Cézanne’s surfaces and Wells’ utopian, on one hand, and a drive toward aestheticizing “wholeness,” harmony, the subsuming of parts into a whole, motivate the dark plot of *Dorian Gray*. In his “Preface” to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde writes, “All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril. Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.” Wilde warns against the search for the depth of firm foundation beneath the dream or ideal manifested at the totalizing surface. Wilde’s aesthetic individualism in *Dorian Gray* reveals an individual wanderer’s search in a world where the comprehensive view no longer exists. Wells’ dynamic utopianism and Cézanne’s aesthetic of surfaces reject static notions of firm foundations. Stein and Wilde’s develop an aesthetic of surface; her “composition” begins, however, with no center. In her literary

version of Cézanne's surface, Stein develops the interplay of part to part in image/dialogue, writing *Three Lives* as a series of stories, the parts overlapping and contrasting. Wilde's story in part develops its conflicting form in the engagement of Dorian Gray and his picture. Subject of Basil's portrait, Dorian in the end remains object of Basil's ideas, but has also become subject to his own ideas as well. What can now be read as similar to Bakhtin's account of the dialogic model that allows free voice to a variety of viewpoints, the interplay remains at the surface. As Wilde writes in *The Critic as Artist*, no one theory is final; his education does not train him for living a totalizing existence.

Finally, it is interesting to note that Cézanne's surface technique and compositional idea of "each part is as important as another" is Stein's Wildean starting place, as she takes up Wilde's call for critics to "rewrite history," creating a new work of art.

In the processes of his narrative, Wilde explores the relation between surface and symbol and his utopian imagination appears to line up along the lines of Bloch's progressive utopian philosophy. But there is tension toward a non-totalizing perspective in the development of the artist critic. This move is key to the movement from Wilde to Stein, as Wilde reaches toward Ricoeur's non-totalizing utopian scheme that "shatters" and offers "alternative ways of thinking" in an ever-unfolding process of creation and interpretation. On one level, Dorian appears the figure/symbol but the ground is Gray, an imperfect, unstable medium. Seemingly tongue-in-cheek, Wilde writes to critics, "My story is an essay on decorative arts" (Ellmann, *Artist as Critic* 247). In pictorial art, Cézanne's problem is "[h]ow to relate every part of the illusion in depth to a surface pattern" (Shiff 291). As with Wilde's, Cézanne's art binds 3-dimensional illusion to a decorative surface effect." Surface for Wilde is related to interpretation. In *The Critic as Artist*, Wilde gave the critic the same freedom he had given the artist in his *Soul of Man*

*Under Socialism.* In *Dorian Gray*, the dynamic interplay of personalities in art and criticism is related to surface. Wilde argues, in *The Critic as Artist*, that no theory is final. Dorian Gray is a hodgepodge of theories, other stories, and genres. The interpretations take shape at the surface of the second picture, Dorian's, and in the literary work itself. No one theory remains on a single plane but weaves, shot silk, within the whole. The many parts are denied differentiation hierarchy. Wilde had already exposed the secret, the "lie" of depth, in *The Decay of Lying*. In *Dorian Gray*, decorative surface is the process of aesthetic individualism shaped by his theories of creation and interpretation and the interplay between the individualities.

Wilde's stress on the desire for individualities is countered by the drive toward and dangers of aestheticizing wholeness. Richard Ellmann argues that in his critical essays, Wilde clarified the meaning of *Dorian Gray* and balanced "two ideas from his dialogues which look contradictory; one is that art is disengaged from life, the other that it is deeply incriminated with it. That art is sterile, and that art is infectious, are attitudes not beyond reconciliation. Wilde never formulated their union" (*Oscar Wilde*, 329). Basil Hallward, the artist, and Lord Henry, the aesthete, influence or infect the life of Dorian, one with a picture, one with a book. Basil, on one hand, refuses to publicly present his portrait of Dorian, fearing he had put too much of himself in it (Wilde 6). Basil attempts, on the other hand, to subordinate Dorian and his picture to his authoritarian control, akin to monologism as Bakhtin theorizes it in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929). Lord Henry had initially "grasped" Dorian as a symbol of youth, "the type of what the age is searching for, and what it is afraid it has found" (*Dorian Gray* 213). Regardless of Dorian's counter that he is "not the same," Lord Henry "gazes" at Dorian as an image of depth and categorically insists that "Life has been [his] art."

To limit or even so much as orient our concept of the utopia to Thomas More would be like reducing electricity to the amber from which it took its name and in which it was first discovered.

Ernst Bloch *The Principle of Hope* 14

This study explores the utopianism of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Stein's *Three Lives* aesthetics through a Wellsean utopian perspective, contesting totalizing structures. Looking at the two narratives against the utopian "blueprint" definition of an ideal place, state or situation of perfection projected in literary social utopias can reveal them more clearly as non-totalizing forms.

Wilde and Stein tell stories of human debasement and defeat; they use literary forms that seem more concerned with aesthetic originality than social criticism, and appear a condition of literary decadence and degeneration. Wilde's *Dorian Gray* has been characterized as decadent aestheticism, its social vision elitist and hedonistic. Dorian is a handsome young man who, sitting for his portrait painted by his friend Basil Hallward, is drawn into conversation with Lord Henry Wotton. Wotton outlines his philosophy of life, a "New Hedonism" in which the aim of life is uninhibited "self-development." Its highest values are beauty and youth. Attracted to these ideas, Dorian desires that his portrait might age and his appearance might remain youthful. He would willingly give his soul for the exchange. This plot seems anything but usual "utopian" structure. The picture lacks a clear elevation of social harmony over individual needs. As Dorian Gray's fascination with Lord Henry's character and idea increases, his relation with the artist, Basil, decreases. Dorian demonstrates utter unconcern for his victims, and his behavior increasingly wreaks havoc within his social community. Dorian appears to confuse passion for art with true love. His encounter with Sybil Vane leads to his bitter disappointment, her suicide, and a change in his portrait—a touch of cruelty around the mouth. Lord Henry's dismissal of Sybil's death as a "fragment from some Jacobean tragedy" (255) settles Dorian's misgivings

about his conduct. From this point, Dorian takes morbid pleasure in the portrait's hideous changes, moves it upstairs to his former play-room, and locks the door to conceal it from the gaze of others. Under the influence of Lord Henry and a secret book, Dorian leads a life of dissolution, experiencing intense sensual and aesthetic pleasure. Despair and depravity replace the freedom from sin and vice and social altruism associated with utopianism. Rumors of Dorian's behavior prompt Basil to confront him. Seeing the portrait horrifies Basil, who recognizes it as his painting only by his signature. Basil's call for repentance angers Dorian, and he kills Basil. With the help of the chemist Alan Campbell, Dorian disposes of the corpse, but he cannot stop thinking of the portrait's consequent bloodstained hand. He obsessively tries to drive the image from his mind with visits to parties and to London's dockland opium dens. Hoping for a new life, Dorian forebears seducing Hettie Merton, but the portrait reveals hypocrisy rather than the hoped-for sign of moral improvement. Dorian slashes the portrait with the knife he had used to kill Basil, but his attempt to destroy the portrait destroys him. Investigating a cry, the servants enter the room to find a beautiful portrait of their master and a wrinkled and withered man, dead upon the floor with a knife in his heart. They can recognize him as Dorian Gray only by his signature rings.

The sketch of *Dorian Gray* confirms the disparity between this narrative and the structural elements and thematic content of literary utopia, an ideal commonwealth beyond the reaches of the known world. Constructed as blueprints for reform, these geographical commonwealths, whether located in parallel space or distant time, are located "nowhere" and exist outside everyday life. The controlling blueprints and theoretical position in depth contrast with Cézanne's and Stein's worlds of canvas and compositions and recalcitrant individualities. Differing from Wells' dynamic modern utopia of individualities, imperfection, and "fertilising

conflicts, the static utopian community presented as an ideal form of human society, is nearly always portrayed as free from sin and vice. In contrast, Dorian Gray travels to the outer reaches of social norms and explores the outer reaches of social norms and explores a realm of hedonistic sensuous pleasures, more fitting with Wells' "margins," "elasticities," and "looseness of play." Rather than a constructed cultivated space of social and individual harmony, Dorian's crafted and dissolute life paradoxically destroys the lives of others. Rather than a production of utopian order and stability, *Dorian Gray* contains a vision of chaotic materiality and sensuality.

Likewise, Stein's *Three Lives* does not conform to a blueprint utopia. Like Wilde, she appears to concentrate on the individual rather than construct an ideal community. She develops the histories of three working-class women in a series of three stories and recounts their individual lives. She individualizes these portraits by titling each with its sitter's name: "The Good Anna" "The Gentle Lena," and "Melanctha: Each One As She May." This listing reflects the sequence in which Stein wrote the stories. Although the last story written told of Melanctha, a young American black woman, in the published novel, Stein refused chronological sequence to construct her own, arbitrary interrelationship of form.

Collectively, the rebellious, passive, and street-wise sensuous characteristics of these individual personalities contrast with the socially cooperative inhabitants of utopia. The good Anna is tough-minded, motivated, and occasionally rebellious. She loves and idealizes those she serves—Miss Mary Wadsmith, Dr. Shonjen, and Miss Mathilda. Anna can be and needs to be depended upon, and she moves from position to position when her authority is threatened—as she does when Miss Mary Wadsmith's niece, Jane, begins to give her orders; when Dr. Shonjen marries and his new wife" was a proud, unpleasant woman" (57); when Miss

Mathilda leaves the country and Anna cannot be persuaded to follow. Unwilling to be under new masters, Anna stays on in Miss Mathilda's house, supports herself by taking on boarders, and dies "after a hard operation" (82).

Anna's assertiveness contrasts with gentle Lena's "passivity" and Melanctha's failed search for relationships. Lena's silence on her own behalf prompts others to intrude and to arrange her life: "it never came to Lena's unexpectant and unsuffering german nature to do something different from what was expected of her, just because she would like it that way better" (247). Exercising control, her aunt, Mrs. Haydon, finds the docile Lena a "good husband." When Lena and Herman Kreder marry, they live with his parents, and she becomes increasingly silent. After the birth of her first child and increasingly so after the next two children, Lena becomes "lifeless." Giving birth to a fourth child, she dies, and "nobody knew just how it happened to her" (279). Unlike Anna and Lena, Melanctha is without regular employment, but like the other women, she is "always ready to do things for others" (107). Stein draws Melanctha in relationship to three women—her "pale yellow, sweet-appearing mother," the incompetent and "simple" Rose Johnson, and the fun-loving Jane Harden—and three men—her "black coarse," virile father, the stable, middle-class doctor Jeff Campbell who loves Melanctha, and the gambler Jem Richards who does not love her. Throughout the story Melanctha develops no stable or satisfying relationship and, instead, was "always losing what she had in wanting all the things she saw" (89). Melanctha, too, ends her life alone. In a home for consumptives, she "stayed until she died" (236).

Stein's series of stories about two domestic servants and a young black woman refuse a totalizing unity expected of literary utopia. Rather than placed out of existing time and space, these are stories of everyday life in a less than ideal society. Although in a series, the three

portraits are not thematically connected nor is the wealth of the community shared for the common good. Instead, all three women live and die alone. Although their stories are repetitious in themes of love, class, and gender, they do not appear to offer a continuous story or a unified social vision.

The comparison of the narratives to literary utopias appears to distinguish wide structural and thematic differences. In literary utopias, social wholeness structures form and thematic topics of government, family, and religion follow the form, elevating social harmony over individual needs. Resisting the narrative drive to totalization, the narratives of Wilde and Stein redescribe the harmonious vision and subvert the imposition of an integrated structure, such as cohesive perspective in painting, to introduce an imperfect form constructed on individualities. Their Cézannean surface aesthetics enable the narratives to resist “perfection,” the misunderstood condition of early utopia, and respect the imperfection of possibility. Their emancipation projects are utopian-in-process—imperfection is incompleteness that implies possibility for change. As Wells emphatically argues, “In a modern Utopia there will, indeed, be no perfection; in Utopia there must be also friction, conflicts . . . (262). At work are the recalcitrant individualities of Cézanne’s surface, in contrasts of colors and all parts at play.

Imaginative projects in the utopian mode are the “search for ‘otherness’” that produces various imaginings. As Ricoeur argues, another reality can produce another kind of family, another sexuality, another kind of government, and another kind of religion. In the search for ‘otherness,’ the difference between literary utopia and the formal, aesthetic structures of these narratives paradoxically illustrate their similarities. What is the relation of pluralizing and valuing? Bakhtin addresses a way we can judge what we imagine:

if ethics is real, and is located fundamentally in particular situations, then real work is *always* required. That work of judging necessarily involves a risk, a special attention to the particulars of the situation and a special involvement with unique other people at a given moment of their lives. It is precisely in such a nexus that morality, like love, lives. (Morson 26)

*Dorian Gray* seems to address this centrally in the stress on the many and the particulars, life and art. In the framework of the utopian mode, utopia becomes an imaginative, experimental project in search of the “Other.” The theme of “otherness,” the concept of “another” allows for numerous variations in individual and social existence. As experimental works, the narratives provide an “outside” glance at subject representation, and they develop perspective not yet functioning in existence. “No one is ahead of his time,” Stein writes (“Composition as Explanation” 22). Of Wilde, biographer Ellmann writes: “the novel was published on 20 June 1890, as pp. 3-100 of the July issue of *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*. After this date, Victorian literature had a different look” (*Oscar Wilde* 314).

## Chapter Two:

### Wilde Stands Uneasy: Individual and Aestheticism

To “correct some errors” of critics reviewing *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Oscar Wilde tells readers of the 30 June 1890 *Daily Chronicle* that far from emphasizing any moral, he had experienced difficulty, “from an aesthetic point of view,” in “keeping the extremely obvious moral subordinate to the artistic and dramatic effect.” The problem was in his conceiving of “the idea of a young man selling his soul in exchange for eternal youth— an idea that is old in the history of literature, but to which I have given new form.” In the history of literature, the young man’s exchange has been a one-time bargain for eternal “truth” rather than “youth,” finalized in the subsuming of sensuous experience to moral/rational form. Rather than closure of eternal truth, Wilde’s new “youth” form is of an ever-unfolding exchange, a continuous “selling.” “Youth, times which are on the point of changing, creative expression” are, as utopian philosopher and writer of *Principles of Hope* Ernst Bloch argues, “calls for things to be different, to be better, to be more beautiful” (116-17). Wilde develops his disruptive, disintegrating aesthetics in his theoretical works and expands them in his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. For Wilde, as for Bakhtin’s twentieth century investigations of the novel as a dialogic genre, the novel is a dynamic form that embraces traditional contraries, explores the potential of their conflict, and projects a critical, utopian scheme, as H.G. Wells would say, “for bettering the interplay of individualities.”

Oscar Wilde believed in individualism and “Art as the most intense mode of Individualism.” He argued that “to become a work of art is the object of living” (qtd. in Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* 310). Artistic endeavor, a model for creative, continuous, constructive living, provides a means toward artistic freedom and expression of personality. Rather than a philosophy of selfishness, the primary aim of Wilde’s aesthetic development, as illustrated in his own artistic endeavors, is self-development. His art—especially his style—embodies his unique temperament and it forges new, alternative perspectives that resist manipulative authority. In Wilde’s own words, his aesthetic “individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force” (Wilde, *Soul* 1091). Wilde’s aesthetic individualism is utopian, at the intersection of ideology and utopia, similar to Paul Ricoeur’s utopianism that confronts ideology where it exceeds its integrative value, “unmasks” authority, and creates a “fiction” of the way things might be.

At the intersection of these distinctions—art and life, sense and soul—Oscar Wilde places his critical aesthetic theories and his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890, 1891). In pictorial-literary structure that anticipates Paul Cézanne’s aesthetic of surfaces and Bakhtin’s dialogic, ideas and voices come into productive conflict with other ideas and voices; Wilde brings the authoritative into question. His aesthetic individualism reveals how the aesthetic tradition has become torn between a desire to stress individualities and the drive toward aestheticizing “wholeness,” a harmony of parts. These tensions motivate the novel’s dark plot, and my study explores the disruptive relation between individual and aestheticism in the aesthetic individualism of *Dorian Gray*.

## **Aestheticism and the drive toward wholeness**

Aestheticism, a complex movement, had experienced various transformations; fundamentally, the aesthetic had been positioned as an autonomous realm “elsewhere,” a separate world or category of judgment, yet paradoxically this concept of a distinct sphere of being was valued as socially redemptive. Unruly, sensate aesthetic impressions required for perfection a unity between the images, and antithetical reason became the ordering principle of connection. The term enforced the distinction “between the material and the immaterial: between things and thoughts, sensations and ideas” (Eagleton 13).

As a complex movement of artistic reform, Aestheticism began by emphasizing the power of art and beauty to regenerate social life and ended by insisting on the independence of art from life and the alienation of the artist from society. By the end of the nineteenth century “aesthetic” was associated with an *art for art’s sake* vision, indicating failure of the long-hoped-for harmony of art and life.

The aesthetic movement’s end of the nineteenth-century emphasis on *art for the sake of art* disturbed Victorians already feeling the ground shifting beneath their beliefs and assumptions of cultural synthesis and sensing an increasing disengaged, mechanistic mode of life. For many Victorians *art for art’s sake* was a “mixture of straightforward rebellion against Victorianism, new theorizing, and extravagant posing—all meeting in unstable fusion in the symbolic rise and fall of Oscar Wilde” (Gilmour 237). Wilde was influenced by the contradictory artistic theories of Ruskin and Pater, one who stirred his conscience and the other who stirred his senses. Ruskin, on one hand, portrays an aesthetic utopian image of social harmony; on the other hand, Pater advocates an aesthetic impressionism, a subjective view that disrupts such harmonizing totalities. Within these traditional contraries of aesthetics, Wilde placed his aestheticism. Jonathan

Freedman treats British Aestheticism in its contradictory nature and defines its contradictions as expressing a desire for synthesis while “articulating a severe skepticism over the value of any such potential unifying force or vision. The result is a complicated vision, which seeks to explore the experience of fragmentation, loss, and disintegration without necessarily giving up the possibility of reuniting these shards” (8). Uneasy between the tensions of individuality and interpenetrating realities, Wilde’s aestheticism, however, moves the tradition’s utopianism toward an engagement of the individualities that, like Cézanne’s surfaces and H. G. Wells’ utopia, resists a harmonious reunion of the parts.

In early British aestheticism, John Ruskin, along with William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelites, found beauty in its various forms, particularly in the art of the medieval period. Ruskin’s portrait of the medieval world of Gothic artists as “a harmonious totality in which art and life had become interpenetrating realities” taught that beauty could change society (Dowling 33). Like a recovered Eden, the medieval period offered a time period, for these artists and writers, of harmonious totality. Wilde’s artist Basil Hallward in *Dorian Gray* expresses this longing for return, lamenting “[t]he harmony of soul and body—how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, and ideality that is void” (8). Such harmonious utopian images convey the idea that the experience of art, especially visual art, could open up possibilities of a genuine experience of human freedom, a Schillerian kind of “freedom” of individual autonomy. Art created a bridge between conflicting tendencies, such as reason and senses, order and chaos, and provided a counter image to the mechanized, alienating character of modern industrial society.

The painters, writers, and thinkers that comprised the early artistic movement saw their work in art and aesthetics as a reaction and an alternative to the social and cultural impact of

modern scientific rationalism and the impact of “disengaged instrumental mode of life” that empties life of meaning and spiritual significance (Taylor 499). The early movement’s emphasis on aesthetic education, cultivation of aesthetic sensibility, was meant to counteract the dehumanizing effects of modern scientific rationalism. The nineteenth century’s “social and psychological effect of the Industrial Revolution, which enslaved millions of workers in gloomy ‘sweating’ industries and created cities of ‘dreadful night,’” provides an image of the mechanized character of modern society (Beckson xiii). Although Ruskin’s aesthetic utopian vision of transcendence failed to fuse art and life into an organic harmonious community of free individuals, his model of art’s role in society stirred Wilde’s conscience.

Aestheticism’s early utopian social project ended, insisting on the independence of art from life, thus the alienation of the artist from society. In contrast to Ruskin’s model of transcendence, Walter Pater’s *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) stirred Wilde’s senses. It was his “golden book”; as Wilde told Yeats, “it is the very flower of decadence: the last trumpet should have sounded the moment it was written” (qtd. Beckson 41). Pater’s “golden book” did sound the last trumpet of Aestheticism as an organic and spiritual art movement for social reform. Readers could still find a lingering vision of the grand utopian project in *The Renaissance* that affirms that “all periods, types, schools of taste, are in themselves equal,” in continuity with the Victorian language of tolerance and sympathy (Harrold 1393). In the “Postscript” of his *Appreciations*, Pater turns, however, from the earlier aesthetic democracy to the more elite “true aesthetic critic” who with other “creative minds of all generations—the artist and those who have treated life in the spirit of art”—builds “that *House Beautiful*” (1460).

Pater's aestheticism is salvation for the elite and the individual rather than the masses. For the individual, Pater's "Conclusion" reveals a modern awareness of and response to the world of flux and "perpetual motion of modern existence," the rejection of systems of thought that "requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience," and a consciousness that "habit is relative to a stereotyped world": only the experience of sensation, "any stirring of the senses," in a world of flux will "set the spirit free for a moment." Pater's formula for success in life maintains "ecstasy" of the senses. Grounded in a philosophy that values the uniqueness of an individual's experience and subjective impressions, Pater contends, "art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake" (Harrold 1411). Art becomes a "refuge," Pater writes in his essay "Style," "a sort of cloistral refuge, from a certain vulgarity in the actual world" (Harrold 1429). All ultimate values are aesthetic, in Pater's aestheticism, a means toward an aesthetic good. Thus the purpose in life shifts from social harmony to an "end of life" in rich experience realized in an individual life of aesthetic enjoyment.

In valorizing the pursuit of individual sense experience, Pater revises the transcendent critique of Ruskin and Morris and refutes Matthew Arnold's critical directive "to see the object as in itself it really is." In the "Preface" to *The Renaissance*, he claims that "in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly" (Harrold 1392-93). Pater's impressionist, subjective criticism challenges Aestheticism's drive to wholeness, much like the Impressionist visual artists who "made thematic . . . the power of art to transfigure ordinary reality," "bringing to light the merely tacit patterns and connections on which we usually lean unnoticed as we construe our normal world" (Taylor 468). To know one's impression as it

really is, Pater is not concerned with the “thing in itself” but knowledge of the impressionist’s appearance of things. Also concerned with appearance, nineteenth century Impressionist painters created sensations of light and color, a technique that “shatters the illusory coalescence of signifier and signified object that characterizes both normalized perception and conventional techniques of representing objects in painting” (Walker 8). Like the Impressionist painters’ visual art, Pater’s literary works retard “easy recognition of familiar objects and [refuse] to dissolve into illusory depth,” making little contact between the subject and the object. For Pater, the gathered “moments” are a refuge from and a response to the progress of rationality and a correction to its “degradation of the senses” (Harrold 71). His impressionist perspective deals a blow to Aestheticism’s universalizing efforts, but like the post-impressionist paintings of Cézanne, it will take the disruptive, individual aesthetics of Oscar Wilde to re-open up self and art to the other from which it is isolated in Pater’s critical impressionistic art.

From a utopian perspective, Pater can be read through Ernst Bloch’s revisionist utopian philosophy. Like Bloch, Pater’s “moments” in art and literature produce what Bloch calls “anticipatory illuminations” and critics, in acts of recovery, discover these “truth” images of utopia that Bloch calls “fortunes of hope.” The utopian imagination in art reveals, for Bloch, the “dream of a better life” embodied in aesthetic images. In the “Conclusion” of *The Renaissance*,” Pater’s crafts an image of his aesthetic critic who enters worldly flux to experience, unceasingly, a chain of perfect and transitory “moments” of desire. In gathering his “moments,” Pater performs Bloch’s utopian task of “recovery,” discovering the exquisite moments in art and the flux of everyday life.

Pater’s recovery of the already existing “moments” of experience has a totalizing purpose, as “end of life” contemplation. These discovered “moments” suggest Bloch’s “not-yet”

principle of hope that indicates a future anticipation for human fulfillment. Unlike Pater or Bloch, Wilde calls for critics “to see the object as in itself it really is not,” indicating not a recovery of existing moments but his shift to a disruptive, disintegrating aestheticism. In “The Preface” to *Dorian Gray*, Wilde writes that “[t]he critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things.” Wilde’s critic as artist subverts the power of narrative authority. Contesting possibilities of aesthetic totalization, Wilde critiques aesthetic idealism’s drive toward the possibility of closure, and like Cézanne and Stein develops an aesthetic that works to end the notion of an end.

### **Aestheticism and Wilde’s uneasy contemporary readers**

Wilde’s influential biographer, Richard Ellmann, understood *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as Wilde writing “the tragedy of aestheticism” (315). Readers raged against the decadent and anti-Establishment author Wilde and his character Dorian. Following its first publication in *Lippincott’s Monthly Magazine*, June 20, 1890, and until the mid 1950s, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was read parallel to Wilde’s chronological existence, his personal and social behavior and, in the context of literary history, his categorical place as a writer concerned exclusively with literature, as opposed to literature with larger concerns with politics and culture. Wilde problematizes the expectations of moral identification between author and work, life and mind. For late nineteenth century readers, texts should be integrated, unified structures. Embroiled in the late-Victorian controversy over the relation between art and morality, readers felt Wilde’s story lacked the conventional nineteenth-century patterned form that confirms the picture of a

cohesive society in a knowable structure.<sup>1</sup> Nineteenth-century readers, comfortable with constructions that maintained moral integrity and moved characters from innocence to suffering and renewal in a hero pattern modified for readers in need of moral direction, valued novels concerned with social issues. For these readers, the novel's biographical association of Oscar Wilde and Dorian Gray created for many a degenerate "hero." An anonymous commentary in the July 5, 1890, *Scots Observer* attacked Wilde; "it is a false art . . . It is false to human nature—for its hero is a devil; it is false to morality—for it is not made sufficiently clear that the writer does not prefer a course of unnatural iniquity to a life of cleanliness, health, and sanity" (Hart-Davis 265). Wilde, however, disturbs and disrupts the relations between terms. *Dorian Gray* problematizes individual identity by placing the author/artist/character in a precarious, less dominant position. Like the man, Wilde's new novelistic form of dialogue frustrated expectations in its refusal of an aesthetic utopian image of reconciliation.

Criticized from a lack-of-morals standpoint, Wilde's subject matter and style challenged conventional topics and ignited an uproar of righteous indignation and accusations of degeneracy. A June 24, 1890 *St James Gazette* commentary contends that had Gautier been given Wilde's material he "could have made it romantic, entrancing, beautiful. Mr. Stevenson could have made it convincing, humorous, pathetic . . . It has been reserved for Mr. Oscar Wilde to make it dull and nasty." In closing the reviewer asserts that such books are "revelations

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1. "Cultural trends in the final decades of the century were thus moving in two simultaneously antithetical directions: declining Victorianism (the synthesis of moral, religious, artistic, political, and social thought that had produced the wealthiest and most powerful empire on earth) and rising Modernism (with its challenges by writers and artists to the cultural foundations of Philistine society, which habitually condemned daring innovations in the arts as 'immoral' or 'degenerate')" (Beckson xiv-xv). Arthur Symons' "The Decadent Movement in Literature" (1893) and Hugh E. M. Stutfield's "Tommyrotics" (1895) offer differing views on the end of the nineteenth century literary debates.

only of the singularly unpleasant minds from which they emerge.”<sup>2</sup> The story’s “secret” meanings so astonished readers that later, at Wilde’s 1895 trial for homosexuality, public prosecutor Edward Carson read several passages from *Dorian Gray* as evidence of Wilde’s own “perverted moral views.” These comments express anxieties over the fin-de-siècle aestheticism’s separation of art and morality, “an indication that the earlier cultural synthesis of Victorianism was unraveling . . . common beliefs and assumptions concerning social relationships, the nature of reality, and the nature of art were subjected to attack” by novels such as Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* (Beckson xvi).

Yet Wilde never has it all one way; he does not merely critique common aesthetic beliefs but also offers a new aestheticism. In his 31 July 1890 letter to the *Scot Observer*, Wilde applies his aesthetic principle of the artist critic, saying that “[i]t will be to each man what he is himself. It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors”; he notes that a “Mr[.] Charles Whibley . . . discovers in [*Dorian Gray*] ‘lots of morality.’ It is quite true,” Wilde continues, “that he goes on to say that he detects no art in it. But I do not think that it is fair to expect a critic to be able to see a work of art from every point of view” (Ellmann, *Artist as Critic* 249). At once, Wilde challenges the single point perspective of narrative structure and critical perspective: he breaks up unquestioned narrative unity and disrupts critical pretensions of seeing the whole of the work in a glance, claims of objective closure, and promotes the ideas that art and life may be multileveled, resistant to unification. Forms of opposition and differences of evaluation suggest, in Bakhtinian terms, dialogue. According to Wilde, “[d]iversity of opinion about a work of art shows,” he writes in the “Preface” of his novel, “that the work is new, complex, and vital.” Since its publication, *Dorian Gray* has generated responses that illustrate diversity and

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2. Samuel Henry Jeyes, “A Study in Puppydom.” *St James Gazette* June 24, 1890. 4.

contradiction of belief systems. If the novel's "dark plot" portrays the fall of a great utopian aesthetic movement it also portrays something else, "outside" its identification with *arts for art's sake* vision.

Wilde's contemporary critics tended to separate the categories of "literariness" from social, ethical, and cultural concerns, a distinction that Wilde's art works to reduce. Contemporary readers who found his novel a "false art" and of "ethical import" indicate an individual perspective that Wilde refuses to totalize in the novel's structure. Wilde's novel produces a perspective similar to Adorno's non-identity, an identity that is always open, individual, and always different from every thought of it. Like Cézanne's recalcitrant surfaces, *Dorian Gray* resists totalization and reconciliation. Like Adorno's dream of emancipation, the novel liberates thought not from division, but emancipates thought, "[t]o free thought of the obligation to envision reconciliation" (Schoolman 118). In its paradoxical and dialogical form, Wilde's novel generates the "fertilising conflict" of H. G. Wells' utopianism of individualities that Wilde had hoped it would produce.

The novel can be read as participating in the critical debates on art and life: Wilde believed the public swallowed "their classics whole, and never tasted them," and this uncritical acceptance "does a great deal of harm" (*Soul* 1091). Against clamor of "Caliban seeing . . . not seeing his own face in a glass," Wilde presented a new form that disturbed aesthetic expectation ("The Preface", *Dorian Gray*). He knew that "[a]ny attempt to extend the subject-matter of art [was] extremely distasteful to the public; and yet," he argued, "the vitality and progress of art depend in a large measure on the continual extension of subject matter" (*Soul* 1091). In a similar way, Morton Schoolman considers the "logic of equivalency that knows the world not as it is, in itself, but in terms of identities that reason projects on it . . . illusory identities" (117). Counter to

public acceptance of “what has been,” Wilde “selects his own subject, and treats it as he chooses.” The public disliked *Dorian Gray*, Wilde argued, because it is “new,” and “they are afraid of it.” Victorians educated in John Ruskin’s vision of art’s purpose to reveal beauty expected art to conform to “man’s moral nature” and provide moral guidance (Beckson 260).

In contrast, Wilde’s picture of Dorian provided a morally “vague” atmosphere. In some ways the moral vagueness of Wilde’s picture resembles the Impressionists’ “suppression of an object’s precise outlines to enable the imagination to perceive ultimate realities” (Beckson 260). Impressionist paintings made some of the “suppressed tacit ‘look’ of things visible” and began the exploration of the power of painting to re-shape our perception of things (Taylor 468). But the Impressionists’ focus on color and light often dissolved form, and Wilde valued the expression of form as well as color. From this perspective, Wilde’s utopian aesthetic vision tends to parallel Cézanne’s post-impressionist paintings that “brought to expression the meaningful forms and relationships which undergird our ordinary perception” and produced egalitarian fields of color and form in surface interplay.

### **Wilde’s uneasy stance: utopian aestheticism and subversive individualism**

In *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1890), Wilde staged his overt aesthetic utopian vision. His aesthetic in *Soul* develops his new aesthetic doctrines laid out in *The Decay of Lying* (1889): In *The Decay of Lying*, Wilde presents his “general principle that Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life” and “Art never expresses anything but itself,” saying, “[t]his is the principle of my new aesthetics (985, 987). Rather than a subordination of Life to Art or Art to Life, Life and Art are brought into a dialogic interplay between the parts. Wilde tells readers of 30 June 1890 *Daily Chronicle* that the “moral of the story” of *Dorian Gray* is that “all excess, as

well as all renunciation, brings its punishment” (Ellmann, *Artist as Critic* 246). This general principle, he writes, “becomes simply a dramatic element in a work of art and not the object of the work of art itself”: “it does not enunciate its law as a general principle.” The interplay of art and life, life and art, resists an objective metaphysics, knowledge of the thing in itself and truth from a particular, single point of view. The interplay of life and art resists both “all excess as well as all renunciation.” Instead it produces an open-ended responsiveness.

As Wilde notes, “paradoxes are always dangerous things,” and by setting his “general principle” in an ever-unfolding disruption of interplay of “art and life,” Wilde establishes an unstable ground for interpreting art. At the conclusion of *The Decay of Lying*, Wilde argues that this general principle has “never been put forward before, but it is extremely fruitful, and throws an entirely new light upon the history of Art” (992). Wilde challenges the history of art as a drive to comprehensive wholeness to achieve a single point perspective; instead Wilde imagines art’s interplay as open-ended and responsive, a continuous play between the parts. Wilde hopes to emancipate art and life from a “world of the identities imposed on them by images and ideals conceived to reconcile different forms of life, different forms of being” (Schoolman 118). Wilde expects his paradoxical theory to produce a “fertilising conflict” that will act as a starting point for a new aesthetic theory and new works of art. Rereading “Art” in the context of his theory will, Wilde believes, release the transformative power of art because art will express itself, rather than be expected to symbolize an age, mediate between traditional contraries, or be concerned only with aesthetic qualities. Wilde does write that “[a]rt finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself,” . . . and “develops purely on her own lines” (982, 987). In the context of his “general principle,” “the principle” that “art will express itself” would not oblige art to be confined to any one theory, including its own qualities. By placing art and life on the same

Cézannean picture plane, Wilde suggests art and life are ongoing processes of a surface aesthetic, and the activities of each will become part of the other. In a kind of Derridean view, for Wilde neither art nor life has a fixed, completely autonomous essence. The conflict between, then, will defer any final meaning.

Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value.

Oscar Wilde *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* 1091

Following his new aesthetic doctrines in *The Decay of Lying*, it should be no surprise that in Wilde's utopian *Soul* "Art" becomes "a disturbing and disintegrating force," equated with "Individualism." The aesthetic individualism of Wilde's *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* was problematic for many Victorians, however. Wilde's socialism privileges the artist and "presents an anarchist vision of the artist fulfilling his 'Individualism' in a utopian society, one not exercising 'that monstrous and ignorant thing that is called Public Opinion'" (Beckson 17). Making individualism "the supreme achievement of socialism," Wilde places stress on the increasing conflict between culture and individualism. By the 1880s in Britain, Carl Beckson writes, "the doctrine of anarchism . . . was associated with such individualism, and its proponents were widely regarded by the conservative press as threats to the social order" (18). Wilde's socialism leads to individualism and threatens conservative work to preserve the current order; Wilde's socialism is a "socialism of pleasure" (Lesjak 195). A utopian aesthetic accompanies Wilde's socialist ethic, and Matthew Beaumont correctly notes that "socialism serves for [Wilde], in the future, as the material foundation of a redemptive aestheticism" (6).

Many factors make it difficult to understand Wilde's art and his aesthetic theories. The public's disfavor of Wilde's private life and his literary inclination to paradox have caused readers to overlook his serious aesthetic challenge. To dismiss the seriousness of Wilde's

aesthetics is, however, to miss his belief in art's vital connection with life. "To become a work of art" is a means toward individual freedom and self-realization. His paradoxical approach challenges the notion that such unity might ever be achieved; nonetheless, art plays a vital role in improving the everyday conditions of individual life. "Art as the most intense mode of Individualism" counters a society that tends to make human beings mechanistic and conformist: "Self-denial is," Wilde contends, "simply a method by which man arrests his progress, and self-sacrifice a survival of the mutilation of the savage, part of that old worship of pain which is so terrible a factor in the history of the world, and which even now makes its victims day by day, and has its altars in the land. Virtues! Who knows what virtues are? Not you. Not I. Not anyone" (*Critic as Artist* 1024). Individualism eliminates self-denial and self-sacrifice as empty ideals that arrest self-development. Wilde argues that the possibility of true freedom and self-realization resides with the individual. Individualism transforms the crush of social repression in the wholeness of experience, for Wilde an ever-unfolding process that may never find complete wholeness.

In Wilde's formula, art and individualism as "disturbing and disintegrating force" are a kind of action, an individualized self-direction. Wilde's aesthetic individualism as "disturbing and disintegrating force" contests the notion of individualism as discrete and unified and challenges any "end of life" or totalizing theory. Freedom for Dorian Gray depends on his "wish" for individualized direction rather than Ruskin's utopian vision of freedom that depended on the cultivation of aesthetic sensibilities toward a harmonious totality. Art is a kind of action. For Wilde freedom is a self-creation that recognizes that the individual, as Pater noted, is a "perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves." But Wilde's aesthetic self, unlike Pater's, is

not isolated. Wilde grounded art and life in unresolved tension, working toward a Cézannean cross-current weaving of meaning with other parts and refusing any final identification.

Pater's aestheticism can be understood in R.V. Johnson's approach to aestheticism as "view of life," as "contemplative aestheticism—the idea of treating experience, 'in the spirit of art' as material for aesthetic enjoyment" (12). In this view of life as aesthetic individualism, "[w]hat emerges *in art* as the self-contained and self-sufficient artwork manifests itself *in life* in the figure of the solipsistic aesthete or dandy who creates himself in a similarly conceived form of artistic expression and chooses an equally unique and independent existence" (Comfort 3). Looking at Pater's idea of the Renaissance sheds light on Pater's aesthetics and aesthetic individualism as "contemplative aestheticism." Pater approaches the Renaissance as an idea rather than an historical period, one that can be found in all periods, studied "for its general spirit and character, for the ethical qualities of which it is a consummate type" (Harrold 1395). In this sense, the historical period becomes a discrete, ahistorical idea, separate from the world of flux, one of Bloch's anticipated but "not-yet" principles of hope. In relation to aestheticism's view of art, as self-contained and self-sufficient, Pater's idea of the Renaissance manifests in life as a figure of "equally unique and independent existence." Pater places the aesthetic at the forefront of life, an alternative to the flux of life that isolates the individual from other aspects of human experience.

Pater's isolated self that resists communication with others outside "the thick wall of personality" is problematic for art and life. In isolating life as art, the individual remains, like the work of art, separate from life, and experience is "ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us . . . . Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation each mind

keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world” (Harrold 1409). Pater’s fineness of criticism illuminates possibilities for a human being’s personal change, a life of sensation that counters the “deadening” flux of the everyday world. He succeeded in finding sources that could restore depth and richness to the meaning of life, but his scheme failed to recover the connection of self and society or Other. British aestheticism’s “fascination with the other” as one of the movement’s major dualities functions, on one hand, by denying the existence “of any phenomenon beyond the confines of the self and, on the other, “lamenting the absence of a significant Other whom, it hopes, might somehow be able to complete or reunify the fragmented, isolated self” (Freedman 35-36). Pater and later Wilde suggest that “the self formed through its experience of others is essentially unstable—so unstable, in fact, that it yearns to overcome its boundaries at the price of embracing its own extinction” (Freedman 37). For Pater the encounter with the Other is a process of identification, “the wish to replace the other, to mimic or mirror enough aspects of another’s character that one might absorb him” (39). In *Marius*, Freedman argues, Pater steps away from such absorption, retreating into the isolated self, because “death is the only possible outcome of acts of identification” (41).

In the dialogical structure of his “picture,” Wilde confirms Pater’s belief that death is the outcome of identification with not only the Other, but also in a theory of life as art that substitutes art for life. Wilde responds to Pater’s fear in the figure of the dandy, Lord Henry, rather than the usual suspect, Dorian. The world may think of Wilde as Lord Henry Wotton: ornamental man-about-town, lover of luxurious living, spouting witty aphorisms from his highly-decorated Corinthian capital. But in the end, Lord Henry is an isolated self, a “mere spectator of life”: he separates himself from life, thinks art a “malady,” and love an “illusion.” Lord Henry identifies life as art and aims to influence Dorian to follow this totalizing image. Image of the

dandy, Wotton absorbs art as Other in a process of identification, “the wish to replace the other, to mimic or mirror enough aspects of another’s character that one might absorb [it].”

Consequently, he remains a static ideal. In a 26 June 1890, letter to the *St James’s Gazette*, Wilde explains that “Lord Henry Wotton seeks to be merely the spectator of life. He finds that those who reject the battle are more deeply wounded than those who take part in it” (Ellmann, *Artist as Critic* 240). Lord Henry’s choice was Pater’s aesthetic choice: an aesthetic of contemplation, unengaged and isolated.

Like Lord Henry, Dorian appears a “picture” of ideality that appeals to the integrative imagination of naturalistic portraiture. At the surface, Dorian’s distinctive beauty seems ideal and static. But Wilde’s aesthetic emphasis suggests reading Dorian through Wilde’s aesthetic point of view. One definition of “Dorian” is an order of architecture. The Doric order, in common use by the seventh B.C., is characterized by its solid, massive appearance and simplicity of form; its fluted column has no base, and its two part capital of circular pad and square slab transition between the column and the entablature (Walton 294). Like the Doric order, the character Dorian portrays an opposition of characteristics: he portrays, on one hand, a state of innocence, clarity, and simplicity; on the other, an object of opposition, opposing circular and square two-part capital, Dorian suggests complexity of surface ideality. The Doric lack of “base,” like Dorian’s lack of family, denies a finite organizing system and suggests a move toward twentieth century non-foundational “outsidedness.” Like Cézanne’s paintings without a fundamental single-point perspective, Dorian’s lack of controlling theory illustrates a recalcitrant surface that holds the potential for interplay and change. Part of Wilde’s illustration of the reconstructive process, the novel *Dorian Gray* resists easy conclusion, thus always holds potential for further readings. The novel’s dialogic structure requires an exchange of different views and

its meaning rises from a dialogue of interpretations between and among individual critics. In this way, Wilde develops a Wellsean utopian scheme to “better the interplay”: a scheme to recover the connection between the self and others, allowing individual to counter aestheticism drive to wholeness and to grow and change as art does. Wilde’s novel reaches toward Wells’ utopianism of individualities that produces life in interplay; as Wells defines it, the “fertilising conflict of individualities” is “how life shapes itself more and more to modern perceptions” (10-11).

Unlike Lord Henry and Pater, Wilde acknowledges that one must enter life in order to be fully human, and art must encompass reality. “Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps,” Wilde writes (Hart-Davis 352). The figures of the novel’s “picture” are closely related to Wilde: the artist, the dandy, and the Wilde’s new perspective of art and art as life. For Wilde, the individual self is multileveled, a construction of self and others. Life as art, for Wilde, would be a process of self-construction, art and life in interplay. The individualities of Wilde’s novel portray this interplay of parts. Like Basil, Wilde is an artist, a creator of forms and images. But Wilde realizes the artist has limitations in the artistic development of individual subjectivity: “there is a limit even to the number of untried backgrounds, and it is possible that further development of the habit of introspection may prove fatal to that creative faculty to which it seeks to supply fresh material” (*Critic as Artist* 1055). A move beyond Impressionistic contemplation, Wilde hopes for an intellectual, critical spirit that will extend the future of the creative faculty. He, like Dorian, “wishes” to progress beyond known aesthetic boundaries: in the future he hopes that both he and his art perform the role of critic and criticism to develop new, alternative aesthetic perspectives. Dorian is what Wilde “would like to be—in other ages, perhaps.” Wilde writes, in *Critic as Artist* that art is not the symbol of an age, but the ages are symbols for art. Wilde believes he

writes the Age of Dorian; he hoped Dorian would in other ages “extend the future of the creative faculty.” For Wilde, it was important to develop new attitudes and new points of view that looked beyond Matthew Arnold’s proper aim of criticism: “to see the object as in itself it really is.” Arnold’s aesthetic idea was old, for Wilde a traditional view of art’s moral purpose that could be disinterestedly found in the object, if you were told what to look for. As well, Wilde sought to see beyond Pater’s critical step away from Arnold: “the first step towards seeing one’s object as it really is, is to know one’s impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly.” Wilde asserts that the aim of criticism is “to see the object as in itself it really is not.” Neither identified with the “best” cultural ideas, nor the subjective critic, the critic becomes an artist. Conflating the artist and critic, Wilde places them in the interplay of personalities.

### **Artist critic and a new work of art.**

In the tension of the artist critic, Wilde develops a non-totalizing perspective art and life as art. Placing the artist and critic face-to-face, Wilde’s aesthetics anticipate H. G. Wells’ 1905 utopian scheme for “bettering the interplay of individualities.” As Wells explains his scheme, “[u]ntil you bring in individualities, nothing comes into being, and a Universe ceases when you shiver the mirror of the least of individual minds” (11). Facing one with the other, the artist critic shatters totalizing aestheticism’s drive to comprehensive wholeness of art with an aesthetic individuality’s receptivity to difference. “The critic,” Wilde writes, “has to educate the public; the artist has to educate the critic” (Hart-Davis 269). In interplay of individualities, rather than a linked chain of moments, Wilde suggests that through criticism the aesthetic critic will be an interpreter. But he is not one simply repeating

in another form a message that has been put into his lips to say. . . . it is only by intensifying his own personality that the critic can interpret the personality and work of others, and the more strongly this personality enters into the interpretation the more real the interpretation becomes, the more satisfying, the more convincing, and the more true. (*Critic as Artist* 1033)

By intensifying his own personality, the critic can better understand others. If Wilde exhibits any universalizing tendencies, it would be a universal individualism, each one developing and conveying its own individual interpretation; not confined by general precepts, however, individualities interplay to develop ideas and views between themselves. A Cézannean aesthetic surface of interplay, Wilde's artist critic non-totalizing process copes without an underlying or overarching universal judgment, individualities of interpretations interplay, ensuring the individuality and collectivity of society. Like Cézanne's works, Wilde understands art and life as art as open and unfinished, an aesthetic model that anticipates Bakhtin's idea of *unfinalizability*: an idea which "rejects models of any cultural process that investigate that process in terms of laws or systems while treating actual events as mere instantiations of preexisting laws" (Morson 39).

Wilde does not follow Pater's procedure but its effects. More than Pater, Wilde gives attention to the interplay of personalities in art and criticism. Pater's "isolated self may expand itself by increasing the number of fine, rich, and rare impressions it has of the world; but these impressions are predominantly visual ones, entering through the eyes and shaping subjects into little scopophiles" (Freedman 42). Wilde, too, seeks sensations in the flux of experience and embraces the "transitoriness of desire," but Wilde's individual and aesthetic individuality is open to the pleasures of all the senses. Moreover for Wilde aesthetic experience develops in a critic

artist process, a new kind of individuality in interplay of individualities. For Wilde, the critical relation is dynamic, interplay between the perceptual and the conceptual: the aesthetic experience informs the subject; the subject in turn creates an object of his or her own. Wilde's process more than Pater's emphasizes the "force of temperament" and beyond Pater, Wilde acknowledges the relationship between the sensual and the intellectual, the individual aesthetic experience and the realities of common life. Wilde not only makes the work of art as source important, but Wilde's aesthetic theory copes with the consequences of aesthetic effects. Unlike Arnold's critical aesthetic activity that informs general society by the critic's single point perspective, for Wilde critical activity is a process of interplay between artist and critic that produces a work of art of his or her own; this individual aesthetic experience informs rather than directs general perceptions and society. Wilde's emphasis on the individual aesthetic experience and the interplay of artist critic approaches Gertrude Stein's observation of Cézanne's visual art, as "each part as important as the whole," and the process "beginning again and again."

In *Dorian Gray*, Sibyl Vane as actor critic initially plays Wilde's artist critic. He gives to Sibyl, actor-artist-critic, the highest role. Interpreting art she acts out, using each work as a starting point for her own work of art: she interprets the works of art from her own perspective, and enacts them in a way that communicates the works in new ways. In doing so, Sibyl's art develops a scheme of bettering the aesthetic interplay, "how life shapes itself more and more to modern perceptions" (Wells 11). As an actor able to interpret and communicate art in new ways, Sibyl appeals to Dorian's imagination and sense of aesthetic non-identity, having identities that cannot be known, because identity, like art, is always different from the ways it can be represented by thought. Dorian tells Basil and Lord Henry that [s]he will represent something to you that you have never known" (65). As "a born artist," Sibyl takes Dorian beyond "London . .

. in the nineteenth century. . . . in a forest that no man had ever seen” (62). Utopian in imagination, Wilde’s aesthetic perspective is outside the ideals and images of nineteenth century aesthetics. Art has the potential to develop new perspectives because, for Wilde, art is the realization of change. As a sibyl, Sibyl Vane ought to communicate alternatives, acting as “vane” to show a way to “better the interplay.” In her love for Dorian, however, Sibyl re-collects empty ideality. Her art falters and then identifies with, what Dorian calls “shallow and stupid,” common “realistic” representations that bring death to her and her art.

Wilde’s visual artist Basil also gives up artistic endeavors toward artistic, self-development. Like Sibyl, Basil becomes dominated by Dorian’s personality; Basil then reproduces what he had already achieved, and thus he fails to realize that art is part of the living process. If balance is achieved, harmony is only temporary. Basil tells Dorian, “I worshipped you. I grew jealous of every one to whom you spoke. I wanted to have you all to myself” (89). Basil wants to isolate art and Dorian and bows to aestheticism’s drive to wholeness. Basil fears he has put too much of himself in the portrait of Dorian, and his failure to present his “new manner” of art arrests, simultaneously, the development of Basil’s and art’s individuality. Basil closes off the creative process.

In theory and artistic form, Wilde explores the notion that identity is shaped. A product of Wilde’s utopian imagination, the art of his novel and its character Dorian Gray function to portray identity as a constituting process rather than one already constituted. In the novel, Wilde portrays the figures Basil, Henry, and Dorian as created in interplay of influences, in interplay between the self and others; however, only the art of Dorian remains open and responsive to the Other. An intense personality, free from oppressive limitations, Dorian is Wilde’s symbol “of what we pray for, or perhaps of what, having prayed for, we fear that we may receive.” A

symbol of what we might be, Dorian represents “a prospective identity.” Ricoeur argues that “[t]he ruling symbols of our identity derive not only from our present and our past but also from our expectations for the future. It is part of our identity that is open to surprises, to new encounters. . . . a prospective identity. The identity is in suspense. Thus, the utopian element is ultimately a component of identity. What we call ourselves is also what we expect and yet what we are not” (311). Wilde describes this surface aesthetic of identity in his “Preface” to *Dorian Gray* writing,

All art is at once surface and symbol.

Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril.

Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.

Wilde’s art as surface aesthetic, like Cézanne’s recalcitrant surfaces, resists the totalizing identities imposed on him by images conceived to suppress art’s individuality and difference. The prospective identity is defined by its capacity for change. In its constitutive role, the utopian imagination refuses confining systems and, in an ever-unfolding disruptive force, anticipates growth in thought and in life. Basil Hallward had realized his ideal absolutely. And as Wilde expresses utopia, “when the ideal is realized, it is robbed of its wonder and its mystery, and becomes simply a new starting-point for an ideal that is other than itself” (*Critic as Artist* 1031). Dorian’s starting point is his own ideal beauty. As prospective identity, he “has as many meanings as man has moods” (1030). He takes suggestion from the artist’s work, and by a fresh medium of expression realizes an imaginative beauty that “makes all interpretations true and no interpretation final” (1031). For Dorian’s role, Wilde provides an atmosphere within which readers can realize new perspectives for “the vitality and progress of art.” He tells readers in his letters, “it was necessary, . . . for the dramatic development of this story to surround Dorian Gray

with an atmosphere of moral corruption. Otherwise the story would have had no meaning and the plot no issue” (Hart-Davis 266). Wilde corrupts the principle of conformity, custom, and conduct. To create new attitudes and new points of view, Wilde breaks with elaborate social codes in order “[t]o keep this atmosphere vague and indeterminate and wonderful.” Wilde’s *Dorian Gray* approaches Cézanne’s painting of recalcitrant surfaces that contest totalizing perspective, unbound from “settled custom of thought, or stereotyped mode of looking at things” (*Soul* 1091).

Overturing traditional constructions, Wilde opens a space for Dorian to assert the “disintegrating force” of individualism and upsets reader expectation. Rather than being morally corrupt, *Dorian Gray* corrupts systematic morality. Wilde overturns the notions of right and wrong that confine thought and self-development. In *Critic as Artist*, Wilde replaces “Sin” as moral principle with “Sin” as aesthetic potential. In Wilde’s theory Sin becomes the perception of possibilities. Aesthetically, Sin saves *Dorian Gray* from “monotony of type.” As Lord Henry remarks, “The costume of the nineteenth century is detestable. It is so somber, so depressing. Sin is the only real colour-element left in modern life” (28). Wilde characterizes *Dorian Gray* with the utopian yearning to “know more” and to “be more.” Dorian Gray is restless and discontent; his subsequent wanderings indicate a need for utopia. At the anthropological level, Dorian’s behavior is called “versatility” that stems from individual choice and is considered *free* and unpredictable. Dorian exhibits independence and individual initiative, the capacity for creative behavior that requires taking risks. Although it causes conflicts between individuals and their community, the individual initiative ensures future survival for the self and society. Likewise, artistic individualism ensures aesthetic survival.

Wilde joined his predecessors in the utopian task to set individuals free from conventional and oppressing structures of everyday life. In a different way than his predecessors, Wilde's aesthetic individualism created space for a more creative culture that returns art to life. "We have got rid of what was bad," Wilde writes in *Critic as Artist* (1890). "We have now to make what is beautiful" (1050). If emphasis is placed on *is*, the concrete here and now, Wilde is working in aspects of human existence, rather than transcendent ideals. At end of the nineteenth century, art was reconciled with life and art was separated from life: either way, life and art remain hierarchical, traditional contraries. On one hand, art's purity is at stake and must remain detached from life. If, on the other hand, the two contraries are reconciled then one must be subsumed under the other, or both parts must equally lose power. In Ruskin's aesthetic utopia, art and life become interpenetrating realities and the world a harmonious totality. The critics of Wilde's *Dorian Gray* were willing to subsume all art under a moral category. For Wilde, however, art is a kind of force. In his critical works he develops the theoretical considerations of the relationship between art and humans. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* he promotes his new aestheticism, a view of art and a view of life. Neither is safe from external influences. Wilde's critical studies and his fiction anticipate the changes undergone by the concept of literary value that means "today it is no longer possible to define 'literariness' separately from cultural, historical, or social concerns" (Small 155). Recent studies point out that aspects of human existence, such as politics, sexuality, and gender, are present in all conceptual schemes.<sup>3</sup> Important here, these aspects are present regardless of the claims of universality and neutrality to mask such aspects.

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3. Ian Small's "Literary Histories," in his *Oscar Wilde Revalued*, explores the revaluing of Oscar Wilde's literary works in the context of the "series of far-reaching changes" that the concept of literary value has undergone in the twentieth century.

## **Wilde utopian**

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a product of Wilde's utopian imagination, and the painting of Dorian Gray portrays familiar but empty ideals, and produces a "fiction" of new perspectives from which we can re-think the nature of existence. Both external object of art and immediate experience of process, Wilde's "portrait" can be viewed as one of Bloch's utopian "tracings," certified by the Blochian moments of "astonishment" that constitute the perception of the future concealed in what exists. For a condition of living, Wilde produces new ideals that for Wilde as for Bloch, carry the dream of a better life, but are not yet. Bloch argues that an ideal contains something desirable and worth striving for (Bloch, *Utopian Function* 105). Thus ideals are what we strive for in the content of our lives. For Bloch the ideas of the imagination "carry on the existing facts toward their future potentiality of their otherness, of their better condition in an anticipatory way." Bloch's utopianism moves critical thought forward, toward what is not-yet in existence.

Wilde, however, stands uneasy between Bloch's utopian progress of finding the not-yet in the existing and Ricoeur's continuously disruptive dialectic: Wilde's utopia anticipates Adorno's affirmation of individuality in his concept of "non-identity," which refers "to nature, being, or the world and all it contains as having identities that cannot be known, because identity is always different from the ways it can be represented by thought" (Schoolman 123). In language that considers Wilde's aesthetic imagination in utopian terms, Ellmann concludes: "We inherit his struggle to achieve supreme fictions in art, to associate art with social change, to bring together individual and social impulse, to save what is eccentric and singular from being sanitized and standardized, to replace a morality of severity by one of sympathy" (*Oscar Wilde* 589).

Is this Utopia?

A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of Utopias.

Oscar Wilde *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* 1089

*The Soul of Man Under Socialism* critically reconfigures utopia, progress, and individualism, a reconfiguration Wilde will expand in *Dorian Gray*. Wilde's statement "Progress is the realization of Utopias" defines utopia in its capacity for change, and it associates utopia with anticipation and hope for what is not-yet in existence. Wilde's metaphoric map suggests that any representation, or picture, of the world needs to include possibilities of what is possible for existence. As part of our imagination, utopia is always present, but in fact it is temporary or not-yet. Wilde's utopian imagination perceives a continuous reconstruction of the living experience that tends forward; each construction derives from interplay, a "fertilising conflict of individualities" (Wells 10). The utopian expression of hope lies in what seems like Wilde's progressive sequence of continuous reconstruction toward "a better country." As in Bloch, Wilde's utopia presents itself as ideas of the imagination that "carry on existing facts toward their future potentiality of their otherness, of their better condition in an anticipatory way" (Bloch, *Utopian Function* 105). Wilde like Bloch believes that art and literature can act as maps of the world; maps constructed with utopian imagination can direct humanity to a "better country." Art, for Wilde as for Bloch, is the main vehicle to those ideals.

Utopian scholars and students of Wilde alike cite, almost as convention, Wilde's statement on Utopia and Progress. Even Ernst Bloch cites it without critique in his *Principles of Hope*. Yet Wilde's conceptual reconfiguration of progress opens utopia and individualism to an ongoing, disruptive process. Progress can be defined as "[a] narrative of change which looked forward and upward to ultimate fulfillment" (Woodall 5). William Morris, like Wilde,

complained that “practical” socialists “read the present into the future,” a form of progress that imagined “people’s ways of life and habits of thought will be pretty much as they are now” (Morris 336-37). H. G. Wells also critiques the concept of progress and makes a similar claim in *A Modern Utopia* footnote, arguing that “[t]he social speculations of the Greeks . . . had just the same primary defect as the economic speculations of the eighteenth century—they began with the assumptions that the general conditions of the prevalent state of affairs were permanent” (265). Matthew Beaumont, author of “Reinterpreting Oscar Wilde’s Concept of Utopia: *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*,” reinterprets Wilde’s concept of utopia and its association with the concept of progress; he argues that students of utopia often use the statement out of context or partially. In other words, they “misrepresent” it. Although William Morris and Wilde disagreed on the agent of change—Morris advocated work and Wilde believed in pleasurable leisure—they “sought to read the future into the present” rather than the present into the future (Beaumont 16).

The question that frames Wilde’s statement, “Is this Utopia?,” is not rhetorical but critical. Like Morris, Wilde believed that machines could free people for better use of their time. Like Morris, he objected to the mass of machine-made articles that reduced not only the object’s beauty but also human creativity: “The evil that machinery is doing is not merely in the consequences of its work, but in the fact that it makes men themselves machines also. Whereas we wish them to be artists, that is to say men” (qtd. in Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* 194). Wilde sought a socialist alternative that disrupted existing conditions. Several things occur: Humanity, the Individual, lands at Utopia, “looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail.” Wilde’s Individual as “always landing” establishes Individual’s development, in art and life, as an ongoing process. Wilde’s process does not indicate a finalized, completed fulfillment, or end

goal. Rather, Wilde disrupts the possibility for the traditional static utopian existence. The statement “Progress is the realization of Utopias” is just that, a stated definition of progress in relation to utopia. But it does not define the process Wilde has just described. Instead, Wilde’s individual ongoing process of constructive self-development rejects traditional individualism’s status as a unified, coherent self. Wilde’s utopian Individual engages with the world.

Wilde has “defamiliarized” utopia and individualism, envisioning utopia as a Wellsean “scheme for bettering the interplay” and producing “[t]he fertilising conflict of individualities” (Wells 10). Similarly, reconfiguring utopian movement in his 1905 *A Modern Utopia*, Wells writes that in traditional utopian schemes “[c]hange and development were dammed back by invincible dams for ever. But the Modern Utopia must be not static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage . . . . Nowadays we do not resist and overcome the great stream of things, but rather float upon it. We build now not citadels, but ships of state” (5). In his utopianism as the interplay of individualities, Wells works against a progress that puts the present in the future, a permanent order of things that hopefully advances. As Beaumont correctly notes, Wilde’s essay “seems to cover the spectrum of ideological positions adopted in turn-of-the-century utopian discourse, from the revolutionary to the evolutionist, the idealist to the materialist, the practical to the escapist” (17). Thus, Wilde’s *Soul* is a play among the parts, a dialogue of utopian ideas, just Mark R. Hillegas writes in his “Introduction” of Wells’ modern utopia; it is “one which sums up and clarifies the utopias of the past. The text and the footnotes (they are Wells’) demonstrate his mastery of every phase of the utopian tradition from Plato and More and Bacon to Bellamy, Hertzka, and Morris. . . . they will be found to be transformed into something new” (Wells x). Like *A Modern Utopia*, *The Soul of Man* is contradictory in nature, a dialogue of conflicting utopian voices and ideas.

## Portraiture and Wildean Aesthetic Individualism

It is certain that the subject matter at the disposal of creation is always diminishing, while the subject matter of criticism increases daily. There are always new attitudes for the mind, and new points of view. . . . There was never a time when Criticism was more needed than it is now. It is only by its means that Humanity can become conscious of the point at which it has arrived. Oscar Wilde *The Critic as Artist* 1055

In Wilde's aesthetics the creative process must progress beyond the artistic creation of new forms. Artists and critics play vital roles in the "world-making" process. For Wilde, the Individual is the artist. "The future is what artists are," Wilde writes in *Soul of Man* (1100). "Humanity," the Individual, with "new attitudes for the mind, and new points of view [for the senses]" becomes "conscious of the point at which it has arrived." Here Wilde argues against the notion of individual essence. There is no discoverable essential, unchanging essence or individual identity. Rather Wilde portrays in *Soul* an image of recalcitrant individualism of self-creation, in a process of engagement of self and other.

As a constructive process, the artistic endeavor is a means toward self-realization and a model for the development of individual life. Art, says Wilde, is the "real mode of Individualism" because it disturbs "monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of machine" (*Soul* 1090-91). Wilde's critical essays develop recurring themes: the role of art and the role of artistic criticism in developing individuality, intensifying personality, and renewing culture. The novel's use of Dorian Gray's portrait to register moral decline develops in an artistic form, portraiture, which lends itself to experimentation. Paradoxically, as Dorian's portrait registers the failure of aestheticism's traditional view of life and view of art, it also registers the vital role of how art is made and its connection to how self is made.

Why is portraiture particularly suited? In portraiture Wilde could experiment with the notion of individualism, ideals, and artistic endeavors and demonstrate a process of change and renewal. The “Preface” of *Portraiture: Facing the Subject* states “Portraiture occupies a central position in the history of western art. It has been the most popular genre of painting and lies at the heart of the naturalist projects. It has been crucial to the formation and articulation of ‘individualism’” (xiii). In a description that could describe some of Cézanne’s portraits, Joanna Woodall, editor and author of *Portraiture’s* “Introduction: Facing the Subject,” writes that “[t]oday, the fixed, immovable features of a portrayed face can seem like a mask, frustrating the desire for union with the imaged self” (9). The moment of carnival “unmasking” is lost: this phrase describes the yearning to “call things by their real names,” seeking “union of language (representation) with the things to which it refers.” The quest for the “good” portrait that guarantees the identity of external experience and inner subjectivity no longer satisfies the need for “presence.” As Cézanne’s pictorial art frustrates “seeing through the window” and contests the perspective of identity so, too, does Wilde’s double portraiture of Dorian Gray frustrate the “desire for union.”

Wilde’s novel and Cézanne’s paintings contest what Woodall describes as naturalistic and dualistic in terms of portraiture. She defines “naturalistic portraiture” as “a physiognomic likeness which is seen to refer to the identity of the living or once-living person depicted” (1). In terms of portrayal principles, “[p]hysiognomic interpretations was predicated upon a ‘symptomatic’ relation between external appearance and an invisible, internal self” (7). The portrayed face and the exploration of the naturalistic quest for identity of “external appearance and an invisible, internal self” are primary and problematic concerns for Wilde’s “picture” of *Dorian Gray*. In naturalistic portraiture, the desire is to overcome separation and to presume

“identification between individualized physiognomy and a distinctive, interiorized identity.”

This is an aesthetic cognitive task: to mediate “between the generalities of reason and the particulars of sense,” . . . a “unity-in-variety” (Eagleton 15). In the desire to overcome division, portraiture speaks to an early utopian task: to overcome separation. In this quest, although in different ways, Wilde follows his predecessors in recovering the connection of the divided self and the self from society. In *Dorian Gray*, other characters, seeing Dorian as he was in his portrait, see Dorian as convention dictated, and assume a union of exterior and internal reality. In portraiture terms, this is a belief that the naturalistic portrait guarantees such identification. Nineteenth-century portraiture stands uneasy, however, between the naturalistic portraits of “great men” who represent authority of science, technology, intellect, and those of the Impressionists, who interrogate such presumptions of unity.

Within a dualist paradigm, conflict between subjectivity and objectivity are, as Woodall notes, fundamental to the interpretation of portraiture. Dualism frustrates the concepts of identity that naturalist portraiture seeks to create; Cartesian dualism locates personal identity “in a concept of mind or thinking person. As pure, divine intellect, the mind was quite separate from machine-like, material body” (10). Other ideas of identity would define it “in terms of the soul, virtue, genius, character, personality, subjectivity.” In *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), Ian Watt explains individualism in relation to the rise of the novel and explains the turn to individuality in term of Rene Descartes’ modern assumption “whereby the pursuit of truth is conceived of as a wholly individual matter” (13). In portraiture, Woodall contends that “[a] sense of the *difference* between an inner, abstract subjectivity and an objectivised, material body has been discerned in portrait practice from the seventeenth century” (10). Watt and Woodall both credit Descartes for the formulation of dualism in its oppositional sense. The problem, for portraiture, lies in “how

the portrayed body can re-present someone's identity," if body and identity are opposed. This distinction of identity and material body applies to the individual and the individual in society. The term 'individualism,' Watt notes, is a recent term, dating from the mid-nineteenth century, and is defined as a way of living: "It posits a whole society mainly governed by the idea of every individual's intrinsic independence both from other individuals and from that multifarious allegiance to past modes of thought and action denoted by the word 'tradition'—a force that is always social, not individual" (60). In society the coherent, unified, essential individual can be viewed as a promise and a threat.

These are tensions of individualism and aestheticism, evident in nineteenth century portraiture: the conflict between individual stylistic freedom and aestheticism's drive to wholeness: "sensation is characterized by a complex individuation which defeats the general concept. . . . marked by an irreducible particularity of concrete determinateness which threatens to put it beyond the bounds of abstract thought" (Eagleton 16). The character Dorian Gray's intense individuality, free from oppressive limitations, is Wilde's symbol "of what we pray for, or perhaps of what, having prayed for, we fear that we may receive." This fear seems evident in late eighteenth century German aesthetic idealism's envisioned "bold new model of social life": "a universal order of free, equal, autonomous human subjects, obeying no laws but those which they gave to themselves. . . . What is at stake here," Terry Eagleton argues, "is nothing less than the production of an entirely new kind of human subject—one which, like the work of art itself, discovers the law in the depths of its own free identity, rather than in some oppressive external power. The liberated subject is the one who has appropriated the law as the very principle of its own autonomy" (19). Dorian Gray's division of body and soul, his portrait a "picture of his soul" or "idea of identity," seems to portray the problems of dualist portraiture: body and

identity opposed, just as beholders of Dorian Gray assume a naturalistic union of external appearance and interior self.

In Wilde's modern novel, Basil laments the lost "harmony" of body and soul, but he does not seek to return to that lost edenic picture of life in his final portrait of Dorian Gray. "The harmony of soul and body—how much that is! We in our madness have separated the two, and have invented a realism that is vulgar, an ideality that is void," Basil says (14). But he imagines a "fresh school": "a fresh school, a school that is to have in it all the passion of the romantic spirit, all the perfection that is Greek" (14). Basil's aestheticism, Donald Lawler writes, is "an ideal combination of the teaching of John Ruskin ("all the passion of the romantic spirit") and Walter Pater ("all the perfection of the spirit that is Greek") (Lawler 14). What Basil strives for is an kind of inter-weaving unity, an interplay of reason and sensation: the perfection of underlying form of Dorian beauty associated with the Greek classical spirit, bringing order out of chaos and the passion of immediate appearance associated with the romantic spirit, creative and imaginative, proceeding by feeling. This is for Wilde, both sense and soul. In previous portraits of Dorian, Basil had painted his art of Dorian as it "should be, unconscious, ideal, and remote," in "the costume of dead ages" (90). But for the portrait of *Dorian Gray*, Basil tells Dorian, "I determined to paint a wonderful portrait of you as you actually are, . . . in your own dress and in your own time. . . . directly presented to me without mist or veil." Dorian painted in modern "dress" is similar to Wells' utopian vision of "how life shapes itself more and more to modern perceptions," in the "fertilising conflict of individualities" (11, 10). Presented without the veil of impositions of identities and ideal that will suppress Dorian identity, Basil's portrait of Dorian approaches Cézanne's resistance to the totalizing veil of single point perspectivism of visual art since the Renaissance. The "rebirth" of portraiture was a definitive feature of the Renaissance;

initially a naturalistic project, by the sixteenth-century, portraits reconciled attention to physiognomic particularities of the subject with more generalized visual devices, techniques understood to attribute universal ideal qualities to the figure. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* shatters such universal, totalizing form in its emphasis on the individuality and aesthetic difference of Dorian Gray. In Wellsean utopian terms, the novel continuously disrupts any final theory of *Dorian Gray* or of individual identity; the “interplay of the individualities” produces a new utopian ideal of “fertilising conflict.”

To become a work of art is the object of living. Oscar Wilde, Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* 310

Wilde believed that nineteenth-century art was deficient in ordering the increasing complexity of human experience. He argued that its concerns were re-productive, continuing the integration of empty ideals and preserving what existed. Ideology and utopia, Ricoeur contends, are concerned with the use of power; ideology integrates and preserves what is. In the aesthetic process a hierarchy of form and content controls and repeats language that arrests the development of thought and behavior. In *Dorian Gray*, Wilde disrupts the integrative power of old ideas. Living life “to become a work of art” requires continuous self-consciousness. Cultivated, this individualism disrupts arrested development to imagine something else. This disruptive power is the utopian part of the imagination; it releases the aesthetic process that develops new, individual forms.

Wilde works outside the power of integrative construction to fashion new forms that interplay with existent ideas. He tells readers, “the idea of a young man selling his soul in exchange for eternal life [is] an idea that is old in the history of literature, but to which I have given new form” (Hart-Davis 263). Although portraiture today is conceived primarily as a representation of “personality,” portraiture and individualism have viewed the concept of identity

as a true self, coherent, immutable, permanent, and independent (Woodall 10, 14). Wilde challenges this “idea that is old,” replacing the notion of a unified, permanent self with an individualism of on-going self-construction. In *Dorian Gray* the artist Basil Hallward self-consciously realizes new form in his portrait. Basil says, Dorian’s “personality has suggested to me an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style. I see things differently, I think of them differently. I can create life in a way that was hidden from me before” (14). In his individual, aesthetic determinations, Basil risks a step outside conventions that carries the potential to cause community disfavor and disruption. The “wonderful creation” derives from Basil’s subjective vision of Dorian’s identity, without the veil of “empty ideality.” Basil’s perception is new, and even the world-sophisticated Lord Henry does not understand Basil’s “leap” forward. “Every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter,” Basil argues. The sitter, or referent, does not dominate the field of vision: “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” (10).

As the artist, Basil has disregarded socially determined forms and reordered life from his personal, impressionistic perspective. Perfection lies not in the harmony of parts to whole but, as Wilde says, in the perfect use of imperfect medium. In *Dorian Gray*, art as life holds center place: “In the center of the room, clamped to an upright easel, stood the full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty” (7). In its upright and full-length position, the portrait of Dorian suggests the dignity of human beings. As Woodall notes, “emulation of exemplars” in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries allowed a union of “‘idealising’ format with ‘realistic’ likeness” and the full-length format with images of secular rulers and sovereigns was part of this process of emulation (2). Dorian, a young man whose beauty is beyond the ordinary

and common representation, deserves to be portrayed, Basil seems to suggest, independent of traditional social portraiture.

Yet Basil is voice for Wilde's aesthetic theory that art is the "real mode of Individualism," that artistic individualism is truth. In his representation of Dorian, Basil has "shown in it the secret of [his] own soul" (10). A revelation of Basil's unique temperament and particular style, the portrait is a creative projection grounded in the true, subjective values of his experience. Wilde writes, "[a] work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want" (*Soul* 1090). In this step, Wilde's disruptive new aesthetic theory simultaneously releases portraiture from efforts toward identity of external appearance and internal self and from artistic endeavors of social, moral, political, and economic arrest. In art that portrays life, the interplay of individualities in art becomes primary. Basil refuses aestheticism's drive to wholeness, a harmony of body and soul, and creates interplay of Basil's "soul" and Dorian's "body." "Dorian Gray is to me simply a motive in art," Basil says to Lord Henry. "You might see nothing in him. I see everything in him. He is never more present in my work than when no image of him is there. He is suggestion, as I have said, of a new manner. I find in him the curves of certain lines, in the loveliness and subtleties of certain colours. That is all" (14-15). Later Dorian's portrait portrays his personality, a new art; this interplay of personalities, artist critic, creates a tension of non-totalizing perspective. Basil's portrait of Dorian illustrates Wilde's aesthetic charge for the intensification of individualism. The portrait's representation, outside the preservation of integrating forms, has disrupted existent notions. Even Dorian, the supposed central subject of the portrait, initially fails to know himself; "is that the real Dorian?" he asks. "Yes; you are just like that. . . . At least you are like it in appearance,"

Basil responds (28). Basil understands his new manner as surface aesthetics. Dorian's initial inability to "grasp" his image as self suggests that reality has shifted, and Basil has painted beyond naturalistic portraiture identification between external appearance and inner identity. What Basil's portrait seems to challenge is the assumption that for knowledge to be real it must be a system that explains everything. For Basil, the portrait is the "real Dorian" in appearance. At the end of Chapter II, Basil and Lord Henry verbally scuffle over the "real" Dorian; as Dorian departs with Lord Henry and Basil stays with Dorian's portrait, each is certain they have the "real" Dorian. Basil imagines a new, alternative possibility for art and for Dorian, and the multiple perspectives Dorian's portrait produces anticipates Adorno's concept of non-identity, "as having identities that cannot be known, because identity is always different from the ways it can be represented by thought" (Schoolman 123).

Basil's alternative perspective on Dorian plays a constitutive, utopian role, and his portrait creates a space from which Dorian will re-think the nature of his existence. In life as in art, Wilde would argue, individualism changes the representation of the subject. When Basil paints Dorian in new form, he paints the "secrets of his soul." His individual perspective reshapes the representation of Dorian. Shaping old ideas into new form, the artist Basil finds in Dorian a beauty not yet revealed. In Bloch's terms, when Basil paints the not-yet, he makes others conscious of what does not exist. Revealed, the not-yet in existence becomes an alternative perspective full of possibility. For Dorian it awakens an awareness of his potential. For Lord Henry, Dorian might be a new "visible symbol" that the century wants (23). But Wilde does not follow Bloch toward the dream of fulfillment. Rather, Wilde's novel reveals multiple, recalcitrant Cézannean perspectives that *Dorian Gray*, since its publication, has produced in multiple theoretical perspectives.

The experimental potential of portraiture form is perfect for Wilde's disruptive imagination. In a portrait whose subject visibly ages, Wilde disrupts the visual constituent, the recognizability of appearance. In consequence, the artist's determinations create uncertainty for the sitter; he cannot identify himself. For Wilde, placing the individual outside ordinary, unifying self-conceptions offers freedom for self-development. Rather than type, Wilde believed "man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multi-form creature" (111). And as Ellmann notes in *Oscar Wilde*, "Wilde prided himself on leading a life not double but multiple" (283). In his capacity for multiplicity, Dorian intensifies the individualism that projects him beyond existent forms. He frees himself from conventional spatio-temporal limits of existing reality. Time for Dorian, for example, is oddly organized; it is suspended, expanded over eighteen years, collapsed into a long chapter, it dips into contemporary London, and multiples experiences by drawing on classical Greece (Elfenbein xvii-xx). The disruptive individualities of Wilde's stylistic "picture" challenge the drive to aesthetic wholeness in art, the single point perspective, whether visual art or literature. In *Soul*, Wilde reconstructs progressive time, and makes individual movement an ever-unfolding process, without a plan of progress. Basil's creation of new form, Dorian's portrait, becomes an expression of possibilities beyond traditional conventions.

As an artful characterization of an individual's life, any portrait represents accumulated and existing influences, as well as anticipated and hoped for developments of individual identity. As Wilde wrote to Max Beerbohm, "[t]he name one gives to one's work, poem or picture—and all works of art are either poems or pictures, and the best both at once—is the last survival of the Greek Chorus. It is the only part of one's work in which the artist speaks directly in his person" (Hart-Davis 576). The title, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* provides understanding for Wilde's new

form. Bringing pictorial art and literature together, Wilde lets the two artistic activities become part of the text and replaces the notion of re-presentation as “a unifying, revelatory encounter between subject and object” with “an ongoing process” that Woodall defines as a Derridean view of identity, “enacted through language, between subjects” (13). Ellmann argues “[t]hat literature and painting could not exchange their roles was the idea which *Dorian Gray* would alter; in the end each art would revert to its norm, but literature would show itself capable of doing what painting could not do, exist temporally rather than eternally” (*Oscar Wilde* 312). In this way, Wilde disrupts aesthetic efforts to totalize the “picture” and “plot” and places two forms in interplay that emphasizes the value of both rather than dominance of one.

Because “name” readily identifies the central reference, portraits call the function of names into question. The name “Dorian Gray” provides a key to the utopian theory of art Wilde sets out in his novel. A shaping constituent, Dorian Gray is appended to the portrait. But as with the visual constituent, the bodily image, Wilde chooses to subordinate the sitter’s “identity” to aesthetic process. Combined as first and last name, Dorian Gray appeals to a unified identity; separated the two names Dorian and Gray, suggest the artist’s ideal, placing character in a *nowhere*, re-constitutive position. The name Dorian is of Greek origin, a dialect of the Dorics; also as a rustic English dialect, Dorian is contrasted with Standard English; as a native of Doris, Dorian is a member of one of the four main peoples of the ancient Greeks; Dorian is of Doris, its people, its language or culture. Wilde selects a name of multiplicity; Dorian as dialect indicates, simultaneously, a dialogue between the parts and a deviation from the standard. The noun gray signifies achromatic color. Denoting a “color” achieved by blending black that absorbs light rays, and white that reflects all the rays that produce color, gray is an imperfect absorption of all “perfect” rays. Reflection and absorption interplay, not arrested but communicating.

Aesthetically, Dorian resists definition. The name Dorian is a multiplicity of viewpoints, always a part of a whole that resists completion and deviates from the standard. Gray calls up a visual image of the absence of prismatic color, and as an achromatic color, gray refracts light rays that, bent or broken, frees form and spirit from its diffracted order. Combined, the names “Dorian” and “Gray” hold the potential to develop alternative perspectives. As a work of art, “Dorian Gray” becomes “the perfect use of an imperfect medium” (“The Preface” *Dorian Gray*).

Wilde’s paradoxical name has further possibilities. A modifier of identity, “Dorian Gray” acts as a foil to what is and as a symbol of ideal possibilities. As adjective, “Dorian” defines a classic order of Greek architecture, characterized by its simplicity of form. “Gray,” as an adjectival, Indo-European base, means “to shine”, “to see.” The nineteenth-century Impressionists often limited the range of chiaroscuro values in a manner of painting characterized by *grise*, “the general evenness of value, neither black nor white but gray all over. Grayness evoked a uniform (and often intense) illumination” (Shiff 201). Working with Pissarro in 1870s and 1880s, Cézanne developed a manner of “mixing several brilliant colors together whenever he wished to make a neutral brown or grayish tone” to avoid conventional chiaroscuro, the illusion of depth (207). Diffracted and re-arranged, the traditional order is thus disrupted in order “to [re-] see,” free from the “laws” of nature. In the novel, Wilde like Cézanne uses “Gray” to eliminate the illusion of depth, or central idea and to allow individuality to play at the surface. In re-formulating portraiture’s essential constituent of naming, Wilde re-emphasizes that a human being possesses “myriad lives and myriad sensations, [he is] a complex multi-form creature.” Typing individuals arrests the development of potential.

As with portraiture’s visual constituent, Wilde also undermines traditional portraiture at the conceptual level. If looking for continuity and unity in the art of *Dorian Gray*, there will be

disappointment. The novel ever-unfolds and frustrates critical certainty. Dialogue, a favored form for Wilde, is the making of truth and reaches toward Bakhtin's dialogic novel and language form, as an unfolding exchange of views that resists aesthetics' drive to create harmony and wholeness. Dialogue is the form that "the creative critics of the world have always employed," Wilde says in his *Critic as Artist*; it "can never lose for the thinker its attraction as a mode of expression" (1046). Shaping the construction of the novel in dialogue form, Wilde hopes critical readers will continue to converse with the novel and explore its meanings. In the pictorial-literary dialogue structure *Dorian Gray*, Wilde challenges essentialist ideas of art and its individuality, creating a dialogue of portraiture—Basil's portrait of Dorian Gray and Dorian's portrait of his "soul" are, for example, two conflicting voices.

Readers of *Dorian Gray* know Wilde offers no easy optimism in its surface plot realities. Rather than a narrative as illustration of a utopian hermeneutic, it appears to be the story of sin and degradation that revolted its critics. Indeed, the picture of Dorian degenerates from innocent beginning to catastrophic ending. Beginning in anticipation of innocence and beauty, the story opens in the artist's, Basil Hallward, studio and references Edenic images. But low and reverberating, "like the bourdon note of a distant organ," the roar of daily London denies the idyllic setting and negates the "rich odour of roses" and "light summer wind" that stirred the trees of the garden" (7). The portrait "of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty," initially upright and at the room's center, a symbol of harmonious totality, is by degrees corrupted and decentered.

Disrupting progress and single point perspective, each episode negates the proceeding one and appears to lower the level of expectation and raise the level of corruption throughout, creating an interplay of tensions. Wilde's plot, structured as a series of episodes, first reveals

Dorian at age twenty in the first ten chapters and at age thirty-eight in chapter twelve through twenty with one intervening chapter that speeds through Dorian's developing aesthetic experiences. His treatment of Sibyl Vane adds "a touch of cruelty in the mouth" and initiates a change in the portrait that "was horribly apparent" (73). And each "unveiling" reveals a growing ugliness in the portrait that negates the horror of the preceding episode. To the thinning hair and sodden eyes of his degeneracy, Dorian's murder of Basil transforms the canvas: "wet and glistening, on one of the hands as though the canvas had sweated blood?" (134). The "scarlet dew" brightens with age and blood stains the painted feet and wrinkled hands; the eyes have a "look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite" (168). In Cézannean multi-perspective of picture, the reader/ beholder never sees the portrait in its wholeness. Only in its parts and their interplay of relations across the canvas does meaning occur, creating possibility for multiplicity of critical interpretations.

From a moral point of view, the portrait appears the degradation of Dorian's "essentialist" soul, and the destruction of "good" portraiture's identification between external appearance and internal identity, the overcoming of the divisions of self. That, however, is what Wilde gets rid of: the relation of self and other as identification and, instead, leads toward a perspective of individualities that interplay. What he portrays are the aspects of human existence that are closed off by attention only to beauty that conceals by claims of universality and neutrality. Wilde plots at the aesthetic level rather than convention moral level, and the ethics his aesthetics propose are those of ever-unfolding exchanges between self and others. His portrait opens toward an aesthetic theory that opens art to questions of human existence. One thing, "it had done for him. It had made him conscious . . ." of his cruelty (76).

Wilde frustrates the idea important for portraiture as re-presentation: “Some kind of eternal or persistent dimension to identity is necessary if the viewer is to be satisfied that the absent person depicted is present, at least in a ‘good’ or ‘authentic’ likeness” (Woodall 11). In *Dorian Gray*, other people and art influence the identities of Basil, Lord Henry, and Dorian. When Basil sees his portrait of Dorian, which had become a starting point for Dorian’s own work, Basil can identify it only by his signature in the corner of the portrait: his influence remains but it does not unify the work’s idea. Likewise, only signature rings can identify Dorian Gray, at his death, refuting the notion that Dorian is, as individual or as art, a completely unified, autonomous individual. Art and individual identities are saturated with other influences. Wilde resists the notion of single point identity of a work of art or an individual. Writing to the *Daily Chronicle*, 30 June 1890, Wilde explains that “to get rid of the conscience that had dogged his steps from year to year that he destroys the picture; and thus in his attempt to kill conscience Dorian Gray kills himself” (Ellmann, *Artist as Critic* 246). Getting rid of the notion of moral conscience, Wilde simultaneously gets rid of the notion of unified identity and artistic single point perspective. In the final moments of the disintegration of this “metanarrative,” Wilde, at the conclusion, has two “gentlemen” query authority, the policeman, as to “Whose house is that, constable?” At the policeman’s response, “Mr. Dorian Gray’s,” house, the two looked at each other, walked away, and “sneered” (*Dorian Gray* 219). The master narrative of art and critical activity has been broken; art and life are no longer harmoniously attuned, and Arnold’s critical ideal that society can be informed and directed by a critic’s attunement to art no longer holds. In terms of aesthetics, Wilde hopes that interpretation of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is unfinalizable, a move that anticipates the surface aesthetics of Cézanne and Stein. Wilde’s development of art and individual as engagement and surface obliterates the internal “law” of

conscience or the “moral” read in aesthetic appearance and suggests an ethics and aesthetics that Bakhtin calls *unfinalizability*, that views people always making themselves in ever-unfolding exchanges between self and others, artist and critic. In this surface aesthetic, no matter how many categories are applied to art, something is always left over, a non-identity in Adorno’s terms.

At his novel’s conclusion, Wilde has broken with the present order of doing things and performs the utopian task of freeing individuals from “monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit” (Wilde, *Soul* 1091). Dorian has stabbed the picture; the valet, Francis, together with a footman and a coachman, “crept upstairs,” knocked, called out, tried to force the door, and receiving no response from “their master,” climbed on the roof, and dropped on to the balcony. Wilde writes that “[t]he windows yielded easily: their bolts were old” (*Dorian Gray* 165). In *Dorian Gray*, Wilde has broken the “bolts” of traditional perspective’s/aestheticism’s “window” of “master” narrative, single point perspective. The “splendid portrait” survives its artist and sitter and, lying on the floor was the “withered, wrinkled, loathsome of visage” Dorian Gray. In an interplay between his critical ideas and his imaginative novel, Wilde breaks down the barrier between creation and interpretation, the division between artist and critic, art and society, liberating each one from the restrictions of the other by the interplay between them. In doing so, Wilde also refutes notions, proposed until the mid-nineteenth century, within the dualist paradigm that “the portrayed body remained an adequate symbol for an identity conceived in this coherent, self-contained way, because notions of identity . . . were, like the imaged body, characteristically consistent, unified and autonomous” (Woodall 11). In “The Preface” of his novel, Wilde states that “All art is at once surface and symbol./Those who go beneath the surface do so at their peril./Those who read the symbol do so at their peril.” Simultaneously, surface and

symbol exist in *Dorian Gray*; surface does not symbolize a coherence and unity of art or the portrayed body's identity.

In the novel, Basil finds in Dorian the motivation toward a new manner of art; he understands his portrait as a creation of interpenetrating realities of body and soul, art and life. Rather than the unified appearance and identity of naturalistic portraiture, Basil's interpenetrating reality is of Basil's artistic personality/soul and Dorian's appearance, artist and sitter, brought together in the portrait. Basil tells Lord Henry he has seen in Dorian's personality a suggestion for "an entirely new manner in art, an entirely new mode of style" (8). Dorian, like a work of art, had influenced, informed Basil, and he was able to "see things differently . . . think of them differently. I can now recreate life," Basil said, "in a way that was hidden from me before." Inner form as Basil's soul, Basil says, "[t]here is too much of myself in the thing." Furthermore, Dorian's own picture, informed by Basil and Lord Henry, shows "the secret of his own soul," an interplay of self and other rather than an identification that Pater had feared as death (4). When Dorian "murders" Basil, he kills deadly identification, the equation of symbol and its referent "thing." Dorian tells the chemist, Alan Campbell, "to destroy the thing that is upstairs—to destroy it so that not a vestige of it will be left" (123). Basil had imposed his own identity on Dorian, giving the look of a stable, isolated, solid body. Before giving the picture to Dorian, Basil had fixed or "masked" the individuality of his art with varnish and frame, essentially fixing or imposing an ideal image and claiming a disinterested stance. Basil's attempt to mask "his soul" kills the creativity of art. In murdering Basil, Dorian murders the notion of art as a single thing; in fact, he describes Basil as "[t]he thing," a "dead thing. . . . like a dreadful wax image," no longer as source and origin of the painting, the death of the author-itarian center

controlling the work of art (123-124). Dorian, in constructing his “wish” to remain always young, separates the “body and soul” that Basil had tried to harmonize. For Wilde art is both surface and symbol, and dead Basil no longer remains a direct referent. Regardless of his desire to kill Basil’s influence entirely, Dorian’s own picture of his soul retains Basil’s “signature” as trace, as are the influences of Lord Henry and his book, now part of, but not completely dominating ideas. True to his oppositional Doric characteristics, Dorian remains without a “base” theory: He “never fell into the error of arresting his intellectual development by any formal acceptance of creed or system” (100, 103). As Cézanne developed his unruly pictures in relatedness without controlling perspectivism, Wilde’s dialogic scheme of interplaying individualities develops without the control of a master narrative. Wilde breaks the locks, disrupts closed, linear narrative and allows for an art and aesthetic individualism of self/critic construction, with limited freedom but in relation with others.

In *Dorian Gray*, Wilde anticipates Wells’ utopian interplay of individualities to create the novel’s dialogue structure. These individualities are present in the constructions of body and soul, pictorial and literary art, physical and abstract, surface and symbol, material and immaterial, and impressionism and symbolism. The traditional contraries play across and through Wilde’s often referred to tension of “sense and soul.” In his process of portraying his new aesthetic individualism, Wilde develops Dorian’s portrait as a process of shaping and re-shaping of aesthetic individuality, grounded in a process of uncertainty and excessive sensations. In *Soul*, Wilde had overthrown time as progress, and Dorian moves out not in linear fashion, but as if in a labyrinth of “streets like the black web of some sprawling spider” (136). In dialogue form of interplay and multiplicity that he had developed for art and life in *The Decay of Lying*, Wilde sets the contraries “sense and soul”: “To cure the soul by means of the senses, and the

senses by means of the soul! . . . Certainly with hideous iteration the bitten lips of Dorian Gray shaped and reshaped those subtle words that dealt with soul and sense” (*Dorian Gray* 135, 136). The shaping and reshaping reveal what claims of totalizing beauty had masked: “Ugliness that had once been hateful to him because it made things real, became dear to him now for that very reason. Ugliness was the one reality” (136). As Cézanne and later Stein, Wilde finds a “realler reality.” His disruptive aesthetic theory opens up aspects of human existence, once masked by universal claims, aspects before excluded from aesthetic “purity.” Dorian’s “picture of his soul” is multileveled, shaped and reshaped by engagement with life, a “shot silk” portrait that anticipates H. G. Wells’ later utopian scheme. The anarchic, unruly, disruptive multiplicity of Wilde’s individual art subverts the attempts of Basil, Lord Henry, Sibyl and others, to instill “Dorian” aesthetic order. In the portrait, for example, one of the first influences we see beyond Basil’s is the influence of Sibyl’s death, as “a touch of cruelty in the mouth” (66). Through the course of Wilde’s novel, the texture is similar to Cézanne’s recalcitrant surfaces and Wells’ later modern utopian “shot silk texture between philosophical discussion on the one hand and imaginative narrative on the other”: “the story of the adventure of his soul among [aesthetic] inquiries” (Wells xxxii, 2). The punishment and reward of the critic artist is tracing the cross-currents of meanings that Wilde’s tensions produce in his story.

For Wilde, individualism as a mode of life must be a “disruptive and disintegrating force.” Like art, it holds multiple perspectives. In *Dorian* as art, the novel illustrates the multiple perspectives of critical evaluations and demonstrates the destructive relation between individual and aestheticism. Lord Henry understands Dorian as the “symbol” for the age; others see him as “Prince Charming”; still others found that his “mere presence seemed to recall . . . the memory of the innocence that they had tarnished” (*Dorian Gray* 93), each seeking an identity between

Dorian's exterior beauty and an "unspotted" soul. For the artist critic, each is important. At the novel's end, James Vane finds his sister Sibyl's "Prince Charming" and nearly allows his understanding of Dorian's individuality to be subsumed to the universal ideality of Dorian's face. James Vane seeks Dorian's death but is stopped, momentarily, by Dorian's use of his unchanging, beautiful visage. Others in the novel have, too, felt the tension at the surface of Dorian face. Unlike the others, however, when told of Dorian's past, James awakens to the tension of inner and outer existence. Aesthetic Dorian, complex and multileveled, challenges aesthetic theory that drives toward aesthetic universality and neutrality of art and individual, and anticipates twentieth century aesthetic theories that open up new perspectives on the heterogeneity of subjects. In Wilde's novel, James Vane is killed; however, Vane experiences both reward and punishment of understanding. As "vane" for Wilde's new "Dorian" aesthetics, James could say, like Wilde's character Gilbert, that his punishment and reward "is that he sees the dawn before the rest of the world" (*Critic as Artist* 1058).

The tension of "sense and soul" in Wilde's novel connects with the recalcitrant surfaces of Cézanne's pictorial art, as well as the interpretative uncertainty of Cézanne's critics' evaluations. Wilde develops this possible connection in *The Critic as Artist*, writing of the "Archaicistes, as they call themselves" who seek "the imaginative beauty of design and the loveliness of fair colour": those who "try to see something worth seeing, and to see it not merely with actual and physical vision, but with that nobler vision of the soul" (1051). These painters work under "decorative conditions," and move beyond "the limitations of absolute modernity of form which have proved the ruin of so many of the Impressionists." In pictorial art, Cézanne applied the color work of the Impressionists, but also brought form back to painting. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor argues that Cézanne "brought to expression the meaningful forms and

relationships which undergird our ordinary perceptions, as they emerge and take shape from the materiality of things. To do this he had to forge a new language, abandoning linear and aerial perspective and making the spatial dispositions arise from the modulations of colour” (468). From the perspective of Taylor’s description of Cézanne’s art, we can view Wilde’s “new aesthetic” language as an approach to Cézanne’s surfaces in his rejection of aestheticism’s drive toward wholeness of conventional, imposed form. Developing *Dorian Gray* in dialogue form, Wilde exposes aspects of human existence that have been excluded by claims of universality, thus allows the individualities of different ideas and voices to compete in the space. Both Wilde and Cézanne work toward, what Taylor calls, a “retrieval of experience” and away from a contemplative perceiving of mere color. Cézanne strives but fails to realize fully his “sensations,” and Wilde argues for the “cultivation of temperament” but also fails to achieve self-realization in the novel. Both Cézanne and Wilde develop a surface aesthetic, an art that is “decorative” and developed at the surface of things: in Wilde’s terms one cannot find this ideal of art

in mere atmospheric effect, but seek rather for the imaginative beauty of design and the loveliness of fair colour, and rejecting the tedious realism of those who merely paint what they see, try to see something worth seeing, and to see it not merely with actual and physical vision, but with that nobler vision of the soul which is as far wider in spiritual scope as it is far more splendid in artistic purpose. (*Critic as Artist* 1051)

Wilde’s critical works and his novel *Dorian Gray* point to interpretive uncertainty that Cézanne’s surfaces generate. In 1896, André Mellerio described Cézanne’s painting in impressionist and symbolist terms, as presenting “nature according to a vision particular to

himself, where the juxtaposition of colors [and] a certain arrangement of lines make his very direct painting like a synthesis of colors and forms” (qtd. in Shiff 10). In describing Cézanne’s impressionistic “particularity” and juxtaposition of colors” with a symbolist “arrangement of lines” and “synthesis of color and forms,” Mellerio’s interpretation parallels Wilde’s description of the artists, like Basil and Dorian, who see with their “souls”: “colour, unspoiled by meaning, . . . [and] the delicate proportions of lines and masses” (*Critic as Artist* 1051). Reading Cézanne’s impressionism, Richard Shiff writes that “symbolist’s utopian desire to unite all humanity within a single form of expression” believed the “permanent reference was the human spirit itself, not something outside it” (48-49). The Impressionist sought a “means of expression that would convey his own spontaneity, originality, and sincerity” that linked his art to “a unique temperament” (46). Reading the documents of nineteenth century visual artists and their theories, Shiff points out that for the Impressionists, “the impression was neither subject nor object, but both the source of their identities and the product of their interaction” (26). In the critical judgment of Cézanne, Shiff points out that for some, Cézanne was an impressionist, for others a symbolist: Shiff, considering Cézanne’s whole body of work, argues “his life’s work, as the product of impressionist “sensation.” Yet, during the 1890s, it clearly served as a model for the younger symbolists” (10). Such uncertainty and indeterminacy can be read in *Dorian Gray*. Basil and Dorian see with the “particularity” of their identity, and Dorian is greatly influence by the “poisonous book,” most often associated with Joris Karl Huysmans’ *A rebours* (1884) that was among “the precedents for the critical position that the symbolists adopted during the late 1880s and the 1890s” (Shiff 46). The book Lord Henry had given Dorian is full of the “technical expressions” and “elaborate paraphrases that characterizes the work of some of the finest artist of the French school of *Symbolistes* (92). The novel both surface and symbol, or in this case

impressionist and symbolist, creates a texture of non-identity that, like Cézanne's surface aesthetic, requires an ever-unfolding exploration; each interpretation is partial, the identity of the work exceeds every identification of it. The interplay of these tensions influences Wilde's "picture of Dorian." And what this study points out is that the tension of the individualities of his text and the multiple individual interpretations they generate disrupt aestheticism's drive to wholeness. Wilde's *Dorian Gray* no longer fits within an identification of aestheticism as it is usually described.

Wilde's own aesthetic-ethical blend is a picture of Wellsean "fertilising conflict." His picture models a non-totalizing aesthetic utopian image of disturbing aesthetic individuality engaged in continuously creative development of self and of self and other. Read in the pictorial framework of Cézannean surfaces, Wilde's disturbing process of contradiction and interplay contests the dominating force of single point perspective. The aesthetic individualism of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* shapes an aesthetic model that is, in Wilde's own words, "neither all excess nor all renunciation," but a tension of interplay of art and life at the surface. Wilde "showed the aesthetic world not isolated from experience, but infused with it. This was the new Hellenism of which he liked to speak" (Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* 361).

### Chapter Three:

#### The Utopian Composition of *Three Lives*

Gertrude Stein fronts her *Three Lives* with Jules Laforgue's statement, "Donc je suis un malheureux et ce n'est ni ma faute ni celle de la vie," introducing the utopian composition of her "first book." Stein's utopian composition resists, however, the "happy" foundation of metaphysical truth: the promise of utopian happiness, the reconciliation of subject and object, individual and world. Rather Stein's utopian thought parallels H. G. Wells' 1905 utopian scheme for "bettering the interplay between individualities" (10). The "unhappiness" of Laforgue's statement emphasizes the unstable relation between self and world; unhappiness is neither the responsibility of self nor life. In *Cezanne and the End of Impressionism* Richard Shiff explains Laforgue's 1883 aesthetic position that "in the new impressionist painting 'object and subject [that is, either nature and artist, or art work and viewer] are . . . irretrievably in motion, inapprehensible and unapprehending. In the flashes of identity between subject and object lies the nature of genius" (28). Shiff concludes then that "[i]n this way Laforgue presented the union of subject and object as an aim or ideal of art." This conclusion, however, does not account for the *malheureux*, non-foundational stance of Laforgue's statement that Stein presents to set the tone and structure of her *Three Lives*. If "identity between subject and object" is only "flashes," this contests the notion of "union"; instead the unstable relation, "in motion," prevents full apprehension and arrest.

On this fault line Stein places *Three Lives*. This unhappy lack of union is not the *faute*, or responsibility, of the artwork or viewer. Like Cézanne, Stein creates a different kind of unity between the parts; it is not a “happy” reconciliation of parts, but the *malheureux* interplay of individualities in a Wellsean “fertilising conflict,” and a Cézannean “each part is as important as the whole.”

In the first book there was a groping for a continuous present and for using everything by beginning again and again and again.

Gertrude Stein “Composition as Explanation” 26

“In the first book there was a groping . . . there was an inevitable beginning again and again and again,” and Gertrude Stein reaches out for a “continuous present” and for “using everything,” for what is, but *not yet conscious* in literature and life. Using the three parts of her composition theory—“using everything,” “beginning again and again,” and “continuous present”—Stein achieves in *Three Lives* the “need for evenness,” a kind of Cézannean unity, overcoming the notion of a “central idea” or ruling myth, the single point perspective of narrative structure. Stein’s projective image is dialogic in structure and utopian in its impulse, the need to know along with “an [utopian] impulse to explore unknown environments, with all the attendant risk and tension” (Quarta 160). In its dynamic, recurring beginnings, *Three Lives* explores aesthetic environments that value each part in a present that moves continuously, at the surface. In the “beginning of beginning again,” the utopian imagination of *Three Lives* takes form and content beyond a “picture” of what existed in literature. Utopian in her need to know a better way, Stein gropes for a realism whose “insistence” is a movement of process that realizes human individual existence, “as they are living.” In her narrative Stein blends her observations of Paul Cézanne’s pictorial art and the teachings William James. Although with a difference, Stein

returns to the issues central to Oscar Wilde, resistance to totalizing aesthetic unity and emphasis on individualities.

This study explores Stein's technique of image/dialogue and its implications for the aesthetics and ethics of human individual existence. In *Three Lives*, Stein's image/dialogue extends in literature Cézanne's pictorial surface aesthetic that emphasizes "the idea of each part of a composition being as important as the whole" (Haas 17). Stein's literary stress upon surfaces along Cézanne's lines challenges literary images designed to reflect the unity and integrity of the self and world, as Cézanne's treatment of surfaces challenged perspectivism's pretense to grasp the world as "whole." Rather than concentrate and unify an underlying idea in a single pictorial image, Stein's insistence on the essence of "each one to have the same value" re-describes individual value. Her scheme of image/dialogue breaks up aestheticizing unity, prevents subordination of one voice to another, and provides, as Stein puts it, an "evenness of everybody having a vote" that implies an independence and integrity of each part that paradoxically develops a surface unity, between and among the parts in a cross-current pattern. For Stein, "[e]ach word, each sound, each textual moment has a vote, and each part of the world voiced by (not only represented by) the writing has a vote as well" (Chessman 202). Thus Stein refigures hierarchical systems of aesthetic construction that, consequently, refigure hierarchical systems of class, family, gender relations, and sexual orientation and imagine an aesthetic-ethics of unfolding exchange between self and others. Stein's literary stress of Cézannean surfaces explores literary possibilities and reveals a utopian imagination in its ability to expose the habits of convention while developing ways to rethink our existence. In *Three Lives*, Stein re-captures the value of the human individual in a Wellsean process of utopian interplay of individualities.

But why talk of Gertrude Stein in relation to the concept of utopia? Increasing numbers of studies agree that Stein's work changed literary language thus changing the way we imagine ourselves. Moreover, Stein would not consider her own work utopian as the term has been traditionally defined—a dream of an ideally harmonious and static state of affairs. Stein's utopianism is, however, as Morson and Emerson say of Bakhtin, “the utopia of an anti-utopian thinker” (Morson 94). Akin to Bakhtin's “dislike of systems,” “distrust of final answers,” and preference for the “messy facts of everyday life,” Stein places her work within the consciousness of thought that considers dynamic change valuable for continuing human intellectual and emotional growth. Her theory of composition is a critical approach to the tradition of Bakhtin's dialogic thought that permits the “fertilising conflict” of different value systems, thus refusing to unify the various points of view.

In 1984, Sheri Benstock commented that “[t]he history of Stein criticism has stayed squarely within the dialectical mode of western culture (male/female, speech/writing, sense/nonsense), avoiding—not seeing (precisely because the field of vision was limited to dialectical opposites)—the ways in which Stein's writing put into question that dialectic, refusing the dialectical, representational, mimetic conceptions. . . . Stein's narratives broke the one bond that joined all Modernists—a belief in the mastery of experience, the recreation of reality, through mastery of the Word. Stein had seen what no other Modernist saw: that meaning always slides away from the word no matter how tightly the author tries to control the directions that meaning might take. . . . To rediscover Stein is to problematize the critical methods we employ in that discovery; indeed without problematizing these critical methods, Stein may never have been rediscovered” (23-24). In *The Public Is Invited To Dance* (1989), Harriet Scott Chessman attempts to step outside the dialectic criticism that, according to

Benstock, is usually used to approach Stein. Chessman reads Stein's writing as a "configuration of voices engaged in dialogue" that offers "a central paradigm" for Stein's project:

a poetics of dialogue, where dialogue presents an alternative to the possibility of patriarchal authoritarianisms implicit in monologue, reliant upon the privileging of one voice, one narrator, or one significance. The equality Stein creates among the different parts of her compositions replaces this model of hierarchy and constitutes the basis for her dialogic form, in which difference may enter without being relegated to a secondary position or subsumed under an authoritarian identity. (2-3)

In a 1946 interview, Stein comments on the composition of *Three Lives*: "Up to that time composition had consisted of a central idea, to which everything else was an accompaniment and separate but was not an end in itself, and Cézanne conceived the idea that in composition one thing was as important as another" ("A Transatlantic Interview 1946" 15). Akin to Bakhtin's twentieth century dialogism, Stein rejects the controlling "central idea" of the monologic, authoritative voice; her narrative composition breaks up such drive toward unity of all parts as accompaniment and, instead, "using everything" she allows "each part to be as important as the whole." Stein's literary stress on surface along Cézanne's lines yields the image/dialogue characteristic of Stein's narrative, *Three Lives*. The narrative's composition portrays a Wellsean kind of utopian stress on individualities that, in dialogue form, produces a utopian scheme to better their interplay. The compositional scheme of "using everything," "beginning again and again and again," toward a "continuous present" that Stein sets out in her "Composition as Explanation" parallels Wells' call for utopia as schemes for better the interplay of individualities. Her utopian composition proposes an ever-unfolding development of art and of individual self, an unfolding exchange of views with others. Characterization for Stein is no longer representational,

but lives developing “as they are living.” Refusing the strict hierarchy of single point perspective, her compositions develop a Steinean “knowing” as “talking and listening,” truth conceived as an unfolding exchange of views. Attempting to read Stein beyond a dialectical mode, Chessman argues, “[t]he utopian dimension of Stein’s project lies in her creation of a literary language that invites our imaginative sense-making effort as readers even as it successfully resists our desire either to master the language’s meaning or to proclaim the language unreadable” (15). Reading *Three Lives* through Stein’s acknowledged Cézannean framework opens the text more fully to the utopian tensions of “fertilising conflict,” of interplay of the parts. Stein’s pictorial-literary structure develops in dialogue form that develops and engages opposing forces. These opposing, interplaying forces or “fertilising conflicts” create alternative perspectives that reveal changes for intellectual and emotional growth and attempt “this evenness of everybody having a vote” (“A Transatlantic Interview 1946” 17). Her attempt to get “evenness” participates in what H. G. Wells calls “modern perceptions”: the “fertilizing conflict of individualities . . . the ultimate meaning of the personal life, and all our Utopias no more than schemes for bettering that interplay” (Wells 11). Like Stein, Wells is concerned with the changing interplay of individual and world. Although different in form and method, his 1905 *A Modern Utopia* argues that “[u]ntil you bring in individualities, nothing comes into being” (11). Stein and Wells consider the individual essential to transform society, and the individual’s role must be re-imagined to portray this image.

### **The simple, ugly situation**

Picasso said, ‘You see, the situation is very simple. Anybody that creates a new thing has to make it ugly. The effort of creation is so great, that trying to get away from the other things, the contemporary insistence, is so great that the effort to break it gives the appearance of ugliness. Your followers can make it pretty, so generally

followers are accepted before the master. The master has the stain of ugliness. The followers who make it pretty are accepted. The people then go back to the original. They see the beauty and bring it back to the original.

Gertrude Stein in "Transatlantic Interview 1946" 32-33

Written in 1905, *Three Lives* is a view of the twentieth century that Stein's contemporaries did not yet see. Her "newness and difference" break with the past and create, for readers, an "appearance of ugliness." Reading *Three Lives*, Stein's friend and writer Hutchins Hapgood complimented "Melanctha" but criticized the repetitions and the "painstaking but often clumsy phraseology"; he warned her that the stories would meet future difficulty with both publishers and readers "because to get their real quality, patience and culture are demanded of the reader" (Sprigge 66). Then titled *Three Histories*, the book was refused by New York publisher Pitts Duffield because it "was too unconventional, for one thing, and if I may say so, too literary" (67). Deciding to have it printed herself, Stein concluded arrangements with the Grafton Press. In *The Autobiography of Alice B Toklas*, Stein recounts the visit by a Grafton Press representative, sent by the director, to discover if Stein was limited in her "knowledge of english," or if she "might not have had much experience in writing" (68). To this, Stein replied that "you might as well tell him . . . that everything that is written in the manuscript is written with the intention of its being so written and all he has to do is to print it and I will take the responsibility."

Early biographer of Gertrude Stein, Donald Sutherland contends that *Three Lives* as well as *The Making of Americans* (written 1906-1911) were vilified on the grounds that they were "cold or dead or clumsy or inhuman" (20). These impressions kept all but a small fraction of the reading public from her works. Sutherland notes that "[t]he demand of the educated American public were for precisely the things the work was meant to destroy, biographical or historical emotion, vagueness of feeling and slurred ideas, all essential to the average educated American

literary taste.” Early critical responses to the novel varied. After its publication, Stein sent copies of *Three Lives* to H. G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, and Arnold Bennett for review. Although no one came forward to sponsor Stein’s innovation, Wells wrote a note to Stein saying that he “had at first been repelled by the extraordinary style . . . had finally read the book with ‘deepening pleasure and admiration, and would look for . . . future works ‘very curiously and eagerly’” (Brinnin 119-120). When Edmund Wilson “encounters” Stein’s early work, he, too, found its newness and difference difficult. In style, Wilson argues, Stein’s work “appears to owe nothing to that of any other novelist, she seems to have caught the very rhythms and accents of the minds of her heroines: . . . Behind the limpid and slightly monotonous simplicity of Gertrude Stein’s sentences, one becomes aware of her masterly grasp of the organisms, contradictory and indissoluble, which human personalities are” (237-38). Wilson’s influential evaluation of Stein’s writings represents the early, positive sense of her work. He acknowledges that *Three Lives* moves toward a new verbal structure that creates a representation of the substantial realities the individual experiences in modern society. Although at the time of its publication it attracted little attention, Wilson notes that “loaned from hand to hand, it acquired a certain reputation.”

Although early responses to Stein’s *Three Lives* reveal an uncertain readership, later critics have been more receptive to the complexities her narrative presents. Mention of Stein’s name and works seldom appeared in early discussions of Modernism, but later critics place her at the movement’s beginning before World War I and understand her work as being solidly at the center of modernist’s “revolution of the word.”<sup>1</sup> In “Gertrude Stein and the Modernist Canon,”

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1. Among others, Jayne Walker charts Stein’s modernist project “from its beginnings in *Three Lives* . . .” (xvii), and Liesl Olson notes Stein as “one of modernism’s earliest experimenters . . . (328-29). Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, in “The Name and

Marianne DeKoven observes that in contrast to the mainstream modernist canon, *Three Lives* “seems not to have the proper weightiness, although,” DeKoven continues, “in fact, it is a mordant, emotionally loaded, complex text, stylistically highly wrought, masquerading as simple, whimsical, even slight. Moreover, . . . [i]ts politics of race and class are extremely troubling” (“Gertrude Stein” 15). Often Stein’s *Three Lives* is considered an important beginning for her continued work, yet critics often fail to examine its complexity. Some argue that because “most critics have not known how to deal with Stein . . . they have focused on the more ‘comprehensible’ pieces—*Three Live*” (Neuman and Nadel xviii). *Three Lives* can be considered “comprehensible” if examined at a surface story-level where it appears three stories of three women. Like Stein, other early twentieth-century writers focused their attention on the lower classes rather than the rich. The two stories, “The Good Anna” and “The Gentle Lena,” of two German servant women might, for example, reveal the difficulties of the great numbers of immigrants entering the United States at this time. Thus Stein’s topic appears timely; after all, she argues her work lies within the composition of her time. In the 1933 Preface of *Three Lives*, Carl Van Vechten notes “Melanctha” is “perhaps the first American story in which the Negro is regarded as a human being and not as an object for condescending compassion or derision” (x). Even from a social and racial perspective, Stein displays what utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch would call “the highest sensitivity to the crucial moments of change in time and its material process” (*The Principle of Hope* 126). Van Vechten, Eugene O’Neill, and Sherwood Anderson read *Three Lives* “with admiration,” Edmund Wilson writes, and he notes “that all three of these

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Nature of Modernism,” associate Stein with the “logic and modes of Modernism” and with “the revolution of the word,” continued by “the later Joyce” (34). Not only do they designate Stein’s modernist contributions as revolutionary and innovative, they note her own placement within the “powerful movement” of “Modernism . . . our inevitable art,” as Stein put it, “the only ‘composition’ appropriate to the new composition in which we live, the new depositions of space and time” (23).

writers were to occupy themselves later with negro life, in regard to which Miss Stein had given an example of an attitude not complicated by race-consciousness” (238-239).

Still only a few critics and artists examine Stein’s aesthetic, imaginative capabilities as utopian. However, her innovative language and her critical attention to multiple, marginal areas of our existence have provided scholars a festival of material on which to try out their own theories. Some twentieth century critics have read *Three Lives* as new in its verbal structure that creates the substantial realities of the individual experiences in modern society. Recent studies have indicated the “future” value of Stein’s work for our time, suggesting that critical twentieth-century feminist, linguistic, and poststructuralist theory, criticism, and practice “have helped us immeasurably in understanding Stein” (Neuman and Nadel, “Introduction” xix). Editing *Gertrude Stein and the Making of Literature*, Shirley Neuman and Ira B. Nadel recognize that twentieth-century theory provides a conceptual framework to discuss Stein’s work. Critics have realized that “the theory was not as new as it sounded, that ‘Stein did that!’ What poststructuralist theory did was let us begin to name what has seemed most problematic in Gertrude Stein’s writing” (xx). In understanding Stein, the contemporary newness of her work and its continuing relevance to the future, readers have developed “new, alternative perspectives.” Expressed in utopian terms, her work has helped readers rethink the nature of human existence and their position in society in new, better ways. Studies not using the utopian perspective from which to examine Stein’s work, understand it in ways that relate to utopian thought. In “At a Tangent: Other Modernisms” in *Modernism: A Literary Guide* (1995), Peter Nicholls argues that Gertrude Stein discovers

a form of writing that reveals continuities between self and world. . . . Even in her early work [*Three Lives*], Stein’s focus of attention travels consistently away from

meaning to the texture of writing. Language begins to assume a new opacity, blocking any easy passage between words and Eliot's 'world of objects'. Stein, we might say, invents another version of modernism by circumventing the image altogether and by exploring precisely that self-sufficiency of language which had seemed decadent to the 'Men of 1914'. (202)

Writing *Gertrude Stein* (1976), Michael J. Hoffman argues that in *Three Lives*, "Stein for the first time took a genuine step away from narrative and linguistic conventions" (21). In *Gertrude Stein and the Literature of the Modern Consciousness* (1970), Norman Winstein counters critical contentions that Stein's radical experiments into the nature of language cause "artistic suicide"(45). Instead, he concludes that "[t]he narrative of Gertrude Stein captures the changes of the real world; it reads awkwardly, since reality changes awkwardly" (107). In *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (1983), Marianne DeKoven sums up her analysis of *Three Lives*, noting that Stein's "impulse to alter conventional language in the service of realizing the essence of her subject leads her to abandon coherent thematic treatment of that subject in preference for the possibility of reinventing the structure of thought itself" (45). From the work of Stein, DeKoven argues, "[n]ew meaning and fresh synthetic combinations can be extracted from thinking," requiring readers and other writers to alter their perspectives on the individual in society.

Stein was aware that she saw the composition of her time, thus narrative composition, in a structure of which her contemporaries were not yet conscious. For the most part, her contemporaries were not her contemporaries. Yet she claims, "[n]o one is ahead of his time, it is only that the particular variety of creating his time is the one that his contemporaries who also are creating their own time refuse to accept. . . . Those who are creating the modern composition

authentically are naturally only of importance when they are dead. . . .The creator of the *new* composition in the arts is an outlaw until he is a classic” (emphasis mine, “Composition as Explanation” 22). Like Cézanne’s surface aesthetics that resists perspective order, Stein’s “new composition” placed her “out” side the “law” of conventional narrative and outside the conventions even, as she notes, of the most accepted “modernist” art. “You see,” she explains, “it is the people who generally smell of the museums who are accepted, and it is the new who are not accepted. You have got to accept a complete difference. It is hard to accept that, it is much easier to have one hand in the past. That is why James Joyce was accepted and I was not. He leaned toward the past, in my work the newness and difference is fundamental” (“Transatlantic Interview” 29). While this may appear mere self-advertisement on Stein’s part, Sheri Benstock, too, understands Stein as a “failed” Modernist and argues that Stein “always stood resolutely outside the mystery of language, just as she stood outside the gate of Modernism” (13). Acknowledging the impossibility of defining Modernism so as to include all its various Modernist experiments, Benstock notes:

The one sacred belief common to them all seemed to be the indestructibility of the bond between the word and its meanings, between the symbol and substance, between signifier and signified. Multiple linguistic experiments—juxtapositions of unlike words, typographical experimentation, translations of language into the dreamworld of night or the language of the mad—only reinforced the linguistic claims on meaning. (13)

Stein, on the other hand, “never believed in the indestructible relation between the word and its meaning, and she was able to demonstrate in multiple ways the uncontrollable divergences of form and content, style and substance, signifier and signified” (14). Although by 1992, Marianne

DeKoven places only Stein's *Three Lives* as a work of modernist fiction and, like the work of Joyce, Woolf, and Dorothy Richardson, devoted to "inventing new fictional means to represent the processes of consciousness. Even *Three Lives*, however, is so American, so much an eruption of modernism from within Jamesian pragmatism and American naturalism, that it occupies a different space within modernist fiction than that associated with the other three" ("Why James Joyce Was Accepted and I Was Not" 26).

In the "After the War—1919-1932" chapter of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein writes, "Kate Buss brought lots of people to the house. She brought Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy and they had wanted to bring James Joyce but they didn't" (200). John Malcolm Brinnin places Stein meeting Joyce at a party to celebrate Jo Davidson's completion of his statue of Walt Whitman (230). Stein "was touchy about the coupling of her name with that of the Irish master mainly because, by suggesting affinities of outlook and method that did not exist, such mention did disservice to both writers," Brinnin writes. Later Stein said, "Joyce and I are at opposite poles, . . . but our work comes to the same thing, the creation of something new" (290). Writing in 1960, Brinnin argues the central challenge for modern writers was "to find some substitute for the myth-structures that had made possible the epics of the past" (298). Some like Joyce would borrow "piecemeal the mythological unity of some period of the past and use it to contain and carry the chaos of the present. . . . Others would base their work upon an idea, a method, or . . . findings of scientists and the meditations of philosophers" (299-300). Brinnin writes that while "Joyce is bound by references; . . . Because she offers no references by which bearings can be taken, Gertrude Stein cannot be 'solved,' she can only be accepted" (304). Sherwood Anderson, in his introduction to Stein's *Geography and Plays*, wrote that "[f]or me the work of Gertrude Stein consists in a rebuilding, an entire new recasting of life, in the city of

words” (8). Although there remains a question of Stein’s influence on Virginia Woolf, in letters and diaries Woolf reveals herself “weighted down by innumerable manuscripts” including “the whole of Gertrude Stein,” and found Stein “rather formidable” (qtd. in Hussey 263).

Stein’s compositions are outside writing and painting that is occupied with making “it as it is [already] made” (“Composition as Explanation” 22). Her composition is a “modern composition,” and like Wells’ modern utopian composition, it means “outside . . . boundary lines.” Wells writes that the “whole trend of modern thought is against the permanence of any such enclosures”; both Wells and Stein endeavor to repudiate ideas that imply “that the whole intellectual basis of mankind is established, that rules of logic, the systems of counting and measurement, the general categories and schemes of resemblance and difference, are established for the human mind for ever” (Wells 11, 19-20). Stein understood that “[i]n the history of the refused in the arts and literature the rapidity of the change is always startling” (“Composition as Explanation” 23). For some, as with Stein’s early critics, the “startling” is disconcerting. But in Bloch’s utopian philosophy, startling provides evidence of art’s utopian creativity and the possibilities for social and individual identity, revealed by works of art that strive for the startling and unpredictable, new portrait of human existence. And Stein’s “first book,” *Three Lives*, not only reveals the “startling and unpredictable” but it also, in its narrative change, develops new modes of knowing the individual and the individual’s position in a changing world.

Stein argues that each generation changes, must change, and the creative artist is the one who portrays the real tendency of reality: “any creative artist is . . . contemporary. Only he is sensitive to what is contemporary long before the average human being is. He puts down what is contemporary, and it is exactly that. Sooner or later people realize it” (“A Transatlantic Interview” 33). Although Stein’s continuous, disruptive “modern composition” has moved

beyond Bloch's disruptive, but goal oriented utopianism, Bloch's "not-yet" helps frames Stein's idea as a utopian concept that reveals "real realism . . . because it grasps the tendency of reality" (*The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* 106). Stein's grasp of "the tendency of reality" is evident in her concept of composition, and in general, the essential component of "insistence," a process that reveal her utopian imagination.

### **Composition and utopian methods: expanding Cézanne and William James**

Everything I have done has been influenced by Flaubert and Cézanne and this gave me a new feeling about composition. Up to that time composition had consisted of a central idea, to which everything else was an accompaniment and separate but was not an end in itself, and Cézanne conceived the idea that in composition one thing was as important as another. Each part is as important as the whole, and that impressed me enormously, and it impressed me so much that I began to write *Three Lives* under this influence and this idea of composition and I was more interested in composition at that moment, this background of word-system, which had come to me from this reading that I had done. . . . It was the first time in any language that anyone had used that idea of composition in literature. . . . the realism of the composition which was the important thing, the realism of the composition of my thoughts.

Gertrude Stein "Transatlantic Interview 1946" 15-16

The three aesthetic compositional components Stein developed in her "Composition as Explanation" lecture give shape to an image/dialogue form that simultaneously breaks up integrative, totalizing narrative structure; promotes the idea that texts may be multi-leveled, dynamic, and non-authoritarian; and resists closure on movement and change. Stein's innovative component "using everything" in a process of "beginning again" liberates alternative voices, words, and ideas of human individuals excluded from single point perspective narrative. Anticipating Bakhtin's idea of dialogue, Stein's multiplicity of voices disrupts authority, even of the author herself. "Beginning again and again and again" and "continuous present" are "both things," Stein explains: this movement establishes her method as a dynamic process, active in

nature, a context in which the multiple points of view and individual expressions resist unquestioning unification. As such, it is a constructed, relational process that provides for inquiry and change, as well as relations between the individual parts. Trying to cope without a central idea, Stein is “groping” toward a modern composition that portrays the composition of her time and individuals as they are “existing” in it. Stein’s dialogic structure relies on successive, individual perspectives in a “fertilising conflict” between the parts. Although influenced by Cézanne’s surface aesthetic and James’ “stream of thought,” Stein’s uses her own medium, the resource of language, and “continuous present” is her “background of word-system” that she says, “had come to me from this reading that I had done” (“A Transatlantic Interview” 15).

In *Three Lives* she portrays her aesthetic composition and explains her “new way” in her theoretical essays “Composition as Explanation” and “Portraits and Repetition.” In reading Stein’s narrative as a product of the utopian function of the imagination, her development of composition is central. In her title, “Composition as Explanation,” Stein accounts for “composition” as a changing process, and her use of “as” suggests that her compositional elements will explain her composition. This shifts composition from reliance on a “central idea” as explanation, toward the idea of composition as a composing, arranging process. Stein understands composition as an on-going process: composition is the act of composing and the process of composition governs her work. For Stein, “[t]here was a groping for using everything and there was a groping for a continuous present and there was an inevitable beginning of beginning again and again and again” (“Composition as Explanation” 26). She explains her composition process as a “groping” rather than a grasping. Because she uses everything in “a continuous present,” beginning again, Stein’s composition disrupts any underlying idea directed toward a single image. Stein compositional process can be illuminated by Paul Ricoeur’s later

twentieth century explanation of his utopian theory of fiction as an ever-unfolding disruptive process, a process in which, he notes, the utopian imagination functions in a constitutive and constituting role rather than one that presents the complete, constituted. In the “[b]eginning again and again and again,” Stein writes, “explaining composition and time is a natural thing” (“Composition as Explanation” 23). Thus the ever-unfolding structure of *Three Lives* permits interplay of alternative voices and value systems.

Influenced by the ideas of William James and Paul Cézanne, Stein gains a “new feeling of composition” that combines James’ psychological explorations into the workings of the human mind and Cézanne pictorial investigations of the equal integrity of all things. In *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein*, Robert Haas argues that Stein wrote *Three Lives* under the influence of psychologist and philosopher William James, Stein’s “most stimulating teacher while she was at Radcliffe” (43). Haas claims that James’ ideas stimulated Stein’s literary struggle to understand the “basic nature” of human individuals in a continuous movement of process. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), Stein writes that “in looking and looking at this picture Gertrude Stein wrote *Three Lives*. . . . she had this Cézanne and she looked at it and under its stimulus she wrote *Three Lives*. . . . The Cézanne portrait had not seemed natural, it had taken her some time to feel that it was natural” (34-35). Stein found in Cézanne’s *Madame Cézanne in a Red Armchair* a pictorial model of James’s ideas of experience that, combined, led her toward her “modern composition.”

In different ways, Cézanne and James both struggled with the problem of continuity grounded in experienced relations, against totalizing and finalizing form. Stein undertakes a similar struggle, developing the problem of continuity of individual experience in the literary portraiture of *Three Lives*. The problem, as Cézanne articulated it, was “to relate every part of the

illusion in depth to a surface pattern” (Shiff 291). Stein’s literary stress on surfaces follows Cézanne’s pictorial getting rid of distinctions: Cézanne reduces perspectivism’s distinction between figure and ground to articulate a new pictorial composition; James denies dualism’s distinction between body and mind or, for James, consciousness and content, and replaces the distinction with a pluralistic “pure experience” (Taylor and Wozniak, par. 11-16). In his “A World of Pure Experience,” James contends that knowledge *in transitu* joins with the notion of “pure experience”: the “field of the present is always experience in its ‘pure state,’ plain unqualified actuality, a simple *that*, as yet undifferentiated into thing and thought” (208). In her “first book,” Stein blends Cézanne’s recalcitrant surface aesthetic of shifting perspectives and James’ “stream of thought,” an account of experience as a stream of consciousness rather than a succession or series of propositions, to produce her sense of narrative as a process of “continuous present.” Like Cézanne’s “surfaces,” James’ “stream,” and Wells’ “great stream of things,” Stein develops her composition in a continuity grounded in relations, or “interplay” between the parts, that denies any single perspective or single formulation of ruling myth or theory. Stein had studied James and read Cézanne; it is through her own medium, however, the resource of language, that she develops “this background of word-system” (“A Transatlantic Interview” 15). “No longer subordinated to the organization of ideas, Stein’s ‘back-ground of word-system’ comes to the fore as the predominant element of the composition,” Jayne L. Walker writes in her study of Stein and Cézanne (13). Stein does bring the “background of word-system” to the surface, and in her “continuous present” images are constructed and relations between images developed. Walker continues, noting that “Stein’s foregrounded ‘word-system’ creates a new mode of realism that inheres in the material patterning of the composition, not merely representing the objects of completed conception but modeling the processes of perception and

cognition. As she defines it here, it is a ‘realism of the composition,’ that is the formal embodiment of the ‘composition of [her] thoughts.’ Stein does ground her new “realism of the composition” in the processes of perception, but Stein uses “everything” and follows Cézanne in reducing the distinction between figure and ground, in avoiding *hierarchical* composition. Stein avoids hierarchical composition, in one instance, by refiguring the beginning, middle, and end of her composition of *Three Lives*, disrupting the chronological sequence in which she had written the three stories. Originally sequenced as “The Good Anna,” “The Gentle Lena,” and “Melanctha,” Stein constructs her own, arbitrary interplay of form. In Cézanne pictorial art this is an “absence of illusionistic depth” that results from “a number of ‘highlighted’ areas [that] appear in like manner in the foreground, middleground and background; and this effect is enhanced by the repetitious pattern of brushstroke, which does not distinguish ‘near’ from ‘far’” (Shiff 209).

Moreover, Stein reduces the distinction between figure and ground at the portrait level. In pictorial art, figure and ground constitute the totality of what is perceivable. Traditionally, figure is what appears structured, what perception is focused upon; whereas ground appears as background, as unstructured. In *Three Lives* Stein brings ground or her “background of word system” to the fore; the study of ground or medium becomes as important as the rhetorical figure or idea. To achieve an “absence of illusionistic depth,” Stein deviates from the ordinary or expected pattern or category of words. In “The Gentle Lena” we see this flattening of the illusion of depth in Stein’s description of Lena, who “had the flat chest, straight back and forward falling shoulders . . . flat, soft featured face”(240-41). Language as generic ground, traditionally of generic transparency and seemingly seamless construction, is what Stein brings to readers’ attention. Shifting attention to ground, Stein explores its differences and illustrates the relations of elements across the categorical distinctions. For example, Stein writes that “Lena was patient,

gentle, sweet and german. . . . had been brought from Germany” and had “german patience,” a “german voice” (240). Lena is categorized as from Germany and speaks the German language, but Stein describes her nature, patience, and voice as “german.” Lena is germane to Stein’s compositional structure: in one general definition “german” as a sprout, bud, or germ, the form from which new organisms or organizations and structures develop. Not easily categorized, “The Gentle Lena” narrative produces a dynamic arrangement of parts that are related to all other elements of the composition.

As an experience of ever-unfolding continuousness, Stein’s development of a surface aesthetic of narrative “continuous present” participates not only with Cézanne’s and James’ struggle to develop new languages of composition in pictorial art and psychology and philosophy, but also H. G. Wells’ utopianism of the interplay of individualities. Key to a connection of Stein and Cézanne is Oscar Wilde’s construction of an ever-unfolding interplay of the artist critic that anticipates aesthetic experience as an ongoing continuum. Cézanne and Stein open up Wilde’s non-totalizing perspective of the artist critic to relationality among all parts of the composition. The non-totalizing perspectives of these artists anticipate Bakhtin’s dialogism that rejects dialectic closure and values conversation between individuals and their ideas, Adorno’s concept of non-identity that privileges individuality, and Derrida’s *difference* that defers meaning and affirms difference, countering a unifying encounter between subject and object: all doing justice to the voice of the Other.

Stein’s “continuous present” replaces composition time as linear progress; as she sees it, “continuous present” is the composition of her time and the time of her composition. Explaining her aesthetic composition Stein continues that

beginning again, and again is another thing. . . . This brings us again to composition this the using everything. The using everything brings us to composition and to this composition. A continuous present and using everything and beginning again. In [*Three Lives* and *The Making of Americans*] there was elaboration of the complexities of using everything and of a continuous present and of beginning again and again and again. (“Composition as Explanation 26)

All of Stein’s disruptive, uncertain “groping” unsettles models of progressive drive toward perfect unity. Instead, the groping qualities of her compositional process are the basic nature of her compositions, with all the “attendant risk and tension,” utopian philosopher Cosimo Quarta argues, of the utopian impulse to “search for new possibilities of sustenance . . .” (160).

Beginning again and again, for Stein, is an ever-unfolding process, unfinished and continuous. John J. McDermott, writing the “Introduction” to *The Writings of William James*, explains that James’s principle of the “experience of continuity” is “not imposed from without but is rather found as an ongoing and intrinsic activity of the flow of experience. . . . intelligibility without a principle of total meaning, and the experience of continuity without the knowledge of finality” (xlvi). For James, the “processive quality” of human beings is of “continuous transitions” of “next with next in concrete experience”; for Stein, the processive quality is a “beginning again and again.” Stein’s process can also be understood in her connection to Cézanne’s “unnatural” shifting perspectives, as well as Wells’ utopian interplay of individualities. As Cézanne holds his pictorial art at the surface, Stein keeps these shifting perspectives “on the page,” using them to seek out form and capture the process of her “word system,” creating a utopian tension of individualities as they appear in worldly reality and narrative composition itself.

“Beginning again and again and again,” Stein establishes her method, the constructed, relational process that provides for inquiry and change, as well as relations between the individual parts. Stein is “groping” toward a modern composition that portrays the composition of her time and individuals as they are “existing” in it. As a method of process, Stein’s “beginning again” compliments her notion of “insistence.”

In “Portraits and Repetition,” Stein argues her work is not repetition or repeating;

that is the same thing, but once started expressing this thing, expressing any thing there can be no repetition because the essence of that expression is insistence, and if you insist you must each time use emphasis and if you use emphasis it is not possible while anybody is alive that they should use exactly the same emphasis. . . . That is what makes life that the insistence is different. (100)

Stein’s “insistence” can never be “repetition,” descriptions of things being given, “because insistence is always alive and if it is alive it is never saying anything in the same way because emphasis can never be the same” (“Portraits and Repetition” 102). A dialogic structure, “insistence” relies on successive, individual perspectives in a “fertilising conflict” between parts. Stein’s insistence is a kind of Derridean difference; it differs from any previous expression because the emphasis changes and defers any final meaning. What seems repetition in Stein’s work, she defines as “insistence that in its emphasis can never be repeating.” Here, Stein “rejects the mimetic art of remembering . . . knowledge that is converted into an artifact of itself. Remembering” Marianne DeKoven writes, “invokes what Stein considers the nineteenth-century English linear mode of successivity; she calls it elsewhere “beginning middle and ending,” and considers herself to have replaced it with the twentieth-century American mode of simultaneity, a thing not accreted through time but composed instantaneously of its various, interchangeable,

equally important parts” (“How James Joyce was Accepted” 24). Stein insists that “[n]o matter how often what happened had happened any time any one told anything there was no repetition. This is what William James calls the Will to Live. If not nobody would live” (“Portraits” 101). In a “continuous present,” “the shifting repetition of insistence is inevitable because you rediscover and reinvent in each moment what you know. If you knew you'd already known it you wouldn't have to say it again” (DeKoven 25).

Stein’s “essence of that expression is insistence” can be understood in relation to William James’ and Cézanne’s influence. Predicated on the existence of difference, Stein’s “insistence” endangers the notion of essentialism, or a Bakhtinean monologism. Coupled with “insistence” Stein’s use of “essence” must differ from essentialism’s fixed or unchanging concept of “essence.” James replaces essence with “process” and uses “essence” in relation to his idea of “interest” and “selectivity.” In *Principles*, James asserts that “there is no property ABSOLUTELY essential to any one thing” and that “[t]he essence of a thing is that one of its properties which is so important for my interests that in comparison with it I may neglect the rest” (II. 333, 335). The transposition of Cézanne’s pictorial techniques and aesthetics into literature creates, for Stein, a “realler” reality, not “in making the people real but in the essence or, as a painter would call it, value. One cannot live without the other” (“A Transatlantic Interview” 16). Stein emphasizes Cézanne’s new compositional idea that conveys “the idea of each part of a composition being as important as the whole” (17). Stein makes the value of each part, each individual, each different value systems as important as the whole, and rather than repetition of the same thing, her composition is a utopian constitutive and constituting process that begins “again and again and again,” so that each part *is* as important as the whole. It is the “beginning of knowing what there was that made there be no repetition” (“Portraits” 101). As

Stein notes in “Composition as Explanation,” beginning again “is a natural thing even when there is a series” (23). The three portraits Stein draws of Anna, Lena, and Melanctha are a “beginning again” to portray each individual, each life and value system, as well as the continuing portrayal of the constitutive, changing process of her compositions. In her compositional component of “beginning again,” Stein applies the verb of continuous movement, a movement that explains her narrative *Three Lives* as an expression of Wells’ utopian “fertilising conflict” of the interplay of individualities. In her “Melanctha,” Stein applies the process of insistence, developing an interplay in relations between Jeff and Melanctha: “I certainly never can know anything about you real, Melanctha, . . .” Jeff says (*Three Lives* 141). “But I certainly do admire and trust you a whole lot now, Melanctha. I certainly do, for I certainly never did think I was hurting you at all, Melanctha, . . .”. To which Melanctha responds, “I know, I know, . . . I know you are a good man Jeff. I always know that, no matter how much you can hurt me.” Each insistence of “I know” or “I certainly” carries the thought forward and each insistence is different. Stein argues, “[t]hat is what makes life that the insistence is different.” The insistence is an emphasis on a particular property, a selective process that develops and then begins again, building the picture in a continuous movement. Bloch argues that “the utopian function is the only transcending one that has remained,” a transcending function “without transcendence” (*Utopian Function* 107).

Stein’s utopian method of “using everything” “brings us again to composition,” a utopianism of individualities of the arrangement of the parts. Stein’s “using everything” opens the field of experience in literature to every sensation and every body as they are “existing,” and places value on the individual and the individual’s relation with others. This composition element is similar to Cézanne’s multiple perspectives and “each part” at the surface that “reach

no more resolution than the whole, nor do they seem certain to attain individually any integral form. These figural elements seem to exist only in their interconnections, and the composition appears to expand by addition of details, minor details, adjacent to those already defined” (Shiff 116). The elements of Stein’s aesthetic composition develop the image/dialogue structure of *Three Lives* and her understanding of Cézanne’s idea of composition, as the idea that “each part is as important as the whole.” Cézanne’s pictorial and Stein’s literary art develop their “non-hierarchical” compositional structure “in terms of the linking of one articulated part to another” (Shiff 215). In *Three Lives*, Stein portrays three working class women, servants and immigrants, German American and African American, developing their lives as they are living. Having disrupted narrative drive toward hierarchical, progressive structure by re-arranging the original chronological sequence, Anna, Lena, and Melanctha, in which she wrote the narratives, each portrait liberates individual voice and point of view.

Previously, individual voice had been subordinated to a controlling idea. “Up to that time composition had consisted of a central idea,” Stein says, “to which everything else was an accompaniment and separate but was not an end in itself . . . “ (“Transatlantic Interview” 15). The three lives are linked in a series of portraits across the surface of her narrative composition; each working class woman’s life is developed individually and is as important as the whole of the *Three Lives* composition. In doing so, Stein like Cézanne establishes correspondences to unify the image, and without conventional modeling “displays a harmonious surface in which the colors of foreground and background form a continuous pattern of interrelated hues” (208). Stein unifies her pattern, not idea, in a “continuous present” at the surface; “using everything” in a continuous pattern of interrelated “hues,” Stein does justice to the Other in a social context.

Her “beginning again and again” interplay of individualities resists narrative unity of any single interpretative theory or finalized existence.

Stein wished to find a new way to portray the human individual, not describe, report, repeat, or resemble what has been. From her perspective, “the realism of the people who did realism before was a realism of trying to make people real” (“A Transatlantic Interview” 16). Stein acknowledges that Flaubert and Henry James had had a “slight inkling” of the new composition she achieves; however, according to Stein, “[t]hey all fell down on it, because the supremacy of one interest overcame them.” Granted, Stein’s precursor Henry James used written art of portraiture strategically for the construction of *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). But she argued, James’ “composition had consisted of a central idea” rather than what she “tried to convey the idea of each part of a composition being as important as the whole” (15). Stein’s *Three Lives* as image/dialogue is non-authoritarian form whose free play of various points of view and value systems, expressed in the various characters, contests an integrative “image.”

In her 1926 lecture “Composition as Explanation,” Stein establishes her “modern composition” as “[c]omposition is not there, it is going to be there”; the modern composition of her “book,” she argues, is the composition of living, “the thing seen by every one living in the living that they are doing, . . .” (24). In this composition of living, Stein says,

there was a constant recurring and beginning there was a marked direction in the direction of being in the present although naturally I had been accustomed to past present and future, and why, because the composition forming around me was a prolonged present. A composition of a prolonged present is a natural composition in the world as it has been these thirty years it was more and more a prolonged present . . . it was natural. (24-25)

The anticipatory process that develops the composition of Stein's *Three Lives* works to compose each part that is as important whole. Speaking of the composition of her novel, Stein said she had "tried to convey the idea of each part of a composition being as important as the whole" ("A Transatlantic Interview" 15). In the process of composition, Stein recognized the individual thing in itself that relies on continuous process to develop. In "Portraits and Repetition," Stein explains that with insistence, without repetition, composition of portraiture was "a movement lively enough to be a thing in itself moving. . . . In other words the making of a portrait of any one is as they are existing and as they are existing has nothing to do with remembering any one or anything" (102, 105). The word "existing" is essential for Stein's continuous process of composition. She argues that "existing as a human being . . . is never repetition" because each time the emphasis is different. Neither for Stein nor for Ricoeur is individual essence a constituted thing. Rather both would agree that individual identity emerges over time, revealed through time and through process. As Stein says, existing has nothing to do with remembering because "remembering is repetition" ("Portraits and Repetition" 106). In the movement of "process and existing," the ideas of the utopian interplay contrast with those of recollection.

In "looking and looking" at Cézanne's portrait of *Madame Cézanne in a Red Armchair* (c.1877) Stein wrote *Three Lives*. In painting, Cézanne's "looking" was a "reading of the model," an effort to "'get to the bottom of what you find in front of you' as Cézanne put it to a young artist friend, [that] was followed by the 'realization'—the formation of a painting out of whatever materials the reading had presented" (qtd. in Murphy 76). Stein, too, attempts to "get to the bottom" of each person. And her reading, like Cézanne's, is a deconstructive process that dismantles conventional seeing to find, as Stein writes, a "realler" reality. The equality of all the

parts of Cézanne's painting relates the parts in a continuous "modeling the processes of perception" across Cézanne's canvas and the pages of *Three Lives*. In getting rid of the distinction between figure and ground, Cézanne makes the viewer "aware of the picture surface itself as well as the motif it is 'realizing' (Murphy 78). Walker describes Cézanne's method to combine these "contradictory sensory signs" as manifesting a "tension between material surface and illusory depth" (9). This places great stress on the art of portraiture, the focus of which is traditionally on the figure. Cézanne's surface aesthetic forces "all forms, whatever their theoretical position in depth, to play a part in the surface pattern. Nothing, therefore, remains in a single plane. . . . Serious artists . . . found it impossible after Cézanne, to see the face without seeing the wall—and with it, carpets, draperies, posted plants and the whole setting of shapes and colors in which the subject was placed" (99). For Stein's writing like Cézanne's painting, the emphasis lies on the creating of each part in a continuous present, and by beginning again and again. Stein, looking at life differently in each continuous moment, composes the various, interplaying parts. Thus Stein's composition, like Cézanne's, resists the linear mode of beginning middle and end. Stein's narrative composition illustrates Cézanne's interplay of recalcitrant surfaces, their meeting and overlapping, from which meaning arises. In doing so, she composes the pictorial-literary structure of *Three Lives* in relation to Cézanne's significant pictorial developments.

Unable to "grasp" Cézanne's picture in a single look, Stein develops her literary "background of word-system" in a process of "looking and looking" that seemed unnatural for her early readers. Cézanne's painterly concerns culminate the aestheticism so important to Oscar Wilde. Although in a different way, Wilde had approached Cézanne's surfaces and expressed Cézanne's own problem of "[h]ow to relate every part of the illusion in depth to a surface

pattern” (Shiff 291). For Wilde, art was both “symbol and surface,” and within Cézanne’s pictorial framework, readers find in Wilde’s artist critic perspective a Cézannean conflict in the awareness of the picture surface itself as well as the motif it is realizing. Stein argues that her literary forerunners, Flaubert and Henry James, had “a little of the feeling about this thing,” but she had “made it stay on the page quite composed” (“A Transatlantic Interview” 15-16). “The Cézanne thing I put into words came in the *Three Lives*,” Stein writes. She contends it is “the first time in any language” that anyone had “tried to convey the idea of each part of a composition being as important as the whole. . . . I was not interested in making the people real but in the essence or, as a painter would call it, value.” Like Cézanne’s pictorial art, Stein’s pictorial-literary structure in *Three Lives* reduces the distinction between central figure and surrounding ground.

Unlike her forerunners, Stein literary work does not fall down to one central idea, but following Cézanne’s “complex shifting of planes, [and] the rich play of surface pattern,” Stein’s triptych portraiture portrays the complex, unique individual, in a complex, unique form that uses the resources of her own medium, language (Wechsler 685). Like Cézanne’s *Madame Cézanne in a Red Armchair*, Stein’s *Three Lives* “records the act of looking as part of the finished image,” leaving the evidence of the “shifting perspective” on the page. In 1905, artist critics R. P. Rivière and J. F. Schnerb noted that Cézanne “worked from part to part on his canvases, allowing one form to define the adjacent one, as if the end of this free process could not be foreseen” (Shiff 116). His paintings

whether ‘finished’ or not with respect to covering the entire canvas, frequently do seem incomplete, as if more parts could easily be added. The artist’s images often reach the edges of the canvas indecisively, or lack a central focus. . . . having

painted many parts . . . with equal attention and intensity, denying them any differentiating hierarchy.

Stein's literary surfaces parallel Cézanne's interplay of parts in an attempt to cope without the perspectivism of a ruling myth or a central idea. In *Three Lives* Stein anticipates a Bakhtinian process in her image/dialogue and presents a utopian surface aesthetic of Wells' utopianism of individualities that contests, in interplay, any totalizing efforts.

In *Three Lives*, the story "Melanctha" appears the most developed challenge to totalizing narrative, perhaps the most utopian story of an anti-utopian thinker. Her image/dialogue structure holds the depth of individual development at the surface of the page and develops in a "continuous present" with interplay of various points of view. Key to Melanctha's minute changes is her "wandering": "It was now something realer that Melanctha wanted, something that would move her very deeply, something that would fill her fully with the wisdom that was planted now within her, and that she wanted badly, should really wholly fill her" (108). Her "wandering" suggests a loosening of linear perspectivism that resists traditional narrative beginning, middle, and end. In fact, "Melanctha wandered on the edge of wisdom. . . . wandered very widely. She was always alone now when she wandered." Like Wilde's Dorian, Melanctha lacks a foundational system and "had now no home nor any regular employment" (109). At the surface of things, "[s]he had youth and had learned wisdom, and she was graceful and pale yellow and very pleasant, and always ready to do things for people, and she was mysterious in her ways and that only made belief in her more fervent." Melanctha, perhaps "melancholy," suggests the "unhappiness" of Laforgue's statement that emphasizes the unstable relation between self and world. Figure and ground interplay. In this one sentence Stein portrays Melanctha from multiple perspectives. We see her surface appearance, her actions, and others'

perspectives of her. In terms of portraiture, the external vision of Melanctha does not identify with her internal yearnings.

The uncertainty of Melanctha's position and the unstable development of her individuality stresses Stein's emphasis on literary surface and her resistance to deep structural cohesion. In the creation of Melanctha and "Melanctha" from moment to moment and part to part, Stein resists narrative finalization: "Melanctha all her life did not know how to tell a story wholly. She always, and yet not with intention, managed to leave out big pieces which make a story very different, for when it came to what had happened and what she said and what it was that she had really done, Melanctha never could remember right" (100). Later in the story, Melanctha accuses Jeff Campbell of "fits of remembering. It's always me that certainly has had to suffer," Melanctha recalls, "while you go home to remember" (181). Melanctha, on the other hand, is "excitement." And Melanctha's excitement disturbs Jeff's hope for "regular" living. Jeff never believes in "doing things to just get excited": I really certainly don't ever like to get excited, and that kind of loving hard does seem always to mean just getting all the time excited" (122). Melanctha's "excited" living counters Jeff's hope for "regular" living, the very "regular" thing Stein's disruptive composition attempts to contest. Remembering for Stein's narrative is similar to pictorial recollection of reproducible and universal knowledge for Cézanne.

Stein's composition "Melanctha" produces an unstable interplay of various points of view. Melanctha's individuality develops from a "fertilising conflict" of her mother's and her father's characteristics: Mis' Herbert "had been a sweet appearing and dignified and pleasant, pale yellow, colored woman. . . had always been a little wandering and mysterious and uncertain in her ways. . . . but the real power in Melanctha's nature came through her robust and unpleasant and very unendurable black father" (90). Her parents provide Melanctha no certain foundation

from which to live; her mother “uncertain,” her father “unendurable” and Melanctha “was a most disturbing child to manage” (91). Stein calls “Melanctha” the “quintessential” story of the series; it gives evidence to her extension of Cézanne’s recalcitrant surfaces. Using everything, Stein’s narrative interplay between Melanctha and Jane Harden, Melanctha and Jefferson Campbell, Melanctha and Rose Johnson, Melanctha and Jem Richards, develops each part in interplay, but play begins again and again. Each part is as important for Melanctha’s continuing development.

Melanctha develops “wisdom” or knowing as she engages each relationship, but Stein’s dialogic form offers neither fulfillment for Melanctha nor finalization of the narrative. After all, Melanctha “was always losing what she had in wanting all the things she saw. Melanctha was always being left when she was not leaving others” (89). Jane Harding “had a good deal of education” and she taught Melanctha “how to go the ways that lead to wisdom” (103). Jeff’s time with Melanctha was an “uncertain time” (136). He always loved now to be with Melanctha and yet he always hated to go to her. . . . he had loved all his life always to be thinking . . . and he had never before had any of this funny kind of feeling.” The interplay between Jeff and Melanctha was a “struggle . . . as their minds and hearts always were to have different ways of working” (153). In Jem Richards, “Melanctha found everything she had ever needed to content her” and “Jem was all the world now to her” (218). But Stein’s story resists such finalizing contentment and soon for Melanctha, “Jem Richards was now all past for her” (224). Rose Johnson appears across the canvas of Stein’s story; Rose had “the sense of proper conduct. . . . Her white training had only made for habits, not for nature” (88, 86). And Rose was always “telling the complex and less sure Melanctha what was the right way for her to do” (88). When Stein writes that Melanctha “had not been raised like Rose by white folks but then she had been

half made with real white blood,” she points out the narrative difference of the imposition of a central idea and the complexity of relating all parts to the narrative surface (86). Stein creates an interplay between Rose’s “simple, promiscuous, unmorality” with Melanctha’s “graceful, pale yellow” intelligent attractiveness, retelling the story with difference across the length of the story. In the uncertainty, tension and continuous development of all parts of the story, Stein avoids falling down to “one idea.” Each contributes and interplays with all other parts. In its dialogic nature Stein’s “Melanctha” allows each part voice and promotes the idea that literary works may be multileveled, resisting unification.

Critics most often focus their critical views on *Three Lives*’ central story “Melanctha” as the best representation of Stein’s new composition.<sup>2</sup> But Stein admired Cézanne’s new composition of the “integrity” of “each part” and the “evenness” of the “vote.” To overlook the other two stories, “The Good Anna” and “The Gentle Lena,” denies the rich significance of her utopian dialogic vision. Like Cézanne’s *Madame Cézanne* sitting in a red chair, “Melanctha” not only occupies most of Stein’s narrative and much of the critical work on Stein’s *Three Lives* but also gives “an impression of centrality”; however, in Stein’s narrative, as in Cézanne’s picture, “everything shifts and bellows, staking out a highly complex picture space. The chair swells out beyond proportion to the right side of the picture. Her body compensates, shifting to the left, while [Madame Cézanne’s] skirt manages to occupy center right” (Wechsler 685). In Stein’s narrative, readers find Cézanne’s hallmark, these shifting perspectives: seeking out form and capturing the process in the image created. In the period he painted *Madame Cézanne in a Red Armchair*, Cézanne “created a dynamic balance between things as they appear in depth, their

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2. Alexander; Blackmer; Brinnin 120-121; Hoffman 32-38; Nicholls 202-210; Walker 19-41. These few references represent critical work from 1960 to 2008, illustrating the continuing interest in Stein’s *Three Lives* and the usual focus on the narrative “Melanctha.”

worldly reality, and the equally compelling reality of the canvas itself. The pictorial drama is in the tension between depth and surface.” Cézanne’s surface designs create Wellsean interplay of “fertilising conflicts” between the painting’s concrete signifiers and the perception of empirical data, as Stein’s portrait of three lives portrays in literary tension between the individualities of language and the “realism of [her] thoughts” at the surface. Or as Stein says, she keeps it on the page. Having composed “The Good Anna” and “The Gentle Lena” as the first and second stories of the triptych, Stein, however, decenters the narrative structure, by giving “Melanctha” center position. Stein’s re-arrangement of her composition not only disrupts the linear flow of the narrative structure. Decentered, “The Good Anna” and “The Gentle Lena” create an opposing tension that also contests the potential dominance that “Melanctha” might gain from its center space. Re-arranging the progressive flow of the narratives’ construction, Stein develops a dialogue among the parts; “everything shifts and billows.” Here all parts will play; here my look at Stein’s narratives will focus on the two stories that flank Stein’s “quintessential” story, “Melanctha.”

### **James, Cézanne, and Stein in Portraiture**

Stein like Cézanne was not interested in representational characterization of human individuals. When Gertrude and Leo purchase Cézanne’s portrait, Gertrude Stein reports that “Vollard said of course ordinarily a portrait of a woman always is more expensive than a portrait of a man but . . . I suppose with Cézanne it does not make any difference” (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* 33). Cézanne’s portraiture does not participate in a dialectical mode of seeing/reading that requires a perfect match between the parts; the image is arbitrary and revises the relation between image and determining substance, thus resisting any unifying perspectivism.

Looking at Cézanne's portraiture, Stein attempts to "realize"—forming her narrative as Cézanne forms his painting out of material the reading presents—the essence or "bottom nature" of the subject, and its form in a matrix of relationships. Because the experimental portraiture form allows for aesthetic exploration, Stein's *Three Lives* can realize the individual in an immediacy of experience and a process of development. Stein develops the unique human being in a process of perception that in *Three Lives* is depicted as individualities and, in its whole arrangement, an individuality of parts. The three stories, "The Good Anna," "Melanctha," and "The Gentle Lena," portray three women. In *Three Lives*, as a whole arrangement, individual parts interplay in an ever-unfolding disruption that refuses the notion of unified, self-sufficient individualism that Wilde had challenged. Stein, like Cézanne, distorts the portraiture form, but even at its most experimental, the portraits' fundamental visual and conceptual elements of recognition endure.

At the visual level, Anna, Melanctha, and Lena are not, however, recognizable persons. Because of the "fictionalization" of Stein portraits, Wendy Steiner, author of *Exact Resemblances*, rejects *Three Lives* as portraiture, arguing it is a novel or novella; its subjects are fictionalized (their names changed), and its operations are imaginary, though "realistic" (64). Steiner does acknowledge Stein's "elaborate theories of portraiture" and agrees the portraiture genre as experimental form allows Stein to make startling "implementation of abstract requirements." Steiner correctly notes that *Three Lives* differs from Stein's later portraiture of "real" people, but Stein would disagree that her *Three Lives* is a novel or novella. In fact Stein's narrative is difficult to categorize. Composition to convey a central idea was, for Stein, a soothing remembering: "this element of remembering . . . makes novels so soothing" ("Portraits" 108). According to Stein, twentieth-century writers, including herself, have not

produced any novels: “As long as the novel has existed, the characters were dominant. . . . You cannot say that there is a novel of the Twentieth Century. I mean a more or less creative writer has never written anything that could in any reasonable sense of the word be called a novel. I have created a lot of characters, but that is another story” (“A Transatlantic Interview” 21-22). According to Stein, “[t]he individual that made the Nineteenth Century live practically does not live in the Twentieth Century, where the individual does not stick out enough for the people reading about him. . . it is the title and the form of the book that you remember rather than the characters in the book.” Whether writers of the twentieth century “novel” agree with Stein is another matter. Even before writing *Three Lives*, Stein said that she began to know “what there was that made there be no repetition” (“Portraits” 101). For Stein, repetition, is remembering: “anything one is remembering is repetition, but existing as a human being, that is being listening and hearing is never repetition. . . . Being existing that is listening and talking is action” (107-08). This is movement; listening and talking are part of doing the same thing; for Stein, “this thing” is what she means “by life”: “If this existence is this thing is actually existing there can be no repetition. There is only repetition when there are descriptions being given of these things not when the things themselves are actually existing and this is therefore how my portrait writing began.”

In art, life represented as process is anticipatory, and becomes a cognitive act that directs our thinking toward what is possible: what different practices might be used to reshape our lives. Life presented as process parallels Wells’ utopian scheme of interplay of individualities that develop in “fertilising conflict.” As experimental literary portraiture, Stein’s *Three Lives* evokes not “recognizable” people but the experience of individuals and art, in the process of shaping and reshaping, like Stein’s own composition, as a compositional process.

Stein illustrates her scheme of image/dialogue in the two stories of Anna and Lena as a set of difference of experiences. Both Anna and Lena are servants and German, thus both generally have a similar experience, and similar to James' idea of experience as a play of parts: he maintains that in

a given undivided portion of experience, taken in one context of associates, plays the part of a knower, of a state of mind, of 'consciousness'; while in a different context the same undivided bit of experience plays the part of a thing known, of an objective 'content.' In a word, in one group it figures as a thought, in another group as a thing. And, since it can figure in both groups simultaneously we have every right to speak of it as subjective and objective both at once. (James 172)

James reinterprets "dualism" as "an affair of relations" that falls outside the single experience, and "can always be particularized and defined." In Stein's composition of parts, we see the consciousness of the characters Lena and Anna are neither merged nor subordinated. They play, rather, the part of "knower, of a state of mind, of 'consciousness', and in a different context, "the part of a thing known." As in Wells' utopianism of individualities, the world is seen as pluralistic and variegated, "shot silk" in its nature, whether the parts are connected; they are related. As Meyer Schapiro said of Cézanne's artistic vision: he

loosened the perspective system of traditional art and gave to the space of the image the aspect of a world created free-hand and put together piecemeal *from successive perceptions*, rather than offered complete to the eye in one coordinating glance as in the ready-made geometrical perspective of Renaissance art. (emphasis added 10)

In “The Good Anna,” Stein explores the “good” state of ‘consciousness’ in compositional structure. The “good” Anna struggles to “know” the world she lives in an effort to create a traditional aesthetic utopian image, based on “the right way to do things.” Although Anna and the Lena are given servant roles, dominated positions in life, Anna strives to make the world conform to her subjective moral stance. She has high ideals, and in the world in which she lives, Anna works to subsume the multiplicity of bad under the control of singular good. Stein first details Anna’s “high ideals” in the realm of “canine chastity and discipline” (12). All the dogs were “under strict orders never to be bad one with the other,” but some of the dogs have “[p]eriods of evil thinking” and although Anna scolded them, the bad, “wicked-minded dogs” had to be secluded from each other when Anna left the house (13). Anna’s high ideals of nineteenth-century conventional ethics Stein reduces to reproductive doggerel.

Stein expands Anna’s world of wicked dogs to include wicked men and recalcitrant under-servants in a wicked world that Anna must control with her voice. Although at times, Anna’s voice was “a pleasant one, when she told the histories of bad Peter and of Baby and of little Rags. Her voice was a high and piercing one when she called to the teamsters and to the other wicked men . . . and her queer piercing german english first made them afraid and then ashamed” (13-14). Based on an “old world sense of what was the right ways for a girl to do,” Anna leaned on old ideas to shape her world and the world of those she served. Anna’s willingness to serve relies on finding people who can be “made”: “Anna’s superiors must be always these large helpless women, or be men, for none others could give themselves to be made so comfortable and free” (25). And Anna always “made herself always fulfill her own ideal of how a girl should look . . . Anna knew so well the kind of ugliness appropriate to each rank in life” (40). Working under the illusion of hierarchy of taste and rightness, a hierarchy where even

ugliness is ranked, Anna's aestheticism is a theory of life that identifies with beauty and moral goodness.

But in Stein's composition, even presenting a "subjective" perspective of experience, such identification cannot be final. Stein's three stories all develop in a field of tension that undermines the stability of that position. The "fertilising conflict" is evident first in Anna's tension of "temper and humor" and, again, in a "strange coquetry of anger and of fear, the stiffness, the bridling, the suggestive movement underneath the rigidity of forced control, all the queer ways the passions have to show themselves all one" (28-29). The idealized harmony of conventional morality, on which the "good" Anna relies to shape her world, fails her: "The good Anna could not understand the careless and bad ways of all the world and always she grew bitter with it all. No, not one of them had any sense of what was the right way for them to do" (73). Anna's only "romance," her "idealised affection," Mrs. Lehntman was at first sight "magnetic, efficient and good. . . . generous and very amiable," but the image shifts and she becomes "bland, impersonal and pleasant" (30, 42). Good Anna had a "firm character," a "sharp firm edge," similar to the hard lines Wells describes as "hard theoretic arrangements" that have been the "common sin of all Utopias hitherto" (262). Mrs. Lehntman, however, "never could be led" and challenges the hard lines of Anna's determination "for the right" (*Three Lives* 42-43). Although Anna "made her words come sharp and with a jerk," Mrs. Lehntman in her "pleasant well diffused attention," countered: "feelings spread her breath, and made her words come slow, but more pleasant and more easy even than before," breaking down the boundaries of Anna's hard lines. In compositional terms, Mrs. Lehntman diffuses the power of Anna's central, controlling idea: "Mrs. Lehntman needed Anna just as much as Anna needed Mrs. Lehntman, but Mrs. Lehntman was more ready to risk Anna's loss, and so the good Anna grew always weaker

in her power to control” (54). In her composition, Stein is ready to risk loss of the central idea. Her resistance to the drive toward narrative wholeness is similar to the disruption in the hierarchy of Anna’s power that disrupts the control Anna’s “good” moral power had, to control those around her and to control the freedom of the composition.

Like Cézanne’s vibration of recalcitrant parts, the interplay of the personalities denies Anna’s drive for “good” wholeness. As the portrait’s central controlling subject, Anna’s position is weakened; if considered as traditional aesthetics’ effort to reconcile sensation and moral signification, the “ideal” decomposes. Stein contends, “it is very lonely living with it lost” (55). Yet Stein deconstructs the subjective position as controlling “knower” and emphasizes individuality that is receptive to difference. The subjective position as controlling “knower” creates “violence in thinking [that] resides in this universalistic orientation intrinsic to knowing, whereby reason obliterates what differences there are in nature and the world by identifying them only according to what form they possess in common” (Schoolman 31). In the de-composition of Anna as the subjective knower of this experience, not only the moral dominant position is weakened by Mrs. Lehntman’s diffusion of the hard single perspective lines. In the relation between these two characters, Anna and Mrs. Lehntman, Stein puts in question the determinacy of meaning and the notion of central, unified identity. Anna’s and Mrs. Lehntman’s differences play at the surface of Stein’s narrative. In connection to Cézanne’s portrait of Madame Cézanne, Stein’s portrait of Good Anna contradicts literary portraits formula of a unified self. The centralizing moral concept “Good” that Stein uses to describe Anna’s efforts, fails to achieve a harmonious, total utopian image of an autonomous individual in a community of like-minded individuals. Although Anna gives the impression of a centralized subjective perspective of the experience that Anna and Lena share, the portrait of Anna, like Cézanne’s of Madame Cézanne,

leaves evidence of shifting perspectives. In Cézanne's *Madame Cézanne in a Red Armchair*, on the right side, "thought in motion creates a kind of showed displacement . . . on the left, everything is more incisive" (Wechsler 685). "The Good Anna" is "shifting planes and rich surface texture," displacement and hard lines in a tension of depth and surface.

It would be easy to define the pure experience of "The Gentle Lena" as a monist portrait. As individual and/or aesthetic theory, Lena seems to represent an early traditional view on "pureness" that concerns the supposed neutrality of the individual subject. Its attention, as aesthetic theory or individual, is concentrated on the object itself, and its pure attention is incompatible with other concerns, such as sexuality, class position, or power. In its "purity," matters of singular quality can be isolated from other aspects of human existence, and Stein's claim that Lena is pure brown suggests her neutrality and isolation as a character, and the teasing of the other girls "only made a gentle stir within her" (*Three Lives* 240). Lena's formation is, however, without conventional, ideal form; she "had the flat chest, straight back and forward falling shoulder of the patient and enduring working woman, though . . . work had not yet made these lines too clear." With Lena, the "rarer feeling" showed "in all the even quiet of her body movements, but in all it was the strongest in the patient, old-world ignorance, and earth made pureness of her brown, flat, soft featured face" (241). The "pureness" of Lena's "brown" appears separate from and nearly un-penetrated and "little troubled" by influence outside her pure attention to a singular existence. In her "purity" Lena appears isolated from the contraries and conflicts of life: Lena is in life but not a participant, for most of the story. Instead she seems to assume a "disinterested" stance, never learning to know, in the Steinean sense of "talking and listening." And Stein's use of "staid," as fixed, settled, or standing still, to describe Lena suggests resistance to change. Influenced by Cézanne and William James, Stein's "Lena" could

portray the dangers of such an essentialist perspective of a fixed, unchanging nature. But within a Cézanne-James framework, “The Gentle Lena” provides more than cautionary tale of monological interests.

In a utopian shift of an anti-utopian, Stein corrupts aesthetic “purity.” In her second written, third place-positioned story, Stein overcomes traditional hierarchies, for example, of the rational and sensuous, and she places “The Gentle Lena” in a “continuous present.” Lena floats upon the “great stream of things,” as Wells says of our utopian shift from a static, permanent state of things that we seek to “resist and overcome” (5). Instead Wells argues that “we have to plan ‘a flexible common compromise, in which a perpetually novel succession of individualities may converge’” (6). In this stream of life Lena is not isolated from traditional contraries, but now moves within a realm of difference. Sounding much like William James, Wells says, “[i]n space and time the pervading Will to Live sustains for evermore a perpetuity of aggressions” (7). Regardless of responses and interpretations of Lena, she cannot be identified or finalized. Simultaneously Stein reveals, in “The Gentle Lena,” the painful loss of a central guiding point and examines William James’ notion of “pure experience” that she keeps at the surface, in a Cézannean “reading” to “get to the bottom of what you find in front of you.” As James writes in “Does ‘Consciousness’ Exist?” “[m]atter we know, and thought we know, and conscious content we know, but neutral and simple ‘pure experience’ is something we know not at all. . . . If you ask what any one bit of pure experience is made of, the answer is always the same: ‘It is made of *that*, of just what appears, of space, of intensity, of flatness, brownness, heaviness or what not” (179).

In “Lena,” Stein gets to the “bottom” of Lena’s nature of “pure experience,” developing James’ pursuit of concreteness and immediacy that would lead to “pure experience,”

undifferentiated into thought or thing (Krueger, par.10). In “The Varieties of Pure Experience: William James and Kitaro Nishida on Consciousness and Embodiment,” Joel W. Krueger explains that for James

the phenomenal content of embodied experience *as experienced* outstrips our capacity to conceptually or linguistically articulate it. In other words, James insists that many of our basic experiences harbor *non-conceptual content*. That is, many of our experiences have a rich phenomenal content that is too fine-grained and sensuously detailed to lend itself to an exhaustive conceptual analysis. For example, we can have visual experiences of colors and shapes of things for which we lack the relevant concepts (a previously unfamiliar shade of magenta or a chiliagon). And this ability holds for other sensory modalities as well. For our ability to describe or report a wide-range of tastes and smells lags far behind our capacity to actually *have an experience of* a nearly infinite spectrum of tastes and smells. In other words, the deliverances of our senses continually run ahead of both our descriptive vocabularies as well as our conceptual abilities. (par. 7)

Pure experience, a harmonious integration of self in nature, is a condition James preferred rather than the dichotomy of self and nature, mind and body. This includes the “inarticulate (or again, non conceptual) dimensions of our lived experience that continuously defy purely logical or conceptual analysis” (par. 10). James’ “pure experience” parallels Adorno’s “non-identity” that he uses to “refer to nature, being, or the world and all it contains as having identities that cannot be known, because identity is always different from the ways it can be represented by thought” (Schoolman 123). In “The Gentle Lena,” Stein explores the “pure experience” of the character Lena that defies any finalizing “identity” because her experience can never be fully “known.”

Lena portrays Stein's aesthetic composition's desire for an ever-unfolding interplay that contests aestheticism's drive toward wholeness of art or individual "unity."

Krueger's analysis provides characteristics of "pure experience" that help illustrate Lena's pure experience. He includes descriptions of "pure experience" as prior to interpretive structures (subject-object bifurcation and conceptual discrimination); as seeing the world but not thematizing it, nor organizing it; as bearing mute witness to the world in all its "blooming, buzzing confusion" (par. 11). Pure experience is the "underlying experiential unity behind language and reflective, conceptual thought. Stein portrays Lena as "always sort of dreamy and not there. She worked hard and went very regularly at it, but good work never seemed to bring her near" (*Three Lives* 245). In "Lena," Stein's exploration of "pure experience" is an exploration of James' stream of consciousness that bears mute witness to the world's "blooming, buzzing confusion": Lena "was so still and docile"; she "had no power to be strong. . . . Lena who was patient, sweet and quiet, had not self-control, nor any active courage" (245, 247). Like the river of her name, Lena takes no action that would determine her existence, nor did she determine a course of action for others, not having "any sense of how she should make people stand round for her, and that was," for other characters in the story, "the trouble with her" (260). In other words, Lena's position retains its independence and integrity; she does not thematize or organize the world, but does witness the world in its "blooming, buzzing confusion."

Within James' scheme of "pure experience," aspects of human experience, such as power, sexuality, gender relations, exist. Throughout the story, Lena's aunt, Mrs. Haydon, determines her present and her future, without ever finalizing the "rarer strain there was in Lena." Lena, at various points in the story, is penetrated by human existence. First, Lena went into "service" and later the marriage "match was made" (253). At the end Lena dies in childbirth; the baby "was

like its mother lifeless,” and her husband Herman now lived “regular and peaceful,” everything regulated and controlled, “alone now with his three good, gentle children (279). The character Lena remains unmerged with the other characters or the author’s, Stein’s, viewpoints. Most importantly, Stein makes us aware of the influence and violence of such constructive elements as power, sexuality, and gender relations, elements that a claim of neutrality masks. Like Cézanne Stein attempts to get rid of compositional harmony, described in pictorial terms as “differentiation”: “all parts of the composition must be rendered intelligibly distinct from one another and ordered hierarchically according to some principle” (Shiff 83). Maurice Denis, one of Cézanne’s most acute early critics, observes that “even in the background areas, Cézanne’s canvases reveal the scintillating pattern of contrasting colors: “The entire canvas is a tapestry where each color *plays* separately and yet mingles its sonority in the ensemble. The characteristic aspect of Cézanne’s painting derives from this juxtaposition, from this mosaic of separate tones gently merging one into the other” (qtd. in Shiff 1123). In the story, regardless of dominating efforts to order Lena according to various principles, Lena plays separately yet is lightly grounded in others; her difference disrupts and creates an unease.

Lena’s action is her voice. At the story’s beginning,

Lena’s german voice when she knocked and called the family in the morning was as awakening, as soothing, and as appealing, as a delicate soft breeze in mid day, summer. She stood in the hallway every morning a long time in her unexpectant and unsuffering german patience calling to the young ones to get up. She would call and wait a long time and then call again, always even, gentle, patient. (*Three Lives* 239)

Lena's calling voice creates dialogic interplay between her and the "young ones" and in dialogue's anticipation of response creates an "evenness" that, in the relation among the parts, resists any conceptual thought. Harriet Scott Chessman points to Lena's quiet, caressing voice as a "utopian moment." The only critic to directly link Stein's *Three Lives* and utopian thought, Chessman claims that Stein's writing "displays a certain utopian element, especially in its attempt to reimagine gender and to subvert violent hierarchies" (4). From Chessman's perspective Stein's work emphasizes "language as the utopian place" that creates a "utopian linguistic realm" where language "invites readers to sense-making efforts but resists the need to control it" (61, 202). Chessman's intuitions of the utopian indeterminacy and uncertainty of Stein's narrative indicate her move beyond a dialectical mode of reading Stein. Chessman points to the utopian moment

Occurring in an urban *locus amoenus*, a moment to be relished in its constancy ("always . . . always"). . . . outside of linear and narrated story, her voice becomes a figure for Stein's impulse . . . toward a writing in which the authority of traditional narration would be shared by other voices, or even replaced by these voices entirely. Lena's actual words do not need to be recounted, since the sensual dimension of language has in such moments more value than the representational. (36)

Stein's Lena, for Chessman, is "doomed" in her "inarticulateness." Language "baffles" Lena. Because she is inarticulate, Chessman argues, the story does not move Lena and her utopia of voice far enough away from the 'real' world, or the world of realistic fiction to allow such gentle 'calling' to be sustained." In the absence of Cézanne's framework of recalcitrant surfaces that resist perspectivism's totalizing drive, Chessman's uncertain intuitions remain uncertain, and

returns Stein's narrative to a totalizing conception of utopia, outside of the stream of existence. Urban or rural, *locus amoenus* is a "pleasant place," an idealized place of safe, Edenic comfort, beyond the necessary utopian scheme of interplay's "fertilising conflict." Cézanne's recalcitrant surfaces, like the tension of Lena's calling, disrupts any single perspective place. Reading "Lena" in a Cézanne's framework, Stein would agree that narration can be shared by other voices, but would disagree with replacing voices. For Cézanne and Stein, each voice is important and plays in a relation with the others at the surface, as the individual part is "existing" rather than how it has been made in the past. Stein, like Cézanne, is "using everything," "beginning again and again," in a "continuous present," that this passage illustrates. Using everything implies that Lena's "actual words" do need to be recounted. Lena's voice is as important as Anna's or Melanctha's, for each part/voice/word is as important as the whole, thus "such moments" are not "more valuable than the representational" because, as with Cézanne pictorial art, with Stein's narrative perceptual and conceptual interplay at the surface level. Lena's calling and waiting suggests the later Bakhtinian "utterance," that anticipates a response; there is nothing static about Lena's voice; in fact, it "was an awakening." Moreover, Stein like Cézanne creates compositions to get rid of any central figure that requires all other parts to contribute to some principle of wholeness; Stein's Cézannean framework reduces the distinction between figure and ground, and all parts have "equal attention and intensity, denying them any differentiating hierarchy" (Shiff 116).

Without Stein's connection to Cézanne's pictorial techniques, Chessman's utopian intuitions tend toward a traditional utopian framework that drives toward a harmonious, unified structure, the kind of hierarchical structure she sees Stein moving away from. The surface pattern of Stein's narrative is dynamic, an ever-involving relation between all parts. It invites no

separate “realm” or single sense-making effort. Counter to Chessman’s idea, Lena is not “doomed” in her “inarticulateness.” Her “pure experience” of the world resists articulation of conceptual thought, and placement in a totalizing utopian realm. Utopia of voice appears to function as “field of the possible” for the reimagination of language, but Chessman’s reference to “a certain utopian element” seems uncertain. What Stein’s Cézannean framework suggests is that there is no “certain utopian element.” All parts play in Wellsean “fertilising conflict.” And Cézanne’s frame allows Stein, and readers, to consider the value of Lena’s calling as a shaping rather than an integrating role.

In “The Good Anna” and “The Gentle Lena,” Stein acknowledges differences between the two women and differences in compositional structure. In “Melanctha” Stein expands her observations to include distinctions beyond the polar, dichotomous perspectives of subjective and objective experience. In this portrait, Stein travels outside those limiting polar boundaries and enters experiences that enlarge our understanding of the complex, and increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse world. In writing the stories of *Three Lives*, Stein composed the portrait of Melanctha last, then placed it at the intersection between sets of experience she developed as “The Good Anna” and “The Gentle Lena.”

### **Humors: narrative fluidity of *Three Lives***

Stein’s insistence on the essence of “each one to have the same value” is distinctive of her image/ dialogue structure. It illustrates Well’s concept of utopia as schemes for better the interplay of productive, “fertilising conflict between individualities,” and is similar to a dialogic process that Bakhtin later theorizes: the characters are objects of the author’s word, and they are also subjects of their own significant words, as well. The stories or characters are not

subordinated to the author's idea. In bettering the interplay of individualities, *Three Lives* redescribes individual value, thus refiguring hierarchical systems. In Cézanne's pictorial art, this is surface. The implications of thinking of surface individuality in Stein can be illustrated by her use of colors that suggest the ancient system of temperament: humors. I find no documentation that suggests she incorporated "humors" into *Three Lives*, but Stein's medical and scientific background suggests it as a possibility. Read in Cézanne's framework Stein's narratives disrupt humors' traditional ideal system of unity and balance and place it within a non-hierarchical composition.

"Humors", a theory of temperament, is based on a color scheme, and the concept provides a means for her forms shaped by color at the individual level and surface arrangement. In ancient and medieval thought, humors are ideal in balance; a right balance would be essential for maintaining health. In balance, humors are harmonious, a good mixture; unbalanced and aggravated, humors are out of sorts, a bad mixture ("The Four Humors").

According to the "humors" theory of temperament, the human body contains four fluid substances, called *humors*, or "fluids," that determine a human individual's health and character. The humors differ from each other as warm or cold and moist or dry ("humor"). Each humor is associated with the four basic elements and made up the universe in ancient thought: Blood/red, associated with the element fire, was warm and moist; clear phlegm, associated with the element water, was cool and moist; black/melancholic, associated with the earth, was cool, dry; and yellow/choler, associated with air, was warm, dry. Because imbalances of the four fluid substances were thought to cause illnesses and personality defects, the ideal, integrated system is one of unity or balance of all elements.

Stein's literary stress on individual surfaces, however, breaks down rather than reconciles the system. Following her modern compositional principle, "using everything," Stein gives all parts play and maintains a "fertilising conflict"/"shot silk" weaving of individualities. Her literary version of Cézanne's surface develops the interplay of all the parts, overlapping and contrasting, parallel to Cézanne's "even distribution, or a tension, of warm and cool colors in nearly every area of his painting" (Shiff 122). The parts are developed in Stein's three stories. The individual parts, various points of view maintain individual expression and the "colors" contrast and complement each other across the book. Stein's insistence on "Good" Anna's pale yellow skin is associated with cholera or yellow bile; she's quick-tempered and often irritable: "you see that Anna led an arduous and troubled life" (*Three Lives* 13). She scolded, grumbled, and complained: Anna's "worn, pale yellow face" was often in "queer discord with the brightness" of her summer clothes (40). The pale yellow of Anna's skin and the blue of her eyes reappear, in different ways, in "Melanctha." Melanctha and her mother are both "pale yellow," but Melanctha's "feeling was really closer to her black coarse father" (90). At the beginning and ending of the story, Stein depicts Melanctha as melancholy, considered the black bile associated with being "blue," gloomy, or depressed. In fact "[s]ometimes the thought of how all her world was mad filled the complex, desiring Melanctha with despair. She wondered, often, how she could go on living when she was so blue" (87). But Melanctha's yellow bile indicates an excited and emboldened passion that places Melanctha in a "shot silk" relation with others. Stein describes "Gentle" Lena as "a brown and pleasant creature, brown as blond races often have them brown, brown, not with the yellow or the red or the chocolate brown of sun burned countries, but brown with the clear color laid flat on the light toned skin beneath, the plain, spare brown" (240). Usually the color brown combines yellow, red, and black. Lena's phlegmatic

brownness could parallel Cézanne's early impressionist "brown"; in his palettes of the 1870s and early 1880s, he mixed "several brilliant colors together whenever he wished to make a neutral brown" (Shiff 207). But Stein's insistence on Lena's "brown with the clear color" connects her with the clear phlegmatic humor.

Aesthetically Stein moves from the choleric, tension-filled story of Anna to create "color laid flat" in "The Gentle Lena." Lena, as part of James' "pure experience," is characteristically sluggish and dull, and calm apathy associates her with the phlegmatic humor: her "gentle, patient, and unsuffering sweetness" turns, by the end, to "careless . . . dull, and lifeless" (278). In a tension of calm and composed with sluggish and dull, the "flat" surface complexity of Lena refuses resolution associated with spatial hierarchy. The fourth humor element of the individual body was associated with the color red and blood. Here the artist, Stein, is the fourth humor and associated with the lifeblood of the narrative. In "Melanctha" the character Rose creates an interplay with the color red and the authority of authorship, in her attempts to shape Melanctha and in her eventual leaving Melanctha to develop own identity. Giving language greater free play, Stein's portraits tend toward arbitrary alignment of "humor" and its "meaning." Anticipating Bakhtin's novelistic dialogue, Stein's characters are objects of the author's word, and they are also subjects of their own significant words, as well. Neither the stories nor the characters are subordinated to the author's ideas or the "humor" system, but "colors" play across the pages. In a "continuous present," a fluidity of movement fails to form the ideal, integrated system of humors. Instead of unity or balance of all elements, Stein's composition begins again and again in a "tension" of contrasting colors: the "cool" blue of "Melanctha," flanked by and in interplay with the contrasting "warm" yellow and brown of "Anna" and "Lena." As Cézanne's "color compositions," Stein binds the "lives" to the surface by "modulating"; different colors

changing from warm-to-cool-to-warm, every color/life is developed individually but is related to all other colors/lives throughout. Stein attempts to abolish linear perspective entirely, as Cézanne does, relying “on sharp warm-to-cold contrasts and overlapping forms to suggest depth” (Murphy 81). She keeps her composition “on the page.”

Similar to Cézanne’s pictorial art, Stein’s narrative lacks “realization”: Anna and Lena just die at the story’s end, and Melanctha is to stay in “a home for poor consumptives . . . until she died” (236). Stein’s narrative engaged in dialogue with Cézanne’s portrait remains open-ended, in Bakhtinean dialogic terms; their language is creative and the self “unfinalizable” (Morson 40). They have provided models of interplay that have broken up the unquestioning unities of literary and pictorial integrated structures. “In a world of hasty judgments and carping criticism,” H. G. Wells writes, “it cannot be repeated too often that the fundamental ideas of a modern Utopia imply everywhere and in everything, margins and elasticities, a certain universal compensatory looseness of play” (270).

In *Three Lives*, Stein makes the spatial structure a relationship of colors that is important to capture alive in portraiture. Stein distorts the literal appearance, proclaiming her right to re-create what seems “natural,” and express the “bottom nature” of her individual characters. At the surface level, Stein combines the red, yellow, black, and brown body humors to depict human individuals. Like Cézanne’s paintings, the stories develop part to part, within the stories and between them; meaning is only available by moving among the parts. There is no comprehensive view to be grasped. Following her modern compositional principle, “using everything,” Stein gives all parts play and maintains a “fertilizing conflict” of the individualities. Stein’s aesthetic of surface, like Cézanne’s, gets rid of a hierarchical concept of human relations and, similar to Wells’ and Ricoeur’s utopianism, her image/dialogue unfolds in interplay. “One

thing as important as another” finds connection to the utopianism of Wells' and Ricoeur's accounts of individualities' disruption of static utopianism or ideological picturing. At the close of *A Modern Utopia*, Wells defines his utopianism of individualities in contrast to traditional utopian thought, writing that “[u]topias were once in good faith, projects for a fresh creation of the world and of a most unworldly completeness; this so-called Modern Utopia is a mere story of personal adventures among Utopian philosophies” (*A Modern Utopia* 372). Stein's new form of composition replaces what was previously seen as linear and closed with a scheme of part to part, a scheme of interplay that contests the notion of “completeness,” similar to Cézanne's surface aesthetics challenge to a single perspective structure and Wells' utopian individualities that contest the drive toward totalization.

## Chapter Four:

### Conclusion

Historically it has happened that the most dynamic societies and epochs have been those that expressed the greatest need for projection, and therefore the greatest *need for utopia*.

Cosimo Quarta, "*Homo Utopicus: On the Need for Utopia*" 163

As a process of transcendence, the utopian story is a historical phenomenon; utopian form and content vary according to the situation from which they arise and transcend. In *Utopian and Critical Thinking*, Martin G. Plattel argues that utopian thought "assumes different forms in an era when man thinks that he himself must take charge of his future than in a period in which the traditions of the past strongly continue to control man's view of life" (27). Wells' modern utopia responds to the failed nineteenth utopian plans, stimulated by the French Revolution, that had emphasized the idea that history could be changed and had promised a new beginning. Progress was no longer a matter of course, obeying ironclad laws of nature. Nineteenth century utopias often had two common qualities; they were socialist and progressive. Wells argues against notions that imply "that the whole intellectual basis of mankind is established, that the rules of logic, the systems of counting and measurement, the general categories and schemes of resemblance and difference, are established for the human mind for ever . . ." (19-20). Modern perception, for Wells, values the "unique," and the "insistence on individuality, and the individual difference as the significance of life. . . . Nothing is precise and certain (except the mind of the pedant), perfection is the mere repudiation of that ineluctable marginal inexactitude"

(20). Looking at Wells' utopian individualities as contesting totalization, it is easy to see the ethical and political consequences of an aesthetic rigor inspired by Cézanne's surfaces. As Wells' individualities, Cézanne's recalcitrant surfaces reject a precise perfection laid out by totalizing structures. The drive toward wholeness, "schemes of resemblance and difference," is what Cézanne's techniques derail.

Wells' utopianism of individualities shifts utopian thinking from systematic blueprint construction of utopian space to more open and more exploratory projects focused on values. In the shift, two things happened. First habitual values are thrown in disarray; second, we enter a new utopian space. The utopian experiment expands creatively. In the relation between Cézanne's surfaces and Wilde's and Stein's aesthetics, there opens the way for aspirations that explore the fulfillment of individual needs. The stress on individual surfaces in the narratives liberates voices and points of view that had previously been subordinated to a controlling idea. "Up to that time composition had consisted of a central idea," Stein says, "to which everything else was an accompaniment and separate but was not an end in itself . . ." ("Transatlantic Interview" 15). The imaginative projects of Wilde's and Stein's narratives, the emphasis on "aesthetic individualism" and "using everything" in a "composition of parts" that are as important as the whole, reflect their aspirations to transform values and assumptions.

At the turn of the century, Wilde's *Dorian Gray* and Stein's *Three Lives* contribute to the resurgence of utopian thought and expectation for change. Fin de siècle was a host of voices "fascinated with the 'gothic' science of degeneration," and "a host of other voices that contested visions of collapse with dreams of regeneration" (Ledger xxiii). A critical shift reflects itself in the "blueprint" form of literary utopias. In *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Krishan Kumar argues that it may be "only a slight overstatement to say that Bellamy's *Looking*

*Backward* created the anti-utopia. Certainly it started that chain of challenge and response that largely makes up the history of utopia and anti-utopia from the 1880s to the 1950s” (128).

Bellamy offers a scientifically ordered, rational, and urban solution to the alienating conditions of the industrial society. The art of Wilde, Stein, and Cézanne, and surely Wells’ utopianism participate with the host of voices that call for a better way of living, not a return to totalizing, rational structures. A model of interplay of individualities relies on “fertilising conflicts” for change and initiative. In contrast, Bellamy offers a scheme of fixed lines and positions. Another voice is William Morris’ and his pastoral utopia, *News from Nowhere* that counters Bellamy’s machine-oriented future that celebrates the machine’s ability to aid in the control and structure of a “just” society. A more attractive vision of socialism, Morris’ *News* emphasizes the value of aesthetic creativity in individual lives, and counters Bellamy’s privileging of machine efficiency over individual initiative.

Alongside Morris’ utopia, Kumar sets Wilde’s *The Soul of Man Under Socialism* (1891) that portrays “socialism as an aesthetic utopia and so won converts among those repelled by the increasingly mechanical representations of socialism” (66). Wilde wrote this essay simultaneous with his writing of *Dorian Gray*. What Wilde advocates in his political essay he creates in his narrative’s fiction. In both Wilde rejects mechanical, theoretical, governmental authoritative control: State and individual are separate but interplay; the State manages all things useful, leaving the individual to develop to its full potential. Socialism is the environment necessary for the “full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection” that is “Individualism” (*Soul* 1080). Wilde’s application of the “full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection” has identity with the German humanist ideal, associated with Wilhelm Humboldt and Frederick Schiller, as well as Schiller’s “aesthetic education” as it influenced Marx, Arnold, and Pater.

The ideal that the educated personality realized the highest ethical potential in man was defense against the “reduction of man to the level of a machine.” In Humboldt’s educationalist model, the individual learns ancient culture to live for the humanist ideal. In a dialectical process, individuality meets universality that results in an ideal totality.

Traditional aestheticism began as a utopian project to link art and life, as a means to overcome alienation, fragmentation of society. In the movement of aesthetic utopianism, Wilde’s insistence of the power of art and literature as a means to change the reality of human existence links him with Schiller, Arnold, and Pater. Humboldt, Schiller, and Wilde sought to limit external authority and valued arts potential for change. Wilde had, however, created a tension toward a non-totalizing perspective in the development of the artist-critic, in *The Critic as Artist*. In Wilde’s version, the objective, universality of art, as well as the harmonious outcome, is under question. In *Soul of Man*, Wilde sets a tension between aesthetic and individualism, writing, “Art is Individualism, and Individualism is a disturbing and disintegrating force. Therein lies its immense value. For what it seeks to disturb is monotony of type, slavery of custom, tyranny of habit, and the reduction of man to the level of a machine” (1091). Wilde has given the critic the freedom he had given the artist, to “extend the subject matter of art . . . the vitality and progress of art depend in a large measure on the continual extension of subject matter” (*Soul* 1091). The individual aesthetic is a “disintegrating force.” The aesthetic individualism creates a destructive relation between aestheticism and individual in *Dorian Gray*. In the narrative, Wilde extends his critical ideas; in *Dorian Gray* the universality of art is permeated with otherness—art, culture, people, language. In response to Arnold’s demand “to see the object as it itself it really is” and Pater’s shift of “the center of attention from the rock of the object to the winds of the perceiver’s sensations” (Ellmann, *Artist as Critic* xi), Wilde asserts that it is “to see the object as it really is

not.” Wilde attempts to get rid of the central image. The conflict between aesthetic and individual relates to Cézanne’s surfaces and the “fertilising conflicts” of pictorial parts. Still Wilde stands uneasy between aestheticism and the individualities of Cézanne, Wells, and Stein. The “environment” of Socialism that is “Individualism” anticipates the Cézannean surface on which the “disturbing and disintegrating” individual parts will reject the totalizing grasp of perspectivism. Wilde writes of the “surface” environment of Socialism, “[e]ach member of the society will share in the general prosperity and happiness of the society” (*Soul* 1080).

Cézanne’s surfaces bridge the narratives of Wilde and Stein. In his essays and his critical fiction, *Dorian Gray*, Wilde reaches toward a surface of interplay. Stein’s literary version of Cézanne’s techniques configures new relations of the parts. Her narrative, like the art of Cézanne, is not a figure of balance and harmony, but explores the elements in their individuality and uniqueness.

Like Wilde, Stein defines the dynamic quality of human nature; in *Three Lives* individualities resist external, mechanical control. An early influence on Stein, William James rejects the notion of a perfect society, not because humans cannot create one, but because its perfection would violate the restless, relative aspirations of their beings: “Everyone must at some time have wondered at the strange paradox of our moral nature,” James writes, “that, though the pursuit of outward good is the breath of its nostrils, the attainment of outward good would seem to be its suffocation and death. Why does the painting of any paradise or utopia, in heaven or earth, awaken such yawnings for nirvana and escape” (167). The pluralism of Wilde’s aesthetic differs with James’ in the tension between Wilde’s artist critic non-totalizing perspective and the temporalized dynamic of James’ continuity. James’ sensations are “continuous.” James argues that “Consciousness . . . is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations . . . . A permanently

existing 'idea' or *Vorstellung*' which makes its appearance before the footlights of consciousness at periodical intervals, is as mythological an entity as the Jack of Spades" (21, 30). James' stress on sensations and particulars anticipates the valorization of surfaces in Cézanne and Stein. In "The Stream of Thought," James contends that from the sensations we receive from each thing, "The Mind selects again. It chooses certain of the sensations to represent the thing most *truly*, and considers the rest as its appearance, modified by the conditions of the moment" (71). Stein, like Wilde, values conflict of individualities to stimulate life. Stein's relation to Cézanne's technique allows a productive, conflicting dialogue across categorical distinctions that links to Wilde's disruptive aesthetic individualism. Against tedious satisfaction along utilitarian socialistic lines, the narratives of Wilde and Stein play out the tensions of individualities that are paradoxically signs of imperfection and movements of dynamic exchange necessary for development and change. The contrast evident between Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and Morris's *News from Nowhere* literary utopias, thus, signals a shift in critical thinking that emphasizes the value of individual productive, imaginative activity in bringing about social transformation. Register of a shift in critical thinking is not confined, however, to overtly utopian works; the utopian imagination functioning in art and literature can register a critical shift in thought.

This critical shift expresses the need for attention to the imaginative tension produced by individuality, in a society inclined toward integrative conformity. Cézanne pictorial art exhibits the tension of the individual and society and offers a correction to the earlier aesthetic tradition. He painted from part to part, giving attention to the individualities at the surface that disrupted the perspectival drive to integration. His technique of painting part to part returned "solidity" of form lost as the Impressionists dissolved form in order to paint the impression of the passing

moment. But Cézanne's forms remain in interplay of the parts rather than falling to unification. At stake is the conventional, the traditional, the idea of a "natural" order of centralization and organic cohesion. When Morris shifts his utopian emphasis toward individual needs, he adds a new dimension to literary utopia that has primarily stressed social concerns. But it is Wells who writes the "modern" utopia. He takes the genre from the "total" static state to a "kinetic . . . hopeful stage" (*A Modern Utopia* 5). The dynamic utopia moves, continually oscillating, between the private individual life and public social concerns, and even this is without resolve. The modern utopia, Wells writes, differs from "those finite compact settlements of the older school of dreamers[.] It is not to be a unanimous world any more; it is to have all and more of the mental contrariety we find in the world of the real; it is no longer to be perfectly explicable . . ." (123). Modernized, utopia becomes tentative and subjective; at best, Wells tells the reader, it is "one individual's aspiration" (372). Wells' individualism is the "willful individualism" that Shiff suggests "leads to the use of techniques which, in their peculiar resistance to configuration, translation, and interpretation, risk a wanderer's incomprehensibility" (66). The "standing out" of each of Cézanne's surfaces is a similar willful individualism that resists, in its recalcitrant individuality, a totality. For Wells, utopian thought must consider the actual lives of men and women in society. But like Cézanne's recalcitrant individuality of surface, these men and women cannot be explained in the whole, only the part and the engagement between them. And while the goal of an equitable society remains, the individual and the individual's role in the transformation of society needs to be re-portrayed in forms constructed by the modern utopian imagination. This perspective of utopia offers a broad enough frame to encompass the utopian imagination of *Dorian Gray* and *Three Lives*.

Research reveals little scholarship on the narratives' relation to the concept of utopia. The criticism that considers *Three Lives* and *Dorian Gray* through utopian lens points to the difficulty in defining utopian imagination in aesthetic constructions. Harriet Scott Chessman appears to be the only critic to directly link Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* and utopian thought. In *The Public is Invited To Dance* she claims that Stein's writing "displays a certain utopian element, especially in its attempt to reimagine gender and to subvert violent hierarchies" (4). From Chessman's perspective Stein's work emphasizes "language as the utopian place" that creates a "utopian linguistic realm" where language "invites the readers to sense-making efforts but resists the need to control it (61, 202). Here Chessman seems to intuit the necessary "fertilising conflict" of utopian imagination. But she argues, the story "does move Lena and her utopia of voice far enough away from the world, or the world of realistic fiction to allow such gentle 'calling' to be sustained" (36). Without Stein's connections to Cézanne's pictorial techniques, Chessman's utopian intuitions develop in a traditional utopian framework the drives toward a harmonizing, unified structure. The surface pattern of Stein's narrative invites no separate "realm" but interplay of recalcitrant surfaces.

Jody Price's *A Map with Utopia: Oscar Wilde's Theory for Social Transformation* directly relates the concept of utopia to Wilde's *Dorian Gray*. Utopia, for Price, appears to function as an unalienated realm outside present reality, and she argues that Wilde's aesthetics provide a map of the world that includes utopia: "Wilde's focus on the transformative qualities of art presents an aesthetic intent on idealizing a world free of oppressiveness of Victorian capitalism" (7). In resistance to the cultural suppression, Price writes, *Dorian Gray* "becomes Wilde's clear articulation of the importance of the unified human being" (100). This fits with Schiller's humanist ideal and Matthew Arnold. But *Dorian Gray* read in the framework of

Cézanne questions the possibility of such a unified subjectivity. The utopian quality of this narrative is, for Price, anticipated freedom from alienation and oppression, but this emancipation seems to offer another scheme of reconciled unification. Wilde's connection to Cézanne's surface aesthetics allows a space to explore Wilde's anticipation of Wellsean utopian interplay of individualities in the making of art and the forming of a self. He brings this idea to *Dorian Gray* from his critical essay, *The Critic as Artist*. In this essay, Wilde explores the necessary interplay of creation and interpretation in a non-totalizing perspective that allows art and self to grow and change.

In explicitly relating Wilde's transformative aesthetics to utopian thought, Price's investigation implicitly addresses, as Chessman does, the larger yet little explored association between utopia and art as the expression of change for individual and social existence. Cézanne's surfaces in their connections to Wells' utopianism help show how the dynamic and active nature of pictorial techniques of surface give aesthetic expression in Stein's and Wilde's narratives. Each disrupts the authority of controlling idea; each of these texts liberates alternative voices, ideas, points of view. The liberation and interplay, not alienation, of individual voices suggest change, based on a model of other, and other than one of totality. In the changing expression of utopian imagination that varies over time, the construction of the individual and the question of a "better way of being" becomes a central issue. Tom Moylan argues in *Demand the Impossible* (1986) that utopian writing

was saved by its own destruction and transformation into the 'critical utopia':  
'Critical' in the Enlightenment sense of critique—that is expressions of  
oppositional thought, unveiling, debunking, of the genre itself and the historical

situation. . . . A central concern in the critical utopia is the awareness of the limitations of the utopian tradition. . . . (10)

Cézanne's surfaces made similar modification of the aesthetic pictorial tradition. Aware of the limitations of single point perspective, as well as the Impressionists' singular focus on light and color, to account for the diversity of difference of the world he painted, Cézanne rejects aesthetic singularity for a surface aesthetics of individualities that brings all parts into play. In his part-to-part technique, Cézanne preserves the dream of unity in interplay of parts that, paradoxically, valorizes difference in their "fertilising conflicts."

In this context, the productive imagination of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Three Lives* function as utopian imagination. In their productions, they encourage other writers and artists to discover the multiplicity of experience. They encourage readers to reach beyond what is given, to activate their human capacity to envision possibilities not yet developed: to use their utopian imagination. The projective movement of their narratives illustrates the utopian impulse, the need to know: "a search for new possibilities of sustenance . . . an impulse to explore unknown environments, with all the attendant risk and tension" (Quarta 160).

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