The Femme Fatale as Symbol of the Creative Imagination in Late Victorian Fiction.

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THE FEMME FATALE AS SYMBOL OF THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION IN LATE VICTORIAN FICTION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

The Department of English

by

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ABSTRACT

The idea of the narcissistic artist in love with the extensions of his own psyche—his image reflected in his artistic creations—has been a frequent subject of serious fiction since the mid-nineteenth century. Writers wishing to treat the conflicts of the artist between his commitment to life and his commitment to his craft have suggested this divided self in symbolic mirrors, twins, doppelgängers, and hermaphrodites. However, students of the fiction which marks the transition to what is called "modern" have little noted one symbol of this psychic conflict. It is the thesis of this study that the relationship of the femme fatale and her victim-lover in certain late Victorian novels is essentially that which exists between art and the artist enamored of his own aesthetic powers. Whether as a conscious literary device of the novelist, or as the projection of the archetype of his unconscious mind, the femme fatale in these novels exercises a paradoxical life-death influence upon the narcissistic artist.

In selected key works of fiction by writers preoccupied with the problem of reconciling aesthetic and moral values in art, there is discernible a pattern of increasing narcissism among the novelists of the late nineteenth century. In each
of these novels, when art (a subjectively conceived pattern of order) seems to offer the artistic protagonist the fulfillment he cannot find in the external world, he willingly forswears his human responsibilities and turns to embrace the seductive lady—the aesthetic ideal of his own creative imagination. The artist, like the lover-hero in myth and legend, is easily lured by the magic of the siren's song promising unusual sensory experiences. For the lover the attraction is to an erotic ideal: the unlimited pleasures of the flesh; for the artist, to an aesthetic ideal: the unlimited pleasures of the imagination. But the artist, like the lover, is deceived by the melodic voice. Aesthetic pleasure: is indeed all that it purports to be; but it ignores the matter of genuine human relationships. Art, by demanding much of the artist, necessarily takes much that is vital in him; and the success of the work of art—as of the vampirish femme fatale—is proportional to the amount of the artist's own humanity that is sacrificed to the object of his devotion.

This dissertation demonstrates that, despite the recurrence of the same enigmatic figure in these novels, the femme fatale does not have a uniform personality and thus reveals the unique nature of each writer's creative imagination. Margaret Wariston in Lesbia Brandon, for example, suggests Swinburne's masochistic devotion to a harsh and unyielding ideal. Sibyl Vane and (implicitly) the portrait
in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* are types of the *femme fatale* embodying Wilde's deceptive ideal of dandiacal self-love. Zuleika in *Zuleika Dobson*, though a caricature rather than a serious portrait, shows Beerbohm's awareness, too, of the necessary destructiveness of the artist-dandy's self-dedication, and Beardsley's Helen in "Under the Hill" epitomizes the barrenness of the aesthetic ideal of the artist who lives in the realm of pure fantasy. Christina Light in James's *Roderick Hudson* is not the sadist that Swinburne's ideal woman is, but she is coldly indifferent to the suffering she causes idealistic artists who become infatuated with her. Of the six novelists considered, only Conrad, through Lena in *Victory*, reveals a devotion to an ideal which, though destructive, is also redemptive.

This study contends, finally, that the narcissism of the writers of the late Victorian period has continued into the present century and is symptomatic of what can be described as "modernism" in fiction.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the closing decades of the last century and in the early years of the present one, a number of serious writers in England (as in America and on the Continent) became increasingly conscious of themselves as artists as distinct from their roles as moralists and propagandists for honesty, sobriety, and monagamy. This turning inward upon themselves resulted in their discovery that the value of a work of art for its own sake was equal, if not superior, to its value as an instrument for the moral improvement of society. As an ordered pattern (e.g., of colors, words, ideas, events), a work of art had a "beauty," an "aesthetic" value that had nothing at all to do with its moral worth. Sensing the conflict of values, such literary artists as Swinburne, Stevenson, Conrad, Wilde, Joyce, and Yeats gave a significant amount of attention to the problem of reconciling the demands of art with the demands of society.

The political, economic, social, and religious attitudes of Victorian England were formed and enforced, for the most part, by the earnest (if somewhat hypocritical) middle classes. Invariably, society judged all alleged works of art
by the criteria set forth by the philistine custodians of the *status quo*. A painting, a novel, or a poem was "good" if it inculcated or reinforced the prevailing social or moral conventions. It was judged "bad" if no moral purpose could be discerned, or if the work was blatantly "immoral." Because Victorian public-oriented art critics refused to acknowledge that a work of art also had a valuable intrinsic "aesthetic" aspect which had no connection with the world of manners and morals, an increasing number of sensitive and conscientious literary craftsmen either deprecatingly ignored or vigorously denounced their would-be judges.

Students of modern literature are keenly aware of the persistence in fiction of the theme of alienation—and especially of the alienation of the artist from society. The artist of the late nineteenth century faced a dilemma that has not yet been resolved, even in the third quarter of the twentieth century. He was obsessed with his own dualism. As a man, he felt the need to participate in the world of men; but as an artist, he felt the need to consecrate himself to art, much as a monk makes vows of celibacy and poverty in order to experience the sublimity of his religious ideal. The world for such an artist was not only an inferior source of amusement; it in fact palled on him. In a typical novel portraying this dilemma the artist, finding communication between himself and others either impossible or unfruitful, openly rebels and begins a private search for fulfillment. However, his voluntary exile serves but to alienate him
further from the whole in which he unconsciously yearns to participate. When he comes to realize that he "can't go home again," he remains in psychic exile, turning inward for the communion denied him from without. Knowing as he does that only the imagination is capable of infinite creation and appreciation, and convinced of his own self-sufficiency, the artist is stimulated by the promises of the imagination to satisfy the needs of his soul. In devoting himself to "art for art's sake" he at once rejects the external world and becomes the willing slave of the artifice proceeding from his own mind.\(^1\)

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\(^1\)Frank Kermode's study of the artist and the image in the poetry of Yeats (Romantic Image [New York, 1957]) makes several of these points concerning the artist's fatal fascination with his own creative powers and their products. To apprehend "the Image--to experience that 'epiphany' which is the Joycean equivalent of Pater's 'vision'" is "to pay a heavy price in suffering." The artist not only "[risks] his immortal soul"; he is necessarily isolated and estranged from those who cannot perceive the Image (pp. 1-2). The modern artist in his pursuit of the Image, is a "specially fated and highly organized artist, a man who gets things out of his head," says Kermode. The reaction of society toward his deliberate isolation is predictable; it cannot understand him. "Whether he likes it or not, society excludes him" (p. 4). The artist thus forced into seclusion is uniquely susceptible to joy. Totally self-dependent, introspective, and egotistic, the artist finds within his imagination the fulfillment of every dream. But to find joy, says Kermode, the artist "must be lonely, haunted, victimised, devoted to suffering rather than action--or, to state this in a manner more acceptable to the twentieth century, he is exempt from the normal human orientation towards action and so enabled to intuit those images which are truth, in defiance of the triumphant claims of merely intellectual disciplines" (p. 6). Yeats's Vision, according to Kermode, is "a blueprint of a palace of art, a place in the mind where man may suffer, some less and some more, where the artist explains his joy in making at the cost of isolation and suffering" (p. 26).
The idea of the narcissistic artist in love with the extensions of his own psyche—his image reflected in his artistic creations—has frequently been represented in literature by the doppelgänger. Writers wishing to treat the conflicts of the artist between his commitment to life and his commitment to his craft have traditionally embodied this divided self in symbolic mirrors, twins, and hermaphrodites. However, one symbolic representation of this conflict has been little noted by students of the literature of the period that marks the transition to what is called "modern." The intention of my dissertation is to examine the works of representative writers of the significant last generation of Victorians and the first of the twentieth century to show that the recurring image of the femme fatale functions as a symbol in the conflict of life versus art. It is my belief that the relationship of the femme fatale and her victim-lover is essentially that which exists between art and the artist. When art promises the artist the

\[2\] E.g., Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*, Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Gautier's *Mademoiselle de Maupin*.

\[3\] A recent unpublished dissertation which treats of the femme fatale as a force in the life of the artist (Reynold Gerrard Siemens, "One Role of the Woman in the Artist's Development in Certain British Artist-Hero Novels of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries" [University of Wisconsin, 1966]), surveys only the genre of the Kunstlerromane from 1823-1914 and does not explore the possibilities of the femme fatale as a symbol of the novelist's artistic imagination, as manifested in both his life and his works. Siemens looks at only the fictional artist and his fatal woman in five novels: Hazlitt's *Liber Amoris*, Disraeli's *Contarini*
fulfillment he cannot find in nature, he willingly forswears his human responsibilities and turns to embrace the seductive lady—the aesthetic ideal of his own creative imagination. In its general outline, the dilemma of the artist is embodied in the familiar tale of the man who, on the promise of an earthly paradise, loses the world to gain the favors of a beautiful enchantress. It is the story of Adam and Eve, of Samson and Delilah, of Ulysses and Circe, of Antony and Cleopatra, of Lancelot and Guinevere, of Sir Guyon and Acrasia, and of countless other ill-fated lovers.

The case of the artist in love with art (and with the processes of artistic creativity) is equally fatal. The artist, like the lover in myth and legend, is dissatisfied with the world as it is and is easily lured by the magic of the siren's song to taste new pleasures. The music of art is the music of Keats' melodist, "Forever piping songs forever new." For the lover the attraction is to an erotic ideal: the unlimited pleasures of the flesh; for the artist, to an aesthetic ideal: the unlimited pleasures of the imagination. But the artist, like the lover, is misled by the attractiveness of the voice that promises so much. Aesthetic pleasure is indeed all that it claims to be; but it ignores the matter of human conduct, that dimension of life which Matthew Arnold says comprises three-fourths of

Fleming, Kipling's The Light That Failed, Hardy's The Well-Beloved, and Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.
man's being. A man is obliged to live and act in this world, else die betimes. Art, by demanding much of the artist, necessarily takes much that is vital in him; and the success of the work of art—as of the vampirish femme fatale—is proportional to the amount of the artist's own life which is transferred to the object of his devotion. Thus personified, the aesthetic vision is as sadistically demanding as the artist is masochistically willing to comply.

In the works I shall examine, the predatory female charms her victim into submission and then destroys him in order to satisfy her own needs. Whether one looks at Wilde's Salomé or Beerbohm's Zuleika Dobson; at Swinburne's Lady Midhurst or Mary Stuart; at James's Christina Light or at Conrad's Lena—or, for that matter, at the aesthetic vision of these writers—he finds the same archetypal figure of the beautiful but deadly woman. Indeed, she is a woman with all the warmth and generosity of a Medusa. She relishes the power she exerts over her admirers. She leads them astray and then, sadistically, refuses to grant them the ultimate satisfaction. She is "la belle dame sans merci."

But her significance as a symbol changes from artist to artist. I have chosen six writers—Swinburne, Wilde, Beerbohm, Beardsley, James, and Conrad—whom I believe to be representative of the increasing introspection discernible among artists conscious of conflicting loyalties. In the fiction of each, the idea of the necessary suffering of the artist enamored of his own aesthetic powers is embodied in
the symbol of the *femme fatale*.

It is my contention, finally, that narcissism of the artists of the late Victorian period has continued into the present century and is symptomatic of what I later define as "modernism" in literature.

In the course of this dissertation I frequently use such key terms as "artist" and "aesthetic experience," "symbol," "image," and "metaphor," and, of course "*femme fatale*." I am convinced that formal definitions of these terms would be less valuable in the present chapter than those meanings which will make themselves clear in context. It will become evident, for example, that I use the term "artist" to refer not only to the painter but to all who use the powers of the creative imagination to produce aesthetic objects. And "aesthetic object," as well as "aesthetic experience," will appear in contexts which show them to be terms connected with the idea of sensory perception of the beautiful. The following chapter is devoted to providing a vocabulary as well as a psychological basis for the analysis of the writers and works which I make in subsequent chapters.
CHAPTER II

BACKGROUNDS IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ARTISTIC CREATIVITY

While the central thesis of this study does not ground itself exclusively upon the hypotheses of C. G. Jung concerning the origin of archetypal imagery in literature, it is nevertheless important to isolate certain of those views held by Jung and his followers which tend to corroborate the conclusions reached by other methods. To present a meaningful survey of those theories concerning the origin of the imagery of creative artists, I have found it necessary to devote a full chapter to Jungian--and sometimes Freudian--interpretations of man's behavior patterns. Such a survey quite naturally includes psychological interpretations of works of art, since what man makes, as well as what he does, is considered part of his behavior. A primary means, then, of determining the nature of the creative faculty is to examine that which it has created. It will be discovered that the creative artist has been less in love with the world than with the mysteries of his own creative powers.

Both Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung, as well as their commentators, attempt to relate certain recurring psychic
Phenomena to the individual's struggle to cope with himself in the world. Jung, with a more comprehensive view than Freud, finds the concept of the beautiful-but-destructive female to be part of a fabric of symbolism deeply embedded in the unconscious mind of the human race. Although Jung's theories of archetypal symbols and the collective unconscious are generally known, a brief review of some of his fundamental assumptions will help to illuminate his remarks on the male's fascination with the female's poisonous beauty.

According to Jung, archetypes are "involuntary manifestations of unconscious processes whose existence and meaning can only be inferred."\(^1\) That these processes sometimes seem to "arise spontaneously . . . from no discernible or demonstrable cause" has given rise to the controversial theory of the "collective unconscious." In "The Psychology of the Child Archetype" Jung presents an abbreviated version of his theory:

Modern psychology treats the products of unconscious phantasy-activity as self-portraits of what is going on in the unconscious, or as statements of the unconscious psyche about itself. They fall into two categories. First, fantasies (including dreams) of a personal character, which go back unquestionably to personal experiences, things forgotten or repressed, and can thus be completely explained by individual anamnesis. Second, fantasies (including dreams) of an impersonal character, which cannot be reduced to experiences in the individual's past, and thus cannot be explained as something individually acquired. These fantasy-images undoubtedly have their closest

analogaes in mythological types. We must therefore assume that they correspond to certain collective (and not personal) structural elements of the human psyche in general, and, like the morphological elements of the human body, are inherited. Although tradition and transmission by migration certainly play a part there are, as we have said, very many cases that cannot be accounted for in this way and drive us to the hypothesis of "autochthonous revival." These cases are so numerous that we cannot but assume the existence of a collective psychic substratum. I have called this the collective unconscious.  

In spite of his strong statement to the effect that archetypes, "like the morphological elements of the human body, are inherited," Jung appears to have modified his position by 1957, when he wrote that he feared his "concept of the 'archetype' has been frequently misunderstood as denoting inherited patterns of thought or as a kind of philosophical speculation." They are "inherited forms of psychic behaviour," he explains, only because they "belong to the realm of the activities of the instincts."  

In an attempt to establish which symbols are "indubitably archetypal," Philip Wheelwright has examined three groups of archetypes which he believes do not depend upon the notion that they are transmitted through a "race memory." He relies, rather, on ancient evidences—literary, philosophical, archeological, and anthropological—to determine the nature of "true" archetypal symbols. The three groups of legitimate archetypes, according to this means of identification, are

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2Ibid., pp. 117-18.  
3Ibid., p. xvi.
... those having to do with sky and sun, fatherhood and kingship, as related symbolic expressions of divinity; those which express what in one way or another is complementary, sometimes antithetical, to the power and majesty of the sky-divinity; and those pertaining to the basically human experiences of aspiration and alienation.  

It is the second and third categories which bear most directly on the problems of this dissertation because the female and the quest are inevitably related to each other and to the difficulties of art and the artist. The archetypal Feminine, says Wheelwright, assumes "a confusing variety of blendings and transformations." He isolates four: the Mother, the Virgin, the Siren, and the Harpy. The Mother and the Harpy are antithetical (Life-giver versus Destroyer), as are the Virgin and the Siren. The Virgin is "the Feminine Ideal, for whose sake the hero, and the heroic in every man, bestirs himself to confront dangers and attain the goal"; and the Siren is "the temptress, the symbol of sensual allurement which distracts man from his essential task."  
Together they comprise the ambivalent *femme fatale*, the figure which Jung describes as oscillating between "goddess and whore.*"  

The importance of the images of the Virgin and the

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Siren in the archetypal quest can be ascertained in the following passage by Wheelwright:

Man is the questing animal. . . . A stern fact about man's existential goal is that it is never completely attainable or perfectly formulable. It is not like a prize to be won. For when the prize has been secured, or the particular project accomplished, it no longer has the character of a goal. . . . The object of man's existential quest is always receding, attainable from time to time in fragmentary particulars but never totally. Satisfaction from grasped success is small and temporary compared with the never-ending itch for something more. Out of this changing and persistent desire for transcendence of particularity arise certain typical relations between the psyche and its world. When these relations are conceptualized they provide terms and questions for metaphysical inquiry; when they are projected into images and narratives they produce certain archetypal symbols and myths.7

Wheelwright, then, concurs with modern "myth critics": the various relationships between the psyche and external reality, when projected into artistic creations, do result in archetypal symbols and myths. Thus man's ongoing quest for the ideal comes to be symbolized in the quest for the virginal Goddess which is always obstructed by the appearance of the whorish Siren.8 In his attraction to the single figure of the femme fatale, man is seen to be equally in love with the angelic and the demonic natures of woman, or, phrased in Jungian terminology, with all products of his psychic creativity, good or evil.

With even this brief review of the fundamentals of

7Wheelwright, p. 237.

8As, for example, Red Crosse is seduced by Duessa while in quest of Una.
archetypal symbolism it is possible to turn now to the main purpose of this chapter: to demonstrate the nature of the relationship of the conscious to the unconscious mind, of the inner to the outer world of man, and especially of the creative artist.

Recognizing that man has always been fascinated by and yet afraid of the unknown in himself, Jung compares man's confrontation with himself to the unpleasant revelation which comes when he looks into a mirror and sees his "shadow," the dark aspects of his personality. While the evil "shadow" can to some degree be known and accepted, there are other aspects of the unconscious which remain unknowable. Beyond the dark image mirrored in the glass or pool there is another projection (or rather "introjection") of the psyche which Jung labels the "anima." The anima is the archetype of the unconscious and hence unknowable. In dreams and fantasies it becomes personified as a feminine being by which the conscious mind is "fascinated . . . held captive, as if hypnotized."\(^9\) In fairy tales the anima is sometimes symbolized by the nixie, "a female, half-human fish."\(^10\) Jung's list of other anima symbols is composed of types of the femme fatale: "She can also be a siren, melusina (mermaid), wood-nymph, Grace, or Erlking's daughter, or a lamia or succubus,


\(^10\)Jung, *Archetypes*, p. 34.
who infatuates young men and sucks the life out of them."

Since the nixie is representative of the type, it is useful to observe some of the characteristic activities of the nixie:

She is a mischievous being who crosses our path in numerous transformations and disguises, playing all kinds of tricks on us, causing happy and unhappy delusions, depressions and ecstasies, outbursts of affect, etc. Even in a state of reasonable introjection the nixie has not laid aside her roguery. The witch has not ceased to mix her vile potions of love and death; her magic poison has been refined into intrigue and self-deception, unseen though none the less dangerous for that.

A literary portrayal of the nixie is to be found in the short story written in 1888 by Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson, who, with her "peasant soul" and her interest in the occult, in many ways played the nixie to her husband. "The Nixie" is a supernatural tale about a daughter of the Great God Pan who casts a curious spell over the sensitive young man she meets. Willoughby is strangely attracted to


14 Arthur Machen's short story "The Great God Pan" is a macabre tale of another of the offspring of Pan. The story has overtones of Stevenson, Poe, and even Yeats. The Woman is born of a union of Pan and a yielding natural mother named Mary. When the child (called Helen) is born, the mother dies (somewhat as in Yeats's "The Adoration of the Magi") and there is loosed upon the world the force of beauty and death inextricably bound. This femme fatale is described as "the most beautiful woman and the most repulsive." Her fatal beauty attracts and then destroys dozens of men before she vanishes. It is significant, I think, that the foster father of Helen (i.e., the scientist who
the young, dark-haired girl who claims to be "'a hundred thousand days'" old. Laughing and holding hands, she leads him, head wreathed in vine leaves, to the river bank, where the two embark in a small boat. Her fatal attraction for him is climaxed as he tries to follow her to her watery home. The description has strong overtones of the Narcissus myth and suggests that his fascination with his own anima projection is destructive:

The boat rocked; swaying dizzily over its side, he looked straight down into a face that sank deeper and deeper, the smile upon it changing grotesquely through the water from gay mockery to the grieved expression of a sobbing child, until it was lost in blackness.15

Willoughby is nearly drowned as he plunges after her. His rescuers can find no trace of "the girl" he mutters about, but they do observe that the strange young man looks as if he has suffered a sunstroke.

The mischievous being imaged forth in the water is of course the anima, the feminine soul of the man who gazes upon it. He is filled with a desire to know the unknowable secrets of his unconscious being, symbolized both by the girl and the water in which she dwells. He is unsuccessful,

enabled Mary, the mother, to see the great god Pan) is named Dr. Raymond (rey + mundo = "king of the world") and that one of Helen's many names is Mrs. Beaumont ("beautiful mountain"), perhaps suggesting the Mount of Venus or the Venusberg associated with the legend that variously makes Venus or Helen the queen of love. See my discussion of the Tannhäuser material in Chapters III and IV below.

15Ibid., p. 284.
but that is his salvation. Had he achieved union with his anima, the fusion of conscious subject and unconscious object would have resulted in the annihilation of the subject. His near-drowning suggests how close he came to spending an eternity in the embraces of absolute unconsciousness.

Erich Neumann's comprehensive study of the "Great Mother" sheds further light on the phenomenon of man's turbulent love affair with his own anima. For all its destructive effects, says Neumann, the anima is paradoxically "the mover, the instigator of change, whose fascination drives, lures, and encourages the male to all the adventures of the soul and spirit, of action and creation in the inner and outward world." ¹⁶ Although Circe turns men into beasts and numerous fairy-tale princesses kill their unsuccessful suitors, both Circe and the princesses invite their conquerors to share their beds.

The power of the anima to call men to adventure, even at the risk of their lives, is suggested to Jung by Rider Haggard's romantic novel She,¹⁷ which follows the same mythic pattern of Mrs. Stevenson's story of the nixie, Morton Cohen, in his critical biography of Haggard, elaborates upon Jung's discussion of the anima in relation to


Ayesha, the mysterious heroine:

Ayesha lives in a physical and spiritual no-man's land, and she is the goal of a quest, also both physical and spiritual. She has supernatural powers of attraction, and the hero, forced to suspend all reason, is drawn to her, ready to surrender irrevocably to her charms and forego all worldly things. . . . The hero finds her only after encountering and overcoming many obstacles. Her presence overwhelms his doubts, dissipates his scepticism. He succumbs and yearns to be united with her— but just at the moment when they are to experience eternal union, she vanishes. For she is actually unattainable, and the hero, jarred back to a mundane consciousness, is left nursing a dream.18

The quest for Ayesha is essentially the "quest for truth and understanding,"19 according to Cohen, who echoes Jung's view that the anima is somehow associated with "a secret knowledge or hidden wisdom, which contrasts most curiously with her irrational elfic nature."20

It has been seen that the male who craves union with his feminine ideal is usually frustrated by her inaccessibility because she does not exist except in his unconscious psyche. Even when her image is projected onto an actual woman, she remains as unattainable as she is desirable. Just as important as understanding the psychology of the man infatuated with his own anima projection is understanding the psychology of the woman in whom his ideal is embodied.

19Ibid., p. 225.
In literature as in life she is almost invariably a sadistic man-woman, incapable of being placated. A survey of some of the prominent traits of this type of woman both in life and in literature should be useful in formulating a working conception of the *femme fatale*.

In *The Romantic Agony* Mario Praz begins his chapter entitled "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" by restating the "obvious" fact that both in real life and in myth there have always existed "examples of arrogant and cruel female characters." Nevertheless, he makes a point of reminding his readers of a few: Lilith, the Harpies, the Sirens, the Sphinx, and Clytemnestra. He then adds several of the Fatal Women of the Italian Renaissance: Vittoria Corombona, Lucrezia Borgia, and the Comtesse de Challant—all of whom were characterized on the Elizabethan stage as insatiable demons whose lechery "spread ruin and perdition among men." But as an established type, or cliché, in literature, the Fatal Woman can be traced in a more or less direct line of descent, according to Praz, from Matthew Gregory Lewis's Matilda in *The Monk* (1796) through Mérimée's *Carmen* (1845) and Flaubert's *Salammbô* (1862) and others in the nineteenth century.

Helene Deutsch's two-volume study, *The Psychology of*
Women, is devoted in part to a discussion of the sadistic female. Dr. Deutsch says that "most erotic feminine types can be derived from the interplay between narcissism and masochism." Because she is in love with herself, the narcissistic woman can never really love anyone else; she herself is always her suitor's rival. In a chapter on the "masculinity complex" in the aggressive woman Dr. Deutsch speaks of her "active provocative coquetry." Circe and Lorlei and Carmen all wear but a "mask of femininity," she says. By appearing feminine they ensnare "masculine hearts only to play a cruel sadistic game with them." The masculine woman, then, unable to enjoy the passive role in heterosexual love, becomes a femme fatale. She is a woman who, in Balzac's words, is "a picture of cold corruption, voluptuously cruel, thoughtless enough to commit a crime, strong enough to laugh at it, a species of devil without a heart, who punishes warm and tender souls for experiencing the feeling of which she is deprived."

Prosper Mérimée's Carmen (1845) is a striking literary portrait of this female "devil without a heart." Don Jose, the hero and victim in the story, is driven to violence by the cruel indifference of the raven-tressed gypsy. In their


26 Ibid., I, 188. 27 Ibid., I, 287.

final confrontation he fails to win her back:

"Be rational, I implore you; listen to me. All the past is forgotten. Yet you know it is you who have been my ruin—it is because of you that I am a robber and a murderer. Carmen, my Carmen, let me save you, and save myself with you." 29

As she refuses him this last time, Don Jose is so much a slave to the passion she has generated in him that he is willing to sacrifice whatever is left of his life and honor in return for her love:

"I cast myself at her feet, I seized her hands, I watered them with my tears, I reminded her of all the happy moments we had spent together, I offered to continue my brigand's life, if that would please her." 30

But she says, "'Love you again? That's not possible!'" And he stabs her in his furious despair. However, killing the thing he loves serves only to destroy himself. Don Jose is later executed for murder.

Another illustration of the femme fatale is one of Théophile Gautier's literary creations: the Cleopatra of Une Nuit de Cléopâtre. 31 Here the beautiful seductress agrees to make love to a young man for one night for the price of his life. Her motive is not so much her sadistic pleasure in killing her suitor as it is her need for rejuvenation. There is, to be sure, a bit of the vampire in

30 Ibid.
31 Mademoiselle de Maupin and One of Cleopatra's Nights (New York, n.d.).
Gautier's Egyptian queen. At the time of the youth's appearance on the scene, the queen is in the depths of ennui and ready for any adventure to make her life interesting, even if for a few hours. The youth, likewise, finds that ordinary life palls on him; he has drunk his fill of the world's pleasures and is now willing to give up all the rest for one moment of supreme ecstasy. What is important is that to him Cléopâtre represents the embodiment of his fancied ideal, and the fulfillment of his wish necessarily involves his annihilation as a man on a quest. Narcissus is giving up the world he knows for one sweet embrace with his beautiful but deadly anima.

C. G. Jung's description of the woman with the over-developed Eros could well be an account of Cleopatra or of Carmen. This type of woman is said to "[love] romantic and sensational episodes for their own sake. . . . Once the goal is attained, her interest evaporates for lack of any maternal instinct, and then it will be someone else's turn."32 Jung suggests that the femme fatale is not necessarily malicious in her intentions but rather cannot resist gratifying her erotic appetite:

Such women really seem to be utterly blind to what they are doing, which is anything but advantageous either for themselves or for their victims. I need hardly point out that for men with a passive Eros this type offers an excellent hook for anima projections.33

32 Jung, Archetypes, p. 89. 33 Ibid.
Besides Don Jose and Cleopatra's lover there are men in real life who have a passive Eros and require masculine women to satisfy the cravings of their psyche. George Sand, notorious for her masculinity, chose feminine men like Alfred de Musset and Chopin as her lovers and ruined them all. "Each of [her] love affairs terminated in literally the selfsame catastrophe: the man was destroyed—George Sand prospered."\(^{34}\)

A kind of cannibalism or vampirism must be inferred in cases in which the beloved partner waxes while the lover wanes. The *femme fatale* is frequently conceived of as a literal vampire, as in one of Gautier's most archetypal romances, *La Morte Amoureuse* (*The Beautiful Vampire*). The story demonstrates the importance of the unconscious during sleep. The conflict between the conscious and the unconscious mind of Father Romuald is manifested in the difference between his waking and dreaming lives. Married to the church and thus celibate and a fit husband to the Virgin, the priest also enjoys a vivid fantasy life in the embraces of the Whore. He is alternately attracted and repelled by the vampire, Clarimonde, whom he says "'hâd a little of Cleopatra in her nature."\(^{35}\) Romuald narrates his own story in his sixty-sixth year of life:

For more than three years I was the victim of an extraordinary, diabolical obsession. I, a poor

\(^{34}\)Deutsch, I, 298.

\(^{35}\)Trans. Paul Hookham (New York, 1927), p. 93. All subsequent references are to this edition.
country priest, led every night in a dream (pray God it was a dream!) the life of a lost soul, a voluptuary, a Sardanapalus. One single glance thrown at a woman nearly cost me the loss of my soul; but in the end, with the help of God and my patron saint, I was able to drive out the malignant spirit that possessed me. My life was complicated with a nocturnal existence of quite a different nature. During the day I was a priest of the Lord, chaste, occupied in prayer and holy works; at night, from the moment I closed my eyes, I became a young nobleman, a connoisseur of women, dogs and horses, dicing, drinking, blaspheming; and when I awoke at daybreak, it seemed as if I fell asleep and dreamed I was a priest (p. 28).

Romuald's anima projection, the archetype of the femme fatale, holds him captive. It is a willing captivity, however, because she governs only that part of his life which lies beneath his conscious desires, and he is able to live a dual existence. Only when he realizes that she is gradually demanding more and more of his conscious life does he decide to exorcise the demon from his life.

Romuald's psychic adventure begins as he is about to take his final vows. At the critical moment he sees a young woman:

Oh! how beautiful she was! The greatest painters, searching for ideal beauty in heaven and bringing down to earth the divine portrait of the Madonna, do not approach this fabulous reality. Neither poet's verse nor painter's palette can give an idea of it (p. 33).

He describes her as a "goddess," a "queen," "an angel or a demon, perhaps both." Her hair, her skin, her teeth—all are more than human. "What eyes!" he exclaims. "With one flash they decided the fate of a man . . ." (p. 34). She continues to gaze at him throughout the ceremony, seeming to
be aware of his agony. The priest interprets her gaze as if he understood the role played by the anima:

Her eyes were a poem, of which each look was a verse. They said:

"If you will be mine, I will make you happier than God Himself in His paradise; the angels will envy you. Tear off that funeral winding-sheet in which you are about to wrap yourself. I am Beauty, I am Youth, I am Life; come to me, and we will be Love. What could Jehovah offer you in exchange for that? Our life will glide by like a dream, and be but a kiss prolonged to eternity" (p. 39).

Clarimonde tempts him to a life of eternal sensual bliss but does not hint at what he must forfeit. Appearing as she does during a psychic crisis in the chaste young man's life, the seductive woman can only be understood as his anima projection or, as Jung more colorfully describes her, "the serpent in the paradise of the harmless man with good resolutions and still better intentions."36 The anima of Adam (Eve) or of Romuald (Clarimonde) or, for that matter, of any man is a temptress who promises the fuller life:

With her cunning play of illusions the [anima] lures into life the inertness of matter that does not want to live. She makes us believe incredible things, that life may be lived. She is full of snares and traps, in order that man should fall, should reach the earth, entangle himself there, and stay caught, so that life should be lived; as Eve in the garden of Eden could not rest content until she had convinced Adam of the goodness of the forbidden apple.37

Even though Romuald is not deterred from making a formal commitment to the ascetic life, his unconscious self

36Jung, Archetypes, p. 28.

37Ibid., pp. 26-27.
urges him to the sensual life. The scene in which he makes his first "night journey" to visit the dead Clarimonde reads like a Freudian casebook. Here are all the elements of the auto-erotic dream up to including orgasm. Romuald is "just going to bed" when there arrives "a man of swarthy appearance" to escort him to the castle of his dying mistress. "Before the door, two horses, black as night, their chests streaked with two long waves of foam, were impatiently pawing the ground." They mount and immediately shoot "forward like an arrow." They gallop abreast through the night:

We tore over the ground; the earth swept beneath us grey and streaked, and the dark outline of the trees fled past like a routed army. We passed through a forest of such dense and chilly darkness that I felt my flesh creep with a thrill of superstitious terror (pp. 60-62).

The feeling of superhuman power in his sexual excitation is strong enough to rout the "army" that threatens to keep him from his objective. There is in his imagery a sense of voluptuous abandon in the thrill of forbidden pleasure. "The manes of our horses steamed more and more wildly, the sweat poured down their sides, the breath came from the nostrils panting and laboured," he recalls, not without some revelation of his original frenzy. As they approach the castle, the "whirlwind subsided" and they "passed under a vaulted passage which opened its dark jaws between two gigantic towers" (p. 62).

It takes no Freudian analyst to see the imagery of the female body and the priest's guilty fears in the
description of the approach to the castle. He enters without hesitation because he is borne along by powers beyond his own and is ushered immediately to the deathbed of Clarimonde. The sight of the beautiful woman fills him with regret for the life he had chosen not to live; and there comes from the depths of his being a prayer that he be able to incarnate his ideal in this woman:

Ah! what a bitter sensation of despair and impotence I felt! What an agony that Vigil was! I should have liked to be able to gather together all my life that I might give it to her and breathe into those icy relics the fire that consumed me (pp. 70-71).

His wish is granted almost immediately; and for the next three years his erotic fires are regularly quenched during his fantasy life by the beautiful vampire, Clarimonde, while his passionless life as a priest is played out in the make-believe of reality.

Romuald describes his split personality:

Sometimes I thought I was a priest who dreamed every night that he was a nobleman, sometimes that I was a nobleman who dreamed that he was a priest. I could no longer distinguish dreams from real life; I did not know where reality began and illusion ended. The dissolute, supercilious young lord jeered at the priest, and the priest abhorred the dissipations of the young lord. Two spirals, entwined and confused, yet never actually touching, would give a good idea of this two-headed existence of mine. Despite the strangeness of the situation, I do not believe that I was ever insane. I always retained quite clearly the perception of my two existences (p. 92).

But with time his two existences are fated to become one. As Clarimonde, his psychic succubus, begins to drain his vitality, he discovers that it is he alone who sustains her existence. The decision he makes with the Abbé Serapion,
who suspects the young priest's erotic dreams, is to destroy
the beautiful vampire in order to restore him to spiritual
health. Together they perform the ritual that puts the
troublesome female out of his mind. But, he says, "My soul's
peace has been very dearly bought . . ." (p. 109).

The Church has long warned her priests of the spiritual
dangers inherent in close association with women and has
thereby helped to nourish a tradition of misogyny in the
Western world that continues, to some extent, into the
twentieth century. Since primitive times there has been the
concept of the "female demon" or "female black magician,"
like "the Babylonian and Hebrew Lilith, the Greek Empusa,
and Lamia, the vampire and eventually the succubus of medi­
eval theology," writes H. R. Hays in The Dangerous Sex.38
In the middle ages, he claims, the Church intensified misog­
yny "on sexual grounds." All women were possible femmes
fatales, creatures with the power "to destroy men, either by
magically undermining their vitality or by sucking their
blood."39 In the nineteenth century, he comments later in
the book, "the decadents created a picture of woman as a
beautiful, frightening, disgusting or menacing animal on
which to hang their dreams and nightmares, and . . . in many
cases their own deviant personalities account for the
imagery. . . ."40 Hays may well have in mind Gautier,

38Hays, p. 142. 39Ibid.
40Ibid., p. 205.
Swinburne, Baudelaire, or any one of a score of writers in France, England, or America.

Writers such as Gautier, Baudelaire, Flaubert, Poe, and others of the nineteenth century were sensitive artists who found a morbid pleasure in deadly women and perverse beauty. In the widely acclaimed study of the nineteenth-century preoccupation in literature with sadism, masochism, and andogyny, The Romantic Agony, Mario Praz traces the fascination with the grotesque through the Graveyard poets and Gothic novelists of the eighteenth century to the English and French Romantic and Decadent poets. Keats and Swinburne, Flaubert and Baudelaire are prominent in the study. The spectacle of Beauty and Death were "looked upon as sisters by the Romantics" and, indeed "became fused into a sort of two-faced herm, filled with corruption and melancholy and fatal in its beauty--a beauty of which, the more bitter the taste, the more abundant the enjoyment." Praz devotes his entire first chapter to the phenomenon he calls "the Beauty of the Medusa." Inherent in this image of "Beauty tainted with pain, corruption, and death" is the great paradox of the pleasure-pain principle underlying all sadistic and masochistic activities.

The type of sensitive artist of whom Mario Praz writes, in his willing withdrawal from society to isolate himself with his temperamental muse, is in a real sense a

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41 Praz, p. 48.
masochist. His aesthetic ideal tantalizes him by forever being out of his grasp, and yet the anticipation of future success keeps him happy in present failure.

The artist in relationship to his art is actually in the position of the masochistic man who desires the presence of a woman who combines in herself the loving attributes of the mother and the punishing attributes of the father. Theodor Reik, a Freudian psychologist, has written that the "beating person" so necessary to the masochist stands in the place of the first love object, the mother, whom the boy had coveted, but in the father's place as well, for whose sake the object had to be abandoned. The composite figure therefore consists of two people: the person one strived to possess and the other whom one wanted to be owned by. The renounced and the new figure, the adored and the dreaded figure, have been fused into one.42

The fused figure is recognizable as a *femme fatale*, a projection of his own anima.

In essence, the masochist is a "hyperidealist or even a romanticist," explains Reik, as if he were speaking of the plight of the sensitive artist.

Suffering is sweet for him, not in itself, but in anticipation of a premium. He enjoys suffering as Don Quixote enjoyed his defeats—for his lady's sake. In the most sublimated forms of masochistic character [as in the case of the artist, it may be supposed] an abstract ideal takes place of the desired woman. Thus Saint Francis gladly suffered for the sake of his beloved Lady Poverty.43

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And thus the artist gladly suffers for the sake of his beloved Lady Muse.

Erich Neumann, in his *Art and the Creative Unconscious*,\(^4\) sets forth in Jungian terms a theory of artistic creation which provides a plausible basis for the key assumptions of this dissertation—namely, those concerning the literary artist and his fatal attachment to the products of his own imagination.

The symbol of primordial unity, Neumann says is "the uroboros, the circular snake eating its tail," an image of reconciled opposites in androgynous perfection.\(^4\) Other objects embodying the masculine-destructive and the feminine-creative are symbolic of this "uroboric Great Mother," which Neumann claims to be "a universally distributed archetype."\(^4\) A creative man, such as Leonardo da Vinci, is unable to escape his childhood identification with the Great Mother archetype and remains "fixated in the matriarchal stage of the psyche." The result is that without a one-sided masculine consciousness he "remains both more childlike and more womanly [and hence more creative] than the normal man."\(^4\)

The fully masculine man lacks the creativity which is made possible in the feminine man because of his adaptation "to the requirements of the unconscious world." However, the


\(^{4}\)Ibid., pp. 9-10.  
\(^{4}\)Ibid., pp. 11-12.

\(^{4}\)Ibid., pp. 18-19.
artist "pays for his creativity with loneliness, which is the expression of his relative lack of adaptation to the life of the community."\textsuperscript{48}

C. G. Jung also believes that the creative man is set apart from other men because of the steady influence of his unconscious. The artist is unable "to free himself from the anima fascination of his mother." It is this failure to make a complete detachment "from the hermaphroditic archetype, coupled with a distinct resistance to identify with the role of a one-sided sexual being," which is responsible for his vision of ideal beauty as androgynous perfection.\textsuperscript{49}

A central contention of Neumann is that Leonardo da Vinci was just such an artist. In childhood he experienced a fantasy of a vulture which, because of its archetypal significance as the beautiful but deadly primordial Great Mother, influenced all his artistic creations and was the cause of his loneliness as a man.\textsuperscript{50} Neumann quotes a relevant comment by Freud on Leonardo's paintings, \textit{Bacchus} and \textit{John the Baptist}:

"The figures are still androgynous, but no longer in the sense of the vulture-fantasy. They are beautiful youths of feminine delicacy and with effeminate forms; they do not cast their eyes down, but gaze in mysterious triumph, as if they knew of a great achievement of happiness, about which silence must be kept. The

\textsuperscript{48}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{49}\textit{Jung, Archetypes}, p. 72.

\textsuperscript{50}\textit{Neumann, Art and the Creative Unconscious}, p. 77.
familiar smile of fascination leads one to guess that it is a secret of love. It is possible that in these figures Leonardo has denied the unhappiness of his erotic life and has triumphed over it in his art, by representing the wishes of the boy, infatuated with his mother, as fulfilled in this blissful union of the male and female natures."  

Neumann, like Walter Pater, finds that the painting of La Gioconda reflects the elements of the human soul in an ambiguous synthesis. In her smile there is a suggestion of "Madonna and witch, the earthly, and the divine." She embodies, in Pater's words, "the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias..." She is both Leda, the mother of the promiscuous Helen, and Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary.  

Even the late work of Leonardo continues to reflect the influence of his childhood fantasy of the vulture-goddess, "of the feminine fecundated by the masculine spirit-wind," says Neumann. There exists, both in a drawing and in a student's copy, a picture of Leda and the Swan:  

Impregnated by the bird-wind, Leda is the mother of the hero. She too discloses the smile, bearing witness to the woman's bond with the Father God. At her feet play the children born of the egg, and the egg always symbolized the offspring of the Great Mother. These children are Castor and Pollux,
who, in antiquity, like John and Christ, embody the
twin, mortal and immortal, nature of the hero. Some
copies show beside them the daughters of the egg,
Helen and Clytemnestra, the matriarchal representa-
tives of the seductive and killing aspects of the
Great Mother, so dangerous to the masculine.  

If the figures of "seductive and killing" women in his
paintings were projections of his unconscious mind, as Neu-
mann insists, and if he considered them beautiful, it can be
argued that Leonardo was enamored of his own imaginative
powers. His art was for him a beloved mistress, never
ceasing to fascinate him, and he was her unrequited lover,
never ceasing to be stimulated.

Pater, too, attests to Leonardo's love of art as an
end in itself, an end hardly distinguishable from anima wor-
ship. Besides rejecting moral and political ends, writes
Pater, Leonardo cultivated beauty as "a kind of self-love."
He seemed to be careless of everything except "art itself":

> Out of the secret places of a unique temperament he
> brought strange blossoms and fruits hitherto unknown;
> and for him, the novel impression conveyed, the
> exquisite effect woven, counted as an end in itself--
a perfect end.  

From Erich Neumann's study of Leonardo da Vinci and
the creative unconscious several important conclusions can
be drawn. The artistic externalization of sensual fantasies
in the usual end sought by the creative man who can never
hope to enjoy pleasures exceeding those of the imagination.
Such are the pleasures reserved for the artist or the poet

54 Ibid., p. 77n.  
55 Pater, p. 117.
who, like Keats, enjoys a momentary ecstasy in a nightingale's song and grows "half in love with easeful Death," a state of mind brought on by the allure of ideal Beauty. Or, again like Keats, the poet often finds his greatest pleasure in imagining those unheard melodies which are supplied by the creative unconscious of the artist.

The normal, or non-creative, man, although he enjoys participation in a culture which insists that he assert his masculinity, is nevertheless rendered impotent by his one-sided sexuality. The creative, or artistic, man, on the other hand, because of his inability to identify wholly with the masculine, is impowered by the forces of the feminine unconscious to create new worlds. It is his mission, claims Neumann, "to compensate for consciousness and the cultural canon. . . ." He is a lonely "hero who must destroy the old in order to make possible the dawn of the new."^56 As an alienated yet powerful agent he resembles Shelley's concept of the poet: the hierophant of an unapprehended world.

Writes Neumann:

When unconscious forces break through in the artist, when the archetype striving to be born into the light of the world take form in him, he is as far from the men around him as he is close to their destiny. For he expresses and gives form to the future of his epoch.57

As a man, the artist continues to suffer from his

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^56 Neumann, Art and the Creative Unconscious, p. 94.

57 Ibid.
anima, the unknowable feminine unconscious within. This source of his creativity is equally and paradoxically destructive and he must live with it or perish by it. His usual method of resolving the "inward tension or suffering of the psyche" is through creative production.\(^{58}\) In short, the artist, by the act of embodying his dilemma in a work of art, manages to transcend his divided self and reach a degree of unity. The struggle between the masculine ego and the feminine unconscious is externalized in a work of the imagination which reflects the allogamy of its origin. This, in part, accounts for the frequent appearance in works by a man not fully "weaned" from his parthenogenetic creator, of the archetypal Great Mother, a being as masculine as she is feminine, as beautiful and loving as she is horrible and cruel. She is the Fatal Woman, the androgynous femme fatale, the belle dame sans merci who holds her lover-son in thrall.

The recurring image of the androgyne in the literature and art of the nineteenth century, according to the argument set forth by A. J. L. Busst,\(^{59}\) is further indication that the creative man is unconsciously attracted to archetypal symbols which body forth his psychic condition. Busset finds that the concept of the androgyne or hermaphrodite (terms which he uses synonymously to denote either

\(^{58}\text{Ibid., p. 195.}\)

bisexuality or asexuality) is "conditioned by the attitude of the mind of [a] particular generation" and, consequently, that there are two prevailing though diametrically opposed conceptions of the androgyne in the nineteenth century— one which is "clearly optimistic and healthy, the other [which] is pessimistic, unhealthy and decadent." The first, a product of the political, social, and religious attitudes of the early years of the century, was optimistic because it symbolized solidarity, fraternity, communion, continuity of progress, trust in the future, in God and the fundamental goodness of man. . . .

And the later conception, appearing in the closing decades of the century,

was pessimistic because it symbolized lack of belief in all those things, and consequently: isolation, loneliness, self-sufficiency, independence, and despair in the future, in God and in man. And where-as the earlier image was above all a symbol of virtue --of the three cardinal virtues, in fact--the later image is above all a symbol of vice, particularly of cerebral lechery, demonality, onanism, homosexuality, sadism, and masochism.

The tendency for fin-de-siècle writers to become disillusioned with practical reality and to claim the superiority of inward cerebrations to outward bodily experience is evident in many literary expressions in France. Busst regards Gautier's Mademoiselle de Maupin as the embodiment of the world-weariness of the decadents:

Maupin has a vague longing for what is not and cannot be, for some exquisite emotion, some refined intense

60 Ibid., p. 10. 61 Ibid., p. 39.
This yearning, finding no suitable object and consequently no possible fulfillment in reality, can only become more intense. And the gulf between the ideal and the real can no longer be bridged once all possibilities of pleasure offered by reality have been exhausted in the imagination by a desire still unsatisfied but with ever loftier aims. D'Albert discovers that to desire something too intensely is to kill desire for that particular thing, for when the objective is finally attained, it no longer matches an intensified desire. The moment must come when such a highly imaginative person is completely blasé on reality without ever having tasted of its pleasures...62

Because the hermaphrodite "does not truly exist in reality otherwise than as the creation of the mind, of pure art,"63 the lover takes pleasure in what Joséphin Péladan has termed "le vice suprême," that is, cerebral lechery. "In the writings of Péladan," says Busst,

the hermaphrodite becomes the object of desire for those who can find no satisfaction in reality and yet whose desires only increase for not being satisfied. For them, the only satisfaction possible is to be found within their own minds, in lecherous fantasies; and among those fantasies the androgyne takes pride of place.64

That an artist ultimately satisfies his longings in the artistic creation proceeding out of his own mind underscores the idea that he considers himself self-sufficient. His "perpetual and ecstatic communion with himself"65 is a kind of onanism associated with the Narcissist. Like Narcissus, the artist is fatally attracted to that magic mirror which offers his only hope of satisfaction but which

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62 Ibid., pp. 42-43.  
63 Ibid., p. 42.  
64 Ibid., p. 44.  
65 Ibid., p. 50.
also invites him to self-destruction.

But the androgyne is not the sole figure in which the creative artists of the nineteenth century embodied their psychic problems. Rivaling the androgyne, along with the doppelgänger and the mirrored image, as a symbol of the divided self, the **femme fatale** and her tormented lover together suggest much more about the real nature of the artist's problem than do the others. Since the creative person is aware both of the promises of life and the promises of art, his situation is essentially that of the lover who, knowing the meaning of freedom, still chooses to become attached to one woman who makes a slave of him. Furthermore, he even luxuriates in the "romantic agony" of being her unrequited lover; like the lover, the artist can never experience what he imagines to be a blissful union between himself and his idealized beauty.

Mario Praz traces the progress of the literary **femme fatale** as Busst follows the androgyne and discovers that the figure undergoes a significant alteration toward the end of the nineteenth century. Instead of being merely a female counterpart to the Byronic hero, "a woman of infamous character, a prostitute, and adulteress," whose "baseness [is] the principal cause of her charm,"66 the **femme fatale** as a symbol became "more highly penetrated with aestheticism and exoticism [in the latter half of the century]. . . ."67

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66Praz, pp. 173, 175.  
67Ibid., p. 226.
fatal women portrayed in the writings of Swinburne, Pater, and Wilde are examples of the type. The spectacle of female demons subjecting their male lovers to exquisite tortures (in the works of Swinburne, for example) elevates masochism to the position of a fine art.

If the arguments of Jung and Neumann are to count for anything, it would seem that the artist of this temperament would be more naturally attracted to the archetype of the *femme fatale,* for a sadistic partner is more suited to his masochistic needs than is the more passive androgyne. The *femme fatale* shares with the androgyne the characteristic of an ambivalent sexuality, but she is actually a more comprehensive figure, capable of embodying much more than androgyny. To the man who projects upon her his anima, she seems to be enjoying an autonomous existence; the truth of the matter is that she can remain healthy and active only by continuously sapping his vitality. Carmen, Cleopatra, Clarimonde—all of these vampires and succubi, if not in a strict sense sadistic, are at least cruelly indifferent to the fates of the men from whom they take their pleasure. The androgyne, such as Maupin, is capable neither of sadism nor, indeed, of pleasurable acts of any kind. The *femme fatale,* on the other hand, is capable of conquest and dominion, even if only for brief interludes. The androgyne never knows the sweetness of mastering or being mastered. In short, the figure of the androgyne is a more limited, less versatile symbol for the complex psychic tensions of those artists who, turning inward,
submit themselves to the awesome powers of their own imaginations. These symptoms of artistic self-oblation are perfectly symbolized in the fatal relationship between the masochistic lover and the femme fatale whom he painfully loves.

In subsequent chapters of this dissertation I attempt to examine key works by several English writers of the closing decades of the nineteenth and the early years of the present century. In most of these works, the figure of the femme fatale appears, if not as an anima projection of the author or as an archetypal symbol, then as a conscious metaphor for the aesthetic ideal to which the author has committed himself, body and soul. Since the femme fatale in these works will be regarded primarily as a conscious symbol, the discussion does not depend upon the tenability of the Jungian hypotheses that have been reviewed in the present chapter. To be sure, however, the assertions made by psychologists as to the nature of the creative mind do help to account for the frequent images in literature suggestive of yearning and frustration.

Among the works that I treat are Algernon Charles Swinburne's two novels, *Love's Cross-Currents* and *Lesbia Brandon*; Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, along with Max Beerbohm's parody of the aesthetic pose, *Zuleika Dobson*, and Aubrey Beardsley's decadent fantasy, "Under the Hill"; Henry James's early novel, *Roderick Hudson*; and Joseph Conrad's *Victory*. By no means is this a complete list of literary efforts which speak symbolically of the dilemma of
the imaginative man in a world threatening to disrupt his self-communion. However, these few titles do suggest something of the diversity of form within the unity of the problem which manifested itself throughout the fifty years covered by this study.

Although there were many attitudes among late nineteenth-century literary artists toward this dilemma, there were fundamentally only two serious ways of responding to the problem. In Chapters III and IV I attempt to examine one of these responses; in Chapters V and VI I concern myself with the second major attitude of late Victorian writers toward the same problem.

In the following chapter I give some consideration to Swinburne, a writer who has been cast by literary historians in the role of a sensualist and decadent; for he was one whose life and works testified to his perverse notions of beauty and pleasure and his defiance of conventional social codes. Swinburne in the eighteen-sixties, like Wilde and his circle in the eighteen-nineties, created literary art which reflected an unusual and highly personal ideal of beauty. In his fiction, no less than in his poetry and drama, he embodied his ideal in the figure of the *femme fatale*, who is always fatal to her lovers, not in any passive and uncomprehending manner, but in a deliberate, sadistic manner. As Wilde, Beerbohm, and Beardsley adored the *femme fatale* in spite of her cruelty, Swinburne adored her precisely because of her cruelty. It is my purpose,
then, in Chapter III to establish the nature of Swinburne's creative imagination by a careful examination of the symbolic *femme fatale* as the figure appears in his literary art—especially in his two novels, *Love's Cross-Currents* and *Lesbia Brandon*. 
In 1947 Graham Hough announced the need for a detailed study of fin-de-siècle literature which would "explain the lavish and eccentric display of erotic symbolism that made its appearance on both sides of the Channel after the middle of the century." In one brief passage in The Last Romantics he enumerates various obsessions of many of the late Victorians, including those with certain "illicit alliances between love, pain and death" and with "the femme fatale or the vampire," as well as with other figures. "No doubt," he says, "some of the mythological embodiments of these states of mind, notably the conception of women as some sort of mysterious fatality, were what Jung would call archetypes, personifications of forces and ideas buried very deep in the human psyche, which social and literary decorum had formerly prevented from finding expression. But others were the result of purely private aberrations of the erotic sensibility."

Whether private aberrations or larger patterns of archetypal projections, their literary manifestations had

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already been noted in 1933 in the seminal work of Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony.* A. C. Swinburne is among those whom Praz discusses, showing that the poet's own peculiar sensual nature is responsible for the appearance in his works of sadistic women and masochistic men. A broader implication of these recurring figures than is suggested by Praz, however, is that Swinburne has embodied in art the deepest of all possible psychic dramas: the poet's disastrous love affair with the archetype of his own anima, represented in his works in the figure of the *femme fatale.*

It is not easy to establish Swinburne among those artists who sacrifice the world for their art and who live in the imagination more than in society. However, he remained throughout his long career a devotee of the craft he practiced and often spoke out against poets who prostituted themselves to philistine ideals. In his younger years he actually placed himself solidly in the camp of the Pre-Raphaelites and the aesthetes. Georges Laforcade, his French biographer, roughly dates Swinburne's aesthetic period as the seven years preceding and including the publication of *Poems and Ballads* in 1866. By 1863, when he visited Paris, says Laforcade, Swinburne had "adopted with few modifications

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2 Oxford University Press, 1933. See especially Chapter Four.

3 The evidence refutes Hough's categorical denial that Swinburne was "ever a devotee of art for art's sake" (p. 189).
the French theory of art for art's sake as laid down by Gautier, Baudelaire and Poe" and had become "aware of the sovereign importance of beauty, or rather his ideal of beauty had changed to a certain extent: it had become something heavy, calm, majestic, impassible, like Baudelaire's 'dream carved in stone.'" These are the years in which he was writing the sensuous Chastelard and the heavily-cadenced verses of Poems and Ballads, as well as some of the luxurious prose appearing in Lesbia Brandon and Love's Cross-Currents.

While Lafourcade and E. K. Brown both claim that with the publication of Songs before Sunrise in 1871 Swinburne had repudiated "the rose-gathering attitude--the search for sensation--which had ruled his youth" and had begun to espouse a doctrine of art as a criticism of life, A. E. Freeman, in a 1927 article, argues that Swinburne's political poems are really but a manifestation of his psychic affinity with rebels and underdogs. Freeman observes, for example, that Swinburne's interests in the politics of France and Italy were theoretical, not practical; for he knew next to nothing about the particulars of the struggles. The remarkable thing about his abstract philosophy of liberty, says Freeman, is that "it required so little feeding from the

4Swinburne (London, 1932), p. 112.

exterior, being apparently self-sustaining from internal sources."6

Freeman's supposition is supported by the poetry and criticism of Swinburne. His works always seem to be self-generated and self-sufficient, with no dependency upon the external world to give them their value. There is an implied relationship between Swinburne's aesthetics and his ethics, since his idea of the beautiful and his idea of the good both feed upon themselves within the imagination. If, as I maintain, the image of Swinburne's internal creative force is projected upon the world as a femme fatale, then both his aesthetics and his ethics are inherently barren, neither bearing any necessary relationship to external reality and neither, therefore, having anything to do with problems of good and evil except as stimuli to the imagination. Indeed, as in "l'esthétique du mal," the ideas of evil and death seem to afford more pleasure to the imagination than do the ideas of goodness and life. Ideals of poetry or of politics exist solely to satisfy the mind, not to influence the world.

Swinburne was sharply critical of writers who were more interested in preaching a sermon than in singing a song. Whitman was a case in point. For Swinburne there were two Whitmans: one was the "poet," the other was the "formalist." The first was a singer, the second a theoretician or

6."The Psychological Basis of Swinburne's Convictions," Poet Lore, XXXVIII (Winter 1927), 584.
or dogmatist (XVI, 411-14). He is a singer, says Swinburne, when he "'[arouses] an unquenchable feeling and ardour!'" for perfection. "It is when he is thinking of his part, of the duties and properties of a representative poet, an official democrat, that the strength forsakes his hand and the music ceases at his lips" (XVI, 416). Swinburne was recording this in 1872, a time when he himself is said to have been guilty of polemics on behalf of Italian liberty. But if Freeman is correct in his estimate of Swinburne as a man who is singing less out of real political conviction than out of the instinct to sing, it can be easily seen that Swinburne's theory of art changed less in kind than in degree between 1866 and 1871, and that he continued to write out of a passion for poetry rather than out of a passion for his subject. Even a "love poem" such as "A Match," by the reckoning of John D. Rosenberg, was written for its own sake: "Self-engendered, self-contained, the poem is inspired not by the emotion of love but by the emotion of poetry itself."  

When Swinburne reviewed Les Fleurs du Mal in 1861 and drew Charles Baudelaire to the attention of Englishmen, he wrote of the French poet as later critics were to write of himself. The following description could as easily have

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been made of Swinburne's most memorable verse from the heart of his "aesthetic period" as of Baudelaire's:

The sound of his metres suggests colour and perfume. His perfect workmanship makes every subject admirable and respectable. Throughout the chief part of this book he has chosen to dwell mainly upon sad and strange things—the weariness of pain and the bitterness of pleasure—the perverse happiness and wayward sorrows of exceptional people. It has the languid, lurid beauty of close and threatening weather—a heavy, heated temperature, with dangerous hothouse scents in it; thick shadows of cloud about it, and fire of molten light. . . . Failure and sorrow, next to physical beauty and perfection of sound or scent, seem to have an infinite attraction for him (XIII, 419).

Swinburne also notes some resemblances of Baudelaire to Keats, Poe, Marlowe, Byron, and Gautier—most of whom were strong influences on Swinburne as well.

On the subject of the purpose of art, Swinburne asserts that although Baudelaire does not write "a sonnet like a moral prescription" (indeed, to do so is to be "no real artist, but a huckster and vendor of miscellaneous wares"), he has provided "moralties in plenty" in every poem. "Morality" for Swinburne consists in neither warning against evil nor exhorting to it, since "the one fault is as great as the other." The material content of a poem by itself—even a subject such as disease and sin or sorrow and death—does not make a poem immoral. Without knowing a thing about its author's ideologies, one ought to be able to regard such a poem as "quite beautiful and valuable . . . as merely the 'design of an unknown master'" (XIII, 423, 424).

His defense of Baudelaire's use of unorthodox
subjects is essentially the same as his own defense of *Poems and Ballads*. In 1866, shortly after the appearance of his controversial collection, Swinburne answered the attacks made on him as an immoralist. His main line of reasoning was that he had not written to advocate anything evil, and since the poems did not (indeed, could not) reflect the personal sentiments or experiences of the poet, they should be judged by the excellence of their designs— that is, for their intrinsic merits as beautiful creations of the imagination. He argues that his poems are not subjective and lyrical but objective and dramatic, and that, as a result, "no utterance of enjoyment or despair, belief or unbelief, can properly be assumed as the assertion of its author's personal feeling or faith." To consider each poem as reflecting "the writer's conviction . . . would leave nothing behind them but a sense of cloudy chaos and suicidal contradiction." He concludes his defense with a recognition that because he has not written for children and has not considered it healthy to seek the approval of immature audiences, he must, perforce, seem an outcast. "I have never worked for praise or pay, but simply by impulse, and to please myself; I must therefore, it is to be feared, remain where I am, shut out from the communion of these" (XVI, 372). This confession, if no other, attests to Swinburne's resignation to an alienated existence as a result of his fidelity to the demands of his creative imagination. It places Swinburne among those artists who willingly lose
the world for the sake of an aesthetic ideal which hovers perpetually just beyond his grasp.

Within six years of the publication of his "Notes on Poems and Reviews," Swinburne had modified only slightly his position with regard to the artist's role. He reaffirmed his belief in the autonomy of art but at the same time insisted that art could have other orientations as well. The review of Victor Hugo's *L'Année Terrible* provides some indication of Swinburne's attitude toward aesthetics in 1872. He argues sensibly that the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art* has both an affirmative and a negative dimension. He agrees with the basic tenets of the theory: "No work of art has any worth or life in it that is not done on the absolute terms of art" and, as art, it must be "judged by the laws of the special art to whose laws it is amenable." Furthermore, "the rule of art is not the rule of morals; . . . in art, the one question is not what you mean but what you do," a perfect Wildean doctrine. On the other hand, art may also have a "moral meaning or design" and may "ally itself with moral or religious passion, with the ethics or the politics of a nation or an age." And Swinburne cites the examples of Aeschylus, Dante, Milton, and Shelley, all of whom refute by their works those who argue that art must not be permitted to be "an ally of anything else" (XIII, 242, 243, 244).

The one consistent note he strikes throughout his essays on art from early to late is that the artist's function as a man and that, accordingly, his artistic creations
should be judged as "art" and not for the ideas they contain. The success of a poem is to be measured not by the poet's choice of materials but how well he has used them. "The ideal dramatist," he writes, "is the greatest of all poets," for he has "no visible preferences; in his capacity of artist he is incapable of personal indignation or predilection. . . . Evil and good, and things and men, are in his hands as clay in the potter's, and he moulds them to the use and purpose of his art alone" (XIII, 254).

Despite his continuing belief that a work of art must have integrity as art before it succeed as anything else, it is with Swinburne's earlier, more orthodox "aesthetic" views which this chapter is concerned. Although I have limited the scope of my study of the symbolic femme fatale to fiction, I feel that an examination of a few of Swinburne's early poems and dramas will help show that his ideal remained constant throughout his early literary period. In the poems of Poems and Ballads (1866), in Chastelard (1865), and in his two novels Swinburne is artistically most convincing that he is violently enamored of his own imaginative powers, painfully enslaved by them, and unwilling to give up the illusion that they will provide him with endless novelty and pleasure. What Graham Hough says about William Morris and The Earthly Paradise could well be said of Swinburne or, for that matter, of such writers as Beardsley, who was devoted to the beautiful products of his own artistic imagination. The fantasy life is timeless and self-generative.
The imaginative poet is a lonely god, taking what joy he can in the sterile fruits of his creative powers. Hough comments on Morris's poem in particular, but his observations are applicable to the practices of all of the "last romantics" whom he treats elsewhere in his book: "The only Earthly Paradise there is is the paradise of the tale-teller, the realm of art. The story-telling in the Earthly Paradise has the same symbolic function as the Grecian Urn in Keats's ode--it represents art in general, the only deathless land that actually exists: the only immortality is the kind of immortality predicted of Keats's nightingale, and at the end death has to be faced after all."^9

The paradox of "living death" or "voluntary slavery" within the paradise of art is most frequently suggested in Swinburne's early works in the figure of the *femme fatale*, either as a conscious or as an unconscious symbol of the paradoxical nature of the creative imagination. Her function is invariably to torment her lover with her beauty without ever gratifying his ultimate request: permanent union. The experience of being held captive is, oddly enough, as inspirational as it is frustrating; there is always the hope that she will consent, and the lover is moved to dare (or to perform) the impossible for her sake. But she is la belle dame sans merci chiefly because she takes too much pleasure in watching him suffer. Her lover's masochism is as necessary

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^9Hough, p. 123.
to her as her sadism is to him. Hence, a *femme fatale* is "fatal" only to men whose masochism matches the intensity of her sadism. The male lovers of Dolores and Faustine crave the kisses of these vampire women; Tannhäuser of "Laus Veneris" all too willingly returns to the prison of Venus's pleasure mountain; and Chastelard is doomed as much by his own desire to be mastered as by Mary Stuart's need to master him. Similarly, only an artist of Swinburne's temperament—that is, one who takes pleasure in daring the forbidden—is destined to an agonizing sense of unfulfillment. Only in this type of creative artist is there the phenomenon of the unattainable dream, the imagined but untranslatable idea of perfect beauty.

A number of the poems in the 1866 edition of *Poems and Ballads*—those poems which caught the public's censorious eye—are verse portraits of Swinburne's ideal woman. "Faustine" and "Dolores" are two of the most striking. The historical Faustine is practically irrelevant here; Swinburne has created an original she-devil. She is outwardly beautiful but inwardly damned, for her face is only "her soul's screen"; behind the gilt mask is death itself. For all her beauty and charms, she is sterile, deadly, and inhumanly lustful. She is but a "love-machine / With clockwork joints of supple gold" (VIII, 243). Such a mechanical monster proves insatiable because she lacks a human conscience.

Dolores is no less heartless than Faustine. She, too,
is "splendid and sterile" and has a "beautiful passionate body / That never has ached with a heart" (VIII, 266). The physical appearance of "Our Lady of Pain" suggests something of her cruel beauty. She has "cold eyelids," "hard eyes," "heavy white limbs," and a "red mouth like a venemous flower." She appeals to the masochistic poet-narrator, who asks her to "bite hard" with her "lips full of lust and of laughter" and to "feed me and fill me with pleasure / Ere pain come in turn." Severe physical tortures, while causing physical pain, actually increase his mental pleasures. Swinburne's narrator realizes that the bloody kisses of his beloved "hurt not the heart or the brain." As a matter of fact, since these sadistic embraces are only imagined to be taking place and can never be experienced outside the mind itself, Swinburne's narrator (and Swinburne himself) is indulging in onanistic "cerebral lechery," which Péladan claims to be "le vice suprême."10

The unrequited poet, like the unrequited lover, is himself responsible for his failure to achieve his ideal. Ultimately, of course, he is not responsible, for he has been unfortunately blessed with an active imagination which continually creates new images of desire. His trouble is that the desired object at any given moment is always beyond

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his reach. The creative man, by virtue of his superior powers of imagination, projects onto the world a series of mental images that are fated to have their endings as well as their beginnings within the mind of their creator. There simply are no women or aesthetic forms in life which can provide the beauty and intensity of pleasure which the imagination demands. Hence, frustration and despair characterize the poet and the lover alike.

Swinburne's narrator places himself among the poets who "embalm and embrace [Dolores] / With spices and savours of song." The poetic activity, in other words, is the nearest the lover can come to achieving a union with his beloved, but that is far from adequate. The artistic temperament has a "thirst of unbearable things" and a "hunger of change and emotion" which only the creative imagination can satisfy. Swinburne's search for the perfect poetic form in which to incarnate his psychic ideal has all the characteristics of an erotic quest for a woman who grants the ultimate satisfaction: a union that ends his need for novelty--a union which, in fact, annihilates his desire for life.

The outcome of a successfully embodied fantasy is dramatized in "Laus Veneris," Swinburne's treatment of the legend of Tannhäuser. Swinburne shows that to have achieved the wished-for ideal is to have lost everything else. A total commitment to the aesthetic or to the erotic ideal necessitates the sacrifice of the human life. In both cases--
the artist enamored of art and the knight enamored of sensual pleasure—the lover is held captive by the object of his desire. Ironically, his enslavement, as painful as it is, is preferable to being free.

In the Tannhäuser story as used by Swinburne, the knightly minnesinger is supposed to have entered voluntarily the delightful but dangerous grottoes of Venus beneath her pleasure mountain, as does the Tannhäuser of Beardsley. Once there, he loses the ability to resume "natural" life. His thralldom to Venus is, however, voluntary, as is shown by his freedom to leave to request forgiveness of the pope. His return is also voluntary, as is shown by his lack of interest in waiting to see whether the pope's staff will begin to blossom. He merely assumes that the nature of his relationship with Venus precludes the possibility of future communion with ordinary men and women and that becoming part of that world would be as unnatural as the miracle of a dry stick's returning to life. That he returns to the Mount of Venus although he in fact is eligible to live an ordinary life shows that he is governed less by what he is or has done than by what he imagines he is or has done.

"Laus Veneris" is a poignant dramatic soliloquy spoken by Tannhäuser, now returned from the pope and convinced that it is his fate to live until judgment day in Venus's pleasure palace beneath the Horselberg. It is important to remember that Tannhäuser is only supposing he is enslaved; but the subjective reality is often more powerful
than objective facts. Tannhäuser admits that Venus is "my soul's body." But he would give her up to return to the world of nature, "where air might wash and long leaves cover me." His wish is actually a death-wish, not unlike that of Tennyson's Tithonus, who would rather die than to have eternal life without real fulfillment. Tannhäuser speaks:

Ah yet would God that stems and roots were bred
Out of my weary body and my head,
That sleep were sealed upon me with a seal,
And I were as the least of all his dead.

But he knows that death is "more pitiful than desire" and that, furthermore, death and desire are "one thing and the same" (VIII, 147, 148). Here with Venus he remains perpetually unsated because she offers perpetual novelty and excess. He eats not the "fruit of life" but rather the "fruit of my desire, / For her love's sake whose lips through mine respire." He is doomed for an eternity to live with the "unassuaged desires" of Venus, his soul:

Yes, all she slayeth; yes, every man save me;
Me, love, thy lover that must cleave to thee
Till the ending of the days and ways of earth,
The shaking of the sources of the sea.

Me, most forsaken of all souls that fell;
Me, satiated with things insatiable. . . .

In the ten years since he first came to Venus the "savour [of sweet things] is all turned now into tears" (VIII, 150, 151, 154).

Swinburne's depiction of the uniquely barren love affair of Tannhäuser, the poet and minnesinger, is supremely suggestive of the dilemma of the artist who gives up
participation in the world of men in order to maintain the blissful-painful union with the image of his innermost soul. He alone of all men knows what it is like to have communion with a projection of his own psychic ideal. It is to commune with himself in sterile isolation. The poem concludes with four stanzas that paint the bitter-sweet fate of the man in possession of the creature of his own imagination:

Ah love, there is no better life than this;
To have known love, how bitter a thing it is,
And afterward be cast out of God's sight;
Yea, these that know not, shall they have such bliss

High up in heaven before his face
As we twain in the heavy-hearted place,
   Remembering love and all the dead delight,
And all that time was sweet with for a space?

For till the thunder in the trumpet be,
Soul may divide from body, but not we
   One from another; I hold thee with my hand,
I let mine eyes have all their will of thee,

I seal myself upon thee with my might,
Abiding alway out of all men's sight
   Until God loosen over sea and land
The thunder of the trumpets of the night.

(VIII, 161)

Swinburne has shown not so much that Tannhäuser's life with Venus is intolerable but that he suffers mentally, knowing he cannot live differently even if he wanted to.

An interesting sidelight on Swinburne's metaphoric use of the Tannhäuser material, and further evidence that the Mount of Venus represents the realm of art, is Philip Stephen Barto's 1916 study, Tannhäuser and the Mountain of Venus. Barto is disposed to conclude that Venus's mountain has never existed except in the dimensions of the dream or
the fantasy: "By means of a potion, by flying through the air upon some sort of a steed—nightmare, goat or calf—by lying down to sleep, by falling into a trance, and usually at night, these are the ways by which the Venusberg has been reached and all point to the fact that the place is not of this earth." Gautier's obsessed priest, it will be recalled, made his initial journey to Clarimonde's pleasure palace at night and on horseback shortly after he had retired for the night. Barto finds "the dreamland route" to the Venusberg common to most versions of the legend. On the problem of locating the home of Venus, Barto can do worse than to concur with Ernst Elster, whom he quotes: "... the true Venusberg lay in the magic land of poesy which no mortal foot has ever trod."

Swinburne's knight is, of course, no mortal. He lives, like Beardsley's Abbé Fanfreluche, in "immortal" art as the archetype of the masochistic artist, martyr to the cause of his own insatiable appetite for exceptional pleasures. And his beloved Venus is his sadistic tormentor, the archetype of that deep-dwelling feminine aspect of his psyche, the unconscious mind, from which come his ecstasies but from which also comes his agony. Swinburne has said: "I have made Venus the one love of her knight's whole life, as Mary

11 Pp. 44-45.  
12 Ibid., p. 43.  
13 Ibid., p. xi.
Stuart of Chastelard's; I have sent him, poet and soldier, fresh to her fierce embrace" (XVI, 366).

The Mary Stuart of the first of his tragedies dealing with her is indeed a woman with a fierce embrace; and Chastelard desires her caresses. An examination of this part of the trilogy depicts metaphorically, as in "Laus Veneris," the dilemma of the artist enamored of an elusive aesthetic ideal.

Swinburne's queen is barely distinguishable from her historical prototype. Nearly two decades after creating his factional Mary Stuart in Chastelard, Swinburne wrote a pair of essays which reveal his understanding of the sixteenth-century Mary. The biographical monograph written for the Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1883 stresses her passionate self-regard and claims that she would have sacrificed all political loyalties "rather than forego the faintest chance of personal revenge" (XIV, 409). She apparently was in life what she was in Swinburne's artistic imagination: a venomous woman, fatal to all those who happened into her web.

In the "Note on the Character of Mary Queen of Scots," written the year before the Encyclopaedia article, he tries to account for Mary's notorious arrogance and vengefulness. He paints a lurid picture of the young girl as a witness to if not a participant in the sadistic and perverse pleasures of life in the court of Catherine de' Medici. The details are presented in witty but forceful ironic understatements:
The virgins who shared the vigils of her maidenhood or brightened the celebration of her nuptials were such as composed the Queen-Mother's famous "flying squadron" of high-born harlots, professionally employed in the task of making the worship of Venus Pandemos subserve the purposes of Catholic faith or polity, and occasionally, as on the Feast of St. Bartholomew, exhilarated by such diversions as the jocose examination of naked and newly-murdered corpses with an eye to the satisfaction of a curiosity which the secular pen of a modern historian must decline to explain with the frankness of a clerical contemporary. The cloistral precinct which sheltered her girlhood from such knowledge of evil as might in after days have been of some protection to her guileless levity was the circuit of a court whose pursuits and recreations were divided between the alcoves of Sodom and the playground of Aceldama (XIV, 425).

In short, she "was reared from her very infancy . . . in the atmosphere of a palace which it would be flattery to call a brothel or a slaughter-house." And while it is conceivable that she could come forth innocent, "it is absolutely and glaringly impossible that she should come forth . . . ignorant of evil." Swinburne's most concise characterization of Mary shows her to be a woman capable of anything and everything: she possessed an "inborn impulse as a frank, passionate, generous, unscrupulous, courageous and loyal woman, naturally self-willed and trained to be self-seeking, born and bred an imperial and royal creature, at once in the good and bad or natural and artificial sense of the words" (XIV, 426-27, 438).

Chastelard (1865), the first play in the trilogy which also includes Bothwell (1874) and Mary Stuart (1881), is the story of the poetic French lover of Mary Queen of Scots—a man who, when he sees that their hoped-for permanent union is doomed, submits to the pleasurable agony of being destroyed
by his truelove. He reaches the point of not being able to live either with her or without her. She alone holds the key to his life and death, and he prefers to perish in the ecstasy of one ultimate fierce embrace than to live removed from her altogether.

Like his historical counterpart, Chastelard is a "suicidal young monomaniac" (XIV, 438). This melancholy lover is given to morbid introspection that amounts to self-flagellation, one of the manifestations of the narcissism of a masochist. He is more in love with himself and with his private notions of things than with things as they are. Since his perverse self-love is greater than his compassion for others suffering equally from unrequited love, he all but ignores the protestations of love coming from his former sweetheart, Mary Beaton. He is as incapable of tenderness as the cruel queen he worships; and, were it not for his need to be mastered, he would make a perfect sadistic partner to the submissive Mary Beaton, whose happiness is as dependent upon Chastelard as his is upon Mary Stuart. This rejected sweetheart tells him as he awaits death in prison that although she has loved him she cannot really pity a man whose heart is harder than that of the woman who has sentenced him (VIII, 112). Chastelard later acknowledges that his eagerness for annihilation is really a form of self-love and wonders whether Mary Beaton, too, is guilty of "an amorous quarrel with herself." Perhaps she is not in love with
Chastelard at all but with "her own wilful soul" (VIII, 113).

Chastelard's narcissism makes him a type of the artist about which Jung and Neumann have written and to which the preceding chapter is devoted. Chastelard is as much a poet in the drama as was his model in history. Swinburne does much to establish his artistic temperament by having him and Mary Beaton render on separate occasions songs that the fictional Chastelard has composed. It is important to note as well that these songs are bitter love ballads and were inspired by his love for Mary Stuart. In Chastelard's process of poetic creation an important role is played by the voluptuous woman upon whom the poet's psychic ideals can be projected. For any artist, however, the beautiful creature always falls short of the perfection he has envisioned as residing there. And yet the artist is fated to seek continually for the perfect incarnation of his dream. Mary Stuart calls her wooer "mad for perfect love," thus recognizing the artist's fatal impulsion toward the impossible dream (VIII, 74).

Most of Chastelard's fascination with the queen is the perverse attraction to what Mario Praz has termed "the beauty of the Medusa," i.e., the loveliness of terror. In trying to account for his love, Chastelard names several of the queen's most compelling charms—her eyes, her hair, her

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14 The Romantic Agony, Chapter One.
cheeks—but he dwells longest on the description of her all-too-dangerous mouth. It is a "flower's lip with a snake's lip, stinging sweet, / And sweet to sting with" (VIII, 16). Here Chastelard establishes himself as a masochistic lover, eager to kiss lips that sting him, eager to gaze upon a face that can destroy him.

The comparison of Mary Stuart to Venus, the tempestuous sea-born love goddess, is maintained throughout the play. The queen possesses a breast-clasp whose design symbolizes the wearer. She tells Chastelard what is depicted thereon:

A Venus crowned, that eats the hearts of men:
Below her flies a love with a bat's wings,
And strings the hair of paramours to bind
Live birds' feet with.

The sea froths underfoot;
She stands upon the sea and it curls up
In soft loose curls that run to one in the wind.
(VIII, 20)

Another association with Venus and the sea is the significant crossing of Mary Stuart and her retinue from France to Scotland, during which Chastelard has experienced a period of poetic creativity. Then, in Scotland, on the night of his fatal rendezvous with the queen, Chastelard tries to recall a French song about a "strange-haired woman with sad singing lips, / Cold in the cheek like any stray of sea, / And sweet to touch" who is caught in fishermen's nets. Men who saw her face, the song goes, "Fell in hot love, and having lain with her / Died soon." Chastelard confesses that he has, in effect, "kissed the sea-witch [Mary Stuart] on her eyes/ And
my lips ache with it," and that he now awaits his necessary
death (VIII, 53-54). In his prison soliloquy in Act V,
Chastelard again identifies Mary Stuart with Venus:

> For all Christ's work this Venus is not quelled,
> But reddens at the mouth with blood of men,
> Sucking between small teeth the sap of the veins,
> Dabbling with death her little tender lips—
> A bitter beauty, poisonous-pearled mouth.
> (VIII, 110)

He has by this time vowed to escape this "Fair fearful Venus
made of deadly foam" by dying as quickly as possible.
Chastelard has been in virtual ecstasy at least since Act
III, when he begins in earnest to anticipate being slain by
the merciless queen:

> I hear my blood sing, and my lifted heart
> Is like a springing water blown of wind
> For pleasure of this deed. Now, in God's name,
> I swear if there be danger in delight
> I must die now: if joys have deadly teeth,
> I'll have them bite my soul to death, and end
> In the old asp's way, Egyptian-wise; be killed
> In royal purple fashion. Look, my love
> Would kill me if my body were past hurt
> Of any man's hand; and to die thereof,
> I say, is sweeter than all sorts of life.
> I would not have her love me now, for then
> I should die meanlier some time. I am safe,
> Sure of her face, my life's end in her sight,
> My blood shed out about her feet--by God,
> My heart feels drunken when I think of it.
> (VIII, 54)

Mary Stuart is cruel and merciless not because she is
malevolent; rather, she destroys her lovers because she
thrives on their blood like a vampire. She acts out of an
instinct of self-preservation. Just prior to her discovery
of Chastelard hiding within her chamber (Act III), Mary
Stuart admires herself in the mirror: "I am quite beautiful.
"How my hair shines." She then muses aloud about her first husband, Francis II of France, hinting that his decline and death contributed to her beauty and vitality. He had

a pale little mouth that clung on mine
When I had kissed him by the faded eyes
And either thin cheek beating with faint bloods.
Well, he was sure to die soon; I do think
He would have given his body to be slain,
Having embraced my body. Now God knows,
I have no man to do as much for me
As give me but a little of his blood
To fill my beauty from, though I go down
Pale to my grave for want--I think not." (VIII, 58-59).

And as she notes her increased pallor and her need for blood, she espies Chastelard's reflection in the mirror; and the vampire has her next victim.

Chastelard becomes a willing sacrifice because he knows that he has been cast off as the favored lover of the beautiful queen. Just as the artist knows his love of ideal beauty and his task of finding the perfect form in which to incarnate his artistic vision are doomed to failure or only partial success at the most, so Chastelard recognizes that his inordinate love of Mary Stuart has been doomed from the outset:

. . . it may be love was a sort of curse
Made for my plague and mixed up with my days
Somewise in their beginning; or indeed
A bitter birth begotten of sad stars
At mine own body's birth, that heaven might make
My life taste sharp where other men drank sweet;
But whether in heavy body or broken soul,
I know it must go on to be my death.

His sad life, he says, is "no fault but God's" and he himself refuses to be penitent for those sins in which he is perfect
but for which he is not responsible (VIII, 65, 66).

And so the fated man perishes and the fatal woman is renewed in her potential for destruction. Swinburne has presented in his story of Chastelard's poignant life and death a metaphoric statement about the destructive results of an artist's involuntary fascination with that feminine ideal which exists perfectly in his imagination but which fails to please when it is objectified in the world. Swinburne's conclusion is Chastelard's: the artist is not responsible for the peculiar quality of his creative imagination, and his resulting personal tragedy can be "no fault but God's."

In his epistolary novel, *Love's Cross-Currents*, Swinburne tells another tale of frustrated love. This novel, like *Lesbia Brandon* which followed it, is dominated by a pair of *femmes fatales* with whom two young men seek impossible alliances. With perhaps the exception of Mary Stuart's icy self-interest, there is no colder indifference to a man's suffering portrayed in Swinburne's narratives than in the character of Lady Helen Midhurst.

First appearing in *Love's Cross-Currents* (written 1862; published 1877), Lady Midhurst appears as a minor character in *Lesbia Brandon* (begun ca. 1864), where she is described as a "venomous old beauty" (p. 230);¹⁵ but she is equally venomous in the earlier work. In *Love's Cross-Currents*...

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Currents she manipulates for her own pleasure the affairs of nearly everyone else. All of her carefully engineered intrigues are especially appealing to her because they involve incestuous relationships. She subtly encourages her grandson, Reginald, to carry on an affair with her married niece, Clara Radworth. At the same time, she schemes with her nephew, Frank, to succeed with Amicia Cheyne, her married granddaughter. All persons in the novel suffer except Lady Midhurst herself, who not only comes through unscathed but actually appears rejuvenated by having drawn a little blood from all the others.

Sometimes as predator, at other times as legislator, but always as *femme fatale*, Lady Midhurst imposes her will on her kinsmen as if they were nothing but pieces in a dramatic game she is playing for her own amusement. She advises Amicia to arrange for a gathering of the principal actors in the drama. "Invite Frank to Midcombe, as soon as the Radworths come; get up your plan of conduct after some French novel—Balzac is a good model if you can live up to him; encourage Mrs. Radworth, don't snub her in any way, let her begin patronizing you again; she will if you manage her properly; be quite the child with her, and, if you can, be the fool with her husband; but you must play this stroke very delicately. . . ." And with insidious glee Lady Midhurst proceeds to set the stage for her little comedy. She conceives of the inter-relationship of the actors as governed
laws by which one can control events, as one can plot the path of a billiard ball by aiming the cue ball accurately. And in metaphors of this game she goes on to speak to Amicia of the "next stroke" and of getting "the two balls in the middle pocket." Lady Midhurst, it must be noted, is not interested in seeing a happy outcome for all; she thrills only in "the beauty of the game," in the precise pattern of action she has imposed upon these human billiard balls (pp. 79-80).

Lady Midhurst is not only an arch-manipulator of the affairs of her family; she is also a stony anti-sentimentalist. Frank writes to his sister Clara of their Aunt Midhurst in terms that show his awareness of the old woman's heartless scheming. A recent letter from her, he confesses, made him feel "hot and sick with the sense of meanness." He complains that Lady Midhurst is a tyrant and that they all necessarily "lie at her mercy." In another letter to Clara, Frank observes that the aging aunt "has the passion of intrigue and management still strong; likes nothing so well, evidently, as the sense of power to make and break schemes and overset them" (pp. 135, 154).

The exercise of this power over others prompts them to resort to vivid figurative language to describe her. Often the comparison is to various species of predators. Clara Radworth feels she must be some kind of poisonous serpent with venomous fangs, but she also notes other
resemblances: "To me she always looked like a cat, or some bad sort of bird, with those greyish-green eyes and their purple pupils" (p. 75). Frank places her in "the vulturine order as to beak and diet" (p. 156).

The destructiveness of this charming predator has evidently proved fatal for several men in her past. She broadly hints that in her younger days she might have been the object of the attention of Captain Harewood even while he was courting her daughter, Amicia's mother. Lady Midhurst's alleged hatred of him as a son-in-law and his subsequent divorce are shrouded in mysterious causes about which one can only speculate (p. 77). To judge from clues she provides elsewhere, and from the allusive name Swinburne has given her, one suspects that Helen Midhurst must indeed have played the role of *femme fatale* in the lives of other men as well. Referring to an obscure but scandalous French novel, she singles out the deadly heroine of the piece as a portrait of herself: "I am the Lady Manhurst of that nice book. I cheat at cards; I break the heart of a rising poet . . . ; and I make two brothers fight a duel, and one is killed through my direct agency. I run away with Lord Avery; I am not certain that my husband dies a natural death; I rather think, indeed, that I poison him in the last chapter but one" (p. 74).

Redgie records Clara's comments on Lady Midhurst and the word-portrait she paints of the old tyrant as some kind
of sardonic goddess, seated "with cold folded hands and
equable observant eyes, half contemptuous in an artistic way
of those who choose either [right or wrong]—that cruel
tolerance and unmerciful compassion for good and bad—that
long tacit inspection, as of a dilettante cynic bidden report
critically on the creatures in the world, that custom of
choosing her point of view where she can see the hard side
of things glitter and the hard side of characters refract
light in her eyes, till she comes . . . to patronize God by
dint of despising men. . . ." Her world is lifeless and
artificial: "'It is all dust and sand, jewels and iron,
dead metal and stone, and dry sunshine: like some fearful
rich no-man's land'" (p. 161).

Lady Midhurst, for all her artistic plotting and
arranging the patterns of lives of others, nevertheless
advises Clara that fate determines the course of events and
that it is far better "never to make a story," that is,
ever to tamper with circumstances as they are (p. 177).
She herself cannot, however, live by her own advice, no
matter how sound it in fact is. She, it appears, has been
fated never to be a mere observer. She has always relished
playing puppeteer. And now, at the end of the twelvemonth
covered by the novel, with Redgie and Frank unsettled in
their love lives, with Amicia widowed, and with the
Radworths' marriage in decline, Lady Midhurst seems well
pleased with having pulled so many strings. Of Clara she
writes: "The bureau d'amourettes is a bankrupt concern, you see: her sensation-shop is closed for good. I prophesy she will turn a decent worrying wife of the simpler Anglican breed; home-keeping, sharp-edged, earnestly petty and drily energetic" (p. 180). Someone else might prophesy otherwise about Clara. It seems almost certain that she will become more and more like her Aunt Midhurst, whom she already resembles: a woman given to managing the love affairs of others and enjoying the role of manipulator.

For there is much in Clara that suggests the femme fatale. She is presented, explicitly as well as implicitly, as a near-rival to Lady Midhurst in cool detachment and love of scheming. Swinburne says in the person of the narrator in the Prologue that even at an early age the handsome, dark-skinned Clara had "the composition of a good intriguer" and "a desirable power of making all that could be made out of every chance of enjoyment. She was never one to let the present slip" (p. 53). And the all-knowing Lady Midhurst describes her to Reginald as "quite Elizabethan, weakened by a dash of Mary Stuart . . . at once excitable and cold" (p. 90). Nevertheless, Redgie is magnetically drawn to Clara. "I should like to follow her everywhere, and be her footman or her groom, and see her constantly," he confides to his friend Audley. "I would clean knives and black boots for her" (p. 93). But when he confesses his passion directly to Clara, she keeps him at a distance while not altogether
destroying his hopes for future success. In subsequent correspondence to Audley he again writes of his love for Clara, this time revealing a masochistic tendency. To see her labor for her unappreciative husband, says Redgie, "gives one the wish to be hurt for her." Obviously, he is under the illusion that Clara is superhuman, the incarnation of his feminine ideal: "She is a great angel, and has charge of souls. . . . She has charge of me for one" (pp. 159-60).

It is possible that Swinburne has in mind a vampire relationship between Clara and Ernest Radworth and that her energy is taken from her submissive husband. Lady Midhurst hints as much when she calls attention to Clara's "splendid teeth" and in the same breath alludes to Clara's possible matrimonial intentions after Ernest has been "killed off." "Do you think," she asks Amicia, "the Radworth has two years' vitality left him?" With still another vampire image, she tells Amicia that Clara may harm Redgie and that, as a result, "I shall have to extricate your brother, half eaten, from under her very teeth" (pp. 96, 99).

But Clara wants to give the impression that she is a devoted wife and self-sacrificial to the institution of matrimony. She refers to herself (in a carefully contrived response to Redgie's passionate avowal of love) as a woman incapable of treachery and deceit. One may suppose the contrary, of course, not only from Lady Midhurst's estimate of Clara but also by the choice of images in her denial of
Redgie's assumptions about her. The hypocrite speaks: "I hate hypocrisy. You are quite wrong about me. Because I am simple and frank, because I like (for a change) things and people with some movement in them, you take me for a sort of tied-up tigress, a woman of the Sand breed, a prophetess with some dreadful mission of revolt in her. . . ." She claims instead to be "neither oppressed nor passionate" (p. 108).

On the matter of Clara's refusal to enter into a liaison with Redgie, Lady Midhurst warns Redgie that Clara's letter is neither a flat denial that she is interested nor an admission of reciprocal passion. "She will keep you on and off eternally to no further purpose" (p. 119). Redgie, it seems, bears a striking resemblance to a seventeenth-century ancestor whose name he bears. The earlier Reginald killed himself for love of the Lady Margaret—a lady whose motto was "sans reproche" but which ought to have been "sans merci," observes the nineteenth-century namesake of the desperate lover (p. 141).

Redgie has been characterized as an artistic person with "violent theories and enthusiasm" (p. 84). It is therefore especially meaningful when Lady Midhurst observes that his beloved Clara is a type of woman whom artists love to paint. "When she has posed for the ordinary fastish woman, she goes in for a sort of Madonna-Gitana, a cross of Raphael with Bohemia" (p. 89). Lady Midhurst might have
just as appropriately compared her to a cross between Mary and Helen of Troy, or between a saint and a siren; for the opposing elements of purity and promiscuity embodied in the combination of the virgin and the gypsy are precisely the identifying marks of the *femme fatale*, which Clara, without question, is. Clara, as well as Lady Midhurst, likes to play games mainly to amuse herself and to ward off ennui. Lady Midhurst notes that she makes her husband's life "an Egyptian plague" with "endless needle-probings of his sore mental pieces: enjoys all kinds of fun, sparingly and heartily at once, like a thoroughly initiated Epicurean. . . . She is sublime . . . ; but she is not wholesome." Not the least protective of her own kind, Lady Midhurst warns Redgie that he may be "made into a burnt-offering on the twopenny tinselled side-altar of St. Agnes of Bohemia" (p. 91).

Something of the relationship between the artist and the *femme fatale*, as opposed to the scientist and the *femme fatale*, can be seen in Clara's effect on her two men. Redgie, the poetic lover, and Ernest, the insipid husband, are both under her influence. To account, therefore, for Ernest's aging and declining and the concurrent heightened sense of life in Redgie is to conclude that the difference is in the men and not in the woman. If Clara, by Lady Midhurst's calculations, is poisonous to base things and beneficial to noble ones, the implications are that she will inspire the
poet but destroy the dullard. However, only part of this seems true. Clara does indeed deplete the life of her hus­band, as Mary Stuart did of hers. But she also has a destructive effect on the poet-lover, as Mary Stuart does on Chastelard. The reason is simple, and Lady Midhurst's theory remains essentially valid. Men like Ernest Radworth can die but they cannot really suffer from a *femme fatale* because they are unable to feel life deeply enough, are not imagina­tive enough, to become enslaved to the *idea* they have of her. Men like Redgie, on the other hand, experience an intense, if somewhat brief, joy as they become keenly aware of her value to them; and their deepest tragedy is precisely that keen awareness. Only men who can feel deeply can suffer deeply.

Another literary embodiment of the artist's dilemma presented in the metaphor of the doomed lover of his feminine ideal is *Lesbia Brandon*, which was published posthumously in 1952 but which Swinburne began as early as 1864, just a year before the appearance of *Chastelard*.

*Lesbia Brandon* is an incomplete and fragmented work, but the story may be pieced together with little real diffi­culty. For the purposes of the present study, it is more important to know something about the relationship of the characters than about the outcome of the action. The novel divides its attention between two young men, Herbert and Denham, who both have an incestuous attraction toward the same married sister, Margaret. Although Herbert is her
brother, Denham is only her half brother, and neither she nor he is aware that they share the same father. Both of her brothers are passionate men given to the extremes of introspection and impulsive action fraught with danger. The pleasure ideal of Herbert, while tending more toward the masochistic than that of Denham, is often indistinguishable from Denham's. As Denham and Herbert may be considered masochistic "twins," so Margaret has her sadistic "twin" in Lesbia, whose mother is also Denham's. The lives of these four are destined in the course of the novel to become even more entangled than they are to begin with, and they are to inspire impossible loves which leave all four frustrated or, in the case of Lesbia, dead.

While the novel does not set out to depict the dilemma of the artist overtly, it does draw a parallel between the pleasurable anguish of beautiful but bitter poetry and the delectable torment of lovely but unyielding women. Near the end of the novel, Margaret, who shares with Lesbia the role of femme fatale, solaces herself by crooning nightmarish ballads to her quivering children. She attempts to account for the pleasurable qualities of the dreadful tales and, in so doing, establishes the psychological basis of the paradox of aesthetic pleasure: "Things in verse hurt one, don't they? hit and sting like a cut. They wouldn't hurt us if we had no blood, and no nerves. Verse hurts horribly; people have died of verse-making, and thought their mistresses killed
them—or their reviewers. . . . It's odd that words should change so just by being put into rhyme. They get teeth and bite; they take fire and burn. . . . one can't see why this ringing and rhyming of words should make all the difference in them: one can't tell where the pain or the pleasure ends or begins" (pp. 332-33). And so it is with the relationship between the masochistic lover of a *femme fatale*, where "intense attraction [has] some features not unlike intense antipathy" and where he can hate his beloved "with all his heart as he [loves] her with all his senses" (p. 218).

Margaret would be a model of Grecian perfection, except that hers is a singular beauty. Her eyes are a "delicate and significant shade of the colour more common with beast or bird; pure gold without allay, like the yellowest part of a clear flame. . . ." And her mouth is one that can "suffer and allure" (pp. 189, 190). Her brother Herbert compares her to Helen, Clytemnestra, and Electra, and indirectly to Circe (pp. 209-12). To her half-brother Denham, "Her god-like beauty was as blind and unmerciful as a god" (p. 218). In the course of the novel, Margaret affects violently her two brothers, both of whom are overwhelmed with desire for her. It is the unnatural and frenzied passion of Denham for Margaret that is most frequently depicted:

The glory and the terror of her beauty held down desire and absorbed despair. Rage rose in him again like a returning sea. Furious fancies woke up and fought inside
him, crying out one upon the other. He would have given up his life for leave to touch her, his soul for a chance of dying crushed down under her feet: an emotion of extreme tenderness, lashed to fierce insanity by the circumstances, frothed over into a passion of vehement cruelty. Deeply he desired to die by her, if that could be; and more deeply, if this could be, to destroy her: scourge her into swooning and absorb the blood with kisses; caress and lacerate her loveliness, alleviate and heighten her pains; to feel her foot upon his throat, and wound her with his teeth; submit his body and soul for a little to her lightest will, and satiate upon hers the desperate caprice of his immeasurable desire; to inflict careful torture on limbs too tender to embrace, suck the tears of her laden eyelids, bite through her sweet and shuddering lips (p. 225).

Denham's emotion is intense enough to convince one that his pleasure is limited to an imagined embraced instead of an actual one, which would result in a human sacrifice. Regarded as an analogue to the artist's fervor for his aesthetic ideal, the situation is equally hopeless. The artist's greatest pleasures, too, are restricted to those which originate and are fulfilled within the mind alone, if they are to be fulfilled at all.

Margaret is also loved by Herbert, and the description of their incestuous kiss gives further indication of Swinburne's preoccupation with sado-masochism and the anguish of unrealizable fantasies:

Kneeling with his face lifted to hers, he inhaled the hot fragrance of her face and neck, and trembled with intense and tender delight. Her perfume thrilled and stung him; he bent down and kissed her feet, reached up and kissed her throat.

"You smell of flowers in a hot sun," he said kissing her feet again with violent lips that felt the sweet-scented flesh pressing them back through its soft
covering. She laughed and winced under the heat of his hard kiss, drawing one foot back and striking lightly with the other, which he took and pressed down upon his neck.

"Oh, I should like you to tread me to death! darling!" (p. 264)

After this passionate and masochistic embrace with his sister ("'I wish you would kill me some day; it would be jolly to feel you killing me.'"), Herbert goes to bed and dreams of Margaret,

seeing her mixed with all things, seeming to lose life for her sake, suffering in dreams under her eyes or saving her from death. How far his sudden sharp delight in her beauty and her gracious habits served to change and colour his natural affection, to stimulate his devotion, and make passionate his gratitude, he never thought or felt. But the one keen and hard impression left on him by the whole day's work was this of desperate tenderness and violent submission of soul and body to her love; the day but for her would have been mere torture and trouble throughout; she had made it in part too pleasant to forget; and this he never forgot; the memory of it, and the strong fervour and spirit of love which was the fruit of it, gave in the end a new tone and colour to his life (pp. 265-66).

Such a passionate submission to a woman—and especially to a sister who is described as almost his identical twin—is precisely that type of submission which the artist makes to his art. It is that submission, also, which Narcissus makes to his reflected image, and which, when the desire has been translated into the actual embrace, annihilates him as a conscious entity. As long as Herbert (or Narcissus or the artist) remains unrequited, however, he lives—but always in the agonizing fantasy life typified in the passage quoted above.
The power which Margaret holds over Herbert is equaled, if not exceeded, by the influence which Lesbia exerts on him. Like Margaret, she is incapable of granting his ultimate desire, and his knowledge of this fact nearly drives him to a frenzy. Her beautiful face (and by implication, her body) "was one to attract rather than satisfy" (p. 273). Marked by conspicuous masculinity, she is nevertheless bewitchingly beautiful and especially appealing to the excessively feminine Herbert. At one point he is almost impelled to demonstrate the self-sacrificial intensity of his love: "... if you thought it would amuse you, I would go right over the cliff there and thank God. I should like to have a chance of pleasing you, making a minute's difference to you" (p. 284). Only by becoming her voluntary slave can Herbert express his passion for Lesbia—and then only in words.

His impossible love for his sister and for his androgynous friend is paralleled in his violent love of the sea. And sea imagery connecting the ideas of erotic and aesthetic pleasure are prominent in the novel. The sea, Herbert tells Denham, is "like a woman: ... the right place for sirens to come out of, and sing and kill people" (p. 211). It is a fierce woman, and he loves it to "stroke and sting him all over as with soft hands and sharp lips." The sea, he imagines, feeds upon young lovers who fall victim to her sadistic charms: "All cruelties and treacheries, all subtle appetites and violent secrets of the sea, were part of her
divine nature, adorable and acceptable to her lovers" (pp. 197, 198).

After riding late one evening, Herbert sleeps fitfully and dreams a significant dream—one that helps to establish the underlying metaphysical truth in Swinburne's art. The dream, which Swinburne describes in rich images of vicious loveliness, symbolizes not only the cruel beauty of the femme fatale and the sea but of aesthetic form as well:

He saw the star of Venus, white and flower-like as he had always seen it, turn into a white rose and come down out of heaven, with a reddening centre that grew as it descended liker and liker a living mouth; but instead of desire he felt horror and sickness at the sight of it, and averted his lips with an effort to utter some prayer or exorcism; vainly the dreadful mouth only laughed, and came closer. . . . Then, with a violent revulsion of spirit, he seemed to get quit of it; but then his ears instead were vexed with sound. The noise of the sea hardened and deepened and grew untunable; soon it sharpened into a shrill threatening note without sense or pity, but full of vicious design.

The dream over, Herbert is struck by the grim paradox of the truth revealed to him in this quasi-religious epiphany. He now sees "that these fairest things, sea and sky, star and flower, light and music, were all unfruitful and barren; absorbed in their own beauty; consummate in their own life" (pp. 281, 282).

Very rarely is such a concise thematic statement to be found in Swinburne;¹⁶ for, as he has elsewhere indicated,

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¹⁶Swinburne's autobiographical poem, "The Triumph of Time," is a notable exception, an example of a personal rather than a purely dramatic or "artistic" motive in his
he is reluctant to have taken as his personal sentiment any point of view expressed within an imaginative work. But in Lesbia Brandon Swinburne's understanding of the insatiable lust of the creative imagination and the parallel between the exotic and the aesthetic appetites seems to manifest itself in almost every scene. Herbert's dream only epitomizes what has been apparent throughout the novel: that there is a symbolic correspondence between the cold morning star and Venus the love goddess and the harsh waves from which she arises and the white rose that becomes a pair of terrible red lips. There is no doubt that Herbert's discovery is Swinburne's sure knowledge. The most desirable objects the mind is capable of imagining are indifferent to that desire to be possessed.

The femme fatale is precisely this kind of object. Poets and artistic temperaments in general are fatally attracted to women in whom they fancy they see their works. The poem expresses his resignation to a loveless life and his acceptance of an imaginative substitute for that ideal relationship he might have enjoyed with his cousin, Mary Gordon. His choice is the sea (the "Mother and lover of men"), who, he says, is the "perfect lover" because her "lips are bitter," her kisses are sweet and hard, her heart is cruel, and her "embraces are keen like pain." The fierce sea, a type of the femme fatale, is an embodiment of his erotic ideal, and he converts the erotic to the aesthetic. In "The Triumph of Time" he declares his intention of "entombing" his beloved (his "soul") in verse ("beautiful burial things"). And beautifully entombed she is—in this poem, as in numerous other poems, plays, and novels.

aesthetic ideal, and in imaginative literature, such as Swinburne's, the erotic is often a symbolic substitute for the aesthetic goal to which the artist aspires. In his verses from Poems and Ballads, in his tragedy Chastelard, and in his novels, Love's Cross-Currents and Lesbia Brandon, there are depicted the violent passions of men involuntarily attracted to women who simultaneously offer and withhold from them a raison d'être. In Swinburne's aesthetic patterns no less than in his employment of suggestive metaphors, he makes the connection between the dilemma of the artist in quest of ideal beauty and the masochistic lover destroyed by a woman who cannot give him what he desires— or in giving him what he desires, destroys him.

Swinburne's own masochism is as evident in his literary efforts as it is in his private letters and in the testimony of contemporaries. They all provide ample proof that he took his keenest pleasure from his keenest pain—or from the anticipation thereof. At any rate, he was most exhilarated when confronting the greatest danger. Whether one considers his predilection for flagellation, or his love of being tumbled about and stung by the salt sea, or his use of the recurring figure of the beautiful but sadistic woman in his creative writings, or, indeed, his love of the pounding cadences of his own poetry, it is clear that everywhere one looks he finds unmistakable signs of Swinburne's attraction to the idea of a tormenting loveliness.
Swinburne recognized, as did all those writers usually thought of as having espoused a doctrine of "art for art's sake," the impossibility of realizing in art the perfection of those images generated by the unconscious creative mind. And yet, like other artists enamored of their private ideals of beauty, he was fatally committed to the pursuit of that loveliness.

Although not so overtly masochistic as Swinburne, the aesthetes of the end of the century mark the limits to which Swinburne's basic attitudes to art could be taken. In Chapter IV I show that the symbolic femme fatale in the fiction of three "dandy-aesthetes" of fin-de-siècle England--Wilde, Beerbohm, and Beardsley--is symptomatic of the extreme narcissism of the imaginative man who prefers Art to Life. They shared with Swinburne a love of self-torment and of questing for an unattainable artificial ideal. The aesthete--and especially the decadent aesthete--of the period took great pleasure in embracing the beautiful but deadly image of his own creative mind. Wilde, Beerbohm, and Beardsley, in their historical persons as well as in their fictional personae, testify to the fatal attractiveness of art for art's sake.
"Aestheticism" and "decadence" are two terms frequently used synonymously. Although they are related, they are not the same, and it is important that my understanding of these words in this study be made clear. "Aestheticism," as I use the term, refers to the worship of a wholly subjective notion of beauty, beauty usually characterized by an ordered sensuous pattern or decoration discernible in any "aesthetic object." The aesthetic object thus contemplated by the "aesthetic faculty" may be either natural or artificial (though it is usually the latter), and it may exist temporally or spatially or both; it may be a musical composition, a painting, a work of literature, or it may be a garment, a human form, or even a human life. An "aesthete" is one who surrounds himself with such objects as these and indulges in those activities which heighten his awareness of beauty (i.e., of order, texture, design) and give him sensory pleasure for its own sake. The aesthete has little or no concern for matters outside his private world of aesthetic pleasure.

"Decadence" refers to an extreme aestheticism, an attitude which makes no clear-cut distinction between healthy and
unhealthy pursuits of sensual gratification nor between the kinds of order, patterns, or textures which constitute beauty. Aesthetic decadence is a failure to see the extrinsic worth of objects as they relate to something beyond their intrinsic merit of self-sufficient beauty. A "decadent" is one who is willing to explore all aspects of life—good and evil, moral and immoral, ethical and unethical alike. Because he has no reverence for prevailing social or religious codes, he seeks his aesthetic pleasures in every imaginable (and unimaginable) realm.

In an attempt to synthesize the antagonistic views of two writers of recent articles on the subject, Russel M. Goldfarb offers neither a definition nor an "un-definition" of "decadence." Like a modern lexicographer, he records the common usages of the term and concludes that there is "fundamental agreement" about its application. Goldfarb's summary of his findings is, consequently, descriptive rather than prescriptive: "Decadent literature is characterized by artistic concern for the morbid, the perverse, the sordid,

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1C. E. M. Joad sees decadence as a result of hubris, a sin of pride. In certain periods of history man "forgets or ignores his true position in the universe, overreaches himself and offends the gods ..." (Decadence [London, 1948], p. 15).

the artificial, the beauty to be found in the unnatural, and
the representation of the cleanness of unclean things; it is
characterized by a self-conscious and weary contempt for
social conventions such as truth and marriage, by an accep-
tance of Beauty as a basis of life."  

The decadent, it seems, acts the part of the sophisti-
cated elder brother to the relatively naive aesthete. The
decadent remains an aesthete in continuing to regard a delight
in beauty for its own sake as the highest good. But his
experience of the world has rendered him incapable of enjoy-
ing innocent pleasures; he must pursue beauty even in the
realm of the morbid, the perverse, the sordid. Both the
aesthete and the decadent regard the artificial as superior
to the natural; both are narcissistic and masochistic; and
both ignore or reject the conventions of society. Both, too,
tend to be exhibitionistic, flaunting their unconventionality,
their uniqueness, their narcissism. Finally, it can be said
of both that they not only cultivate the aesthetic faculty
but also cultivate themselves as aesthetic objects for self-
admiration. In a word, if the aesthete is a dandy, the
decadent aesthete is a demoniacal dandy with a perverse

3"Late Victorian Decadence," JAAC, XX (Spring 1962), 373.

4E.g., Wilde's Basil Hallward is an aesthete; Dorian
Gray is a decadent. James's Rowland Mallet and Roderick
Hudson are aesthetes. Beerbohm's Duke of Dorset is an
aesthete; Beardsley's Abbé Fanfreluche is a decadent. Con-
rad's Axel Heyst is an aesthete; Mr. Jones is a decadent.
notion of what constitutes good taste.

It is inevitable, in a study of the creative imagination of British novelists in the late nineteenth century, that the aesthetes and the decadents of the period be given careful consideration. For this reason I have included Oscar Wilde, Max Beerbohm, and Aubrey Beardsley as representative of the methods and matter of those literary artists who grew increasingly disenchanted with society and formed in their art as well as their lives private patterns of aesthetic excellence. Each was a typical dandy (i.e., a self-conscious exhibitionist who thinks surface and manner more important than substance), and each wrote a novel in which a dandy-artist figures centrally.5

The aesthetic (and sometimes decadent) attitude toward life and art, while not fully expressed by these three writers, is, I believe, nevertheless epitomized in them. The fiction of the last decade of the century reveals the strained relationship between the artist and society which had been developing and worsening since before the middle of the century. Edmund Wilson names the industrial revolution and the rise of the middle class as causes of a utilitarian

5Ellen Moers in her study of historical dandies from Brummell to Beerbohm (The Dandy [New York, 1960]) makes this comment: "Dandyism is relevant to the artist and the intellectual ... because it is essentially an anti-bourgeois attitude. The dandy is independent of the values and pressures of a society in pursuit of money. He does not work; he exists. And his existence is itself a lesson in elegance to the vulgar mind" (p. 264).
society which had no use for artists who did not share the utilitarian philosophy. As a result, "they found themselves out of touch with their fellows and thrown in upon their own private imaginations."^{6}

Because of his well-enunciated views concerning the relationship of art to life, Oscar Wilde, the prototypical Aesthete of the Nineties (in reputation if not in fact), is the foremost spokesman for those writers whose works I feel reveal a great deal about the dilemma of the artist-dandy in late nineteenth-century England. Oscar Wilde's position as aesthete is complicated by his equally intense interest in changing the thinking of society. No servant of the philistine Establishment, Wilde theoretically dedicated himself to art for art's sake and denied the art (qua art) had a social or ethical function. It is true, however, that his practice belied his theory, for his writings generally had a rhetorical or moralizing intention.^{7} But his life no less than his art was based on the idea of the intrinsic value of the


^{7}Holbrook Jackson claims that Wilde's assertion that art was superior to life was only a pose and that he actually "always valued life more than art, and only appreciated the latter when its reflex action contributed something to his sensations; but because he had thought himself into the position of one who transmutes life into art, he fell into error of imagining art to be more important than life. And art for him was not only those formal and plastic things which we call the fine arts; it embraced all luxurious artificialities" (The Eighteen-Nineties [New York, n.d.], p. 66). The idea of the fatal deception of art underlies the thesis of this dissertation.
aesthetic experience.

In the present chapter I examine a few key writings of Oscar Wilde to ascertain the symbolic function of the femme fatale, a recurring figure in his works, in connection with the quandary of the aesthete in a land devoid of all beauty except that which he creates out of his own imagination. I follow the section on Wilde with an analysis of the same figure in Max Beerbohm's parody of the aesthetic dandy in the whimsical novel, Zuleika Dobson. I conclude the chapter with yet another study of the dandy--this time the wholly decadent Abbé Fanfreluche of Aubrey Beardsley's "Under the Hill," a fragmented novel based upon the Tannhäuser legend.

In his letters and essays Wilde wrote frequently of the role of the artist and of the relationship of art to life. To the editors of contemporary newspapers Wilde forcefully asserted the independence of art from morality: "The sphere of art and the sphere of ethics are absolutely distinct and separate," he wrote to the St. James Gazette, "and it is to the confusion between the two that we owe the appearance of Mrs. Grundy, that amusing old lady who represents the only original form of humour that the middle classes of this country have been able to produce." 8 The artist, he says in a letter to the Scots Observer, is "fascinated by what he

has in hand." He is interested in pleasing himself, not in pleasing others. It is the "decorative" motive, not the moral, that attracts him: "... perfection is what we artists aim at." Wilde cites Keats as another artist who enjoyed equally the artistic creation of good and evil. According to Wilde, the artist "stands remote from one's subject-matter." "[He] creates it, and ... contemplates it," but he has "no ethical sympathies at all. Virtue and wickedness are to him simply what the colours on his palette are to the painter. They are no more, and they are no less. He sees that by their means a certain artistic effect can be produced, and he produces it" (Letters, pp. 264, 266). In another letter to the Scots Observer Wilde comments further on the distinction between aesthetics and ethics: "If a man sees the artistic beauty of a thing, he will probably care very little for its ethical import. If his temperament is more susceptible to ethical than aesthetic influences, he will be blind to questions of style, treatment, and the like" (Letters, p. 269).

In "The Critic as Artist" Wilde links the artist with the appreciator of art. Wilde here claims for the aesthetic critic the artist's faculty of aesthetic vision and the artist's fate of walking "in loneliness and dreams." Both have forsaken the active (i.e., "moral") life for the contemplative, each imagining an ideal beauty beyond the partial beauty he discerns in life. The art critic, like the artist,
creates decorative forms and rejects nature as an ideal of beauty (p. 991). The aesthete (be he artist or critic) lives principally in the imagination, for life and the experiences of life are narrow, "deficient in form," and "incoherent," and generally unsatisfying (Works, pp. 977, 973). It is "through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence. . . . Art does not hurt us" (Works, p. 977).

According to Wilde, the work of art, while it is the fulfillment of the artist's vision, is only the initial stimulus for the critic's vision. The "beauty" of a work of art consists in its not being in itself an ending-point, in its failure to embody the perceptor's aesthetic ideal. That the work of art remains mysterious and evocative is proof that it still contains secrets. "It is through its very incompleteness," says Gilbert (Wilde's spokesman in the dialogue), "that Art becomes complete in beauty, and so addresses itself, not to the faculty of recognition nor to the faculty of reason, but to the aesthetic sense alone. . . ." (Works, p. 970). He warns that since the aesthete must be "sincere" and "fair" in his reaction to aesthetic forms, he is on the borderline of ethics and therefore must "be able to recognize that the sphere of Art and the sphere of Ethics are absolutely distinct and separate" (Works, p. 987).

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"The Decay of Lying," like "The Critic as Artist," is written in the form of a dialogue. Wilde's spokesman is Vivian, who recites an essay within the essay, the fundamental assertion of which is that "Life . . . is the mirror, and Art the reality" (Works, p. 921). The following remarks represent Wilde's aesthetic theory:

"Art begins with abstract decoration, with purely imaginative and pleasurable work dealing with what is unreal and non-existent. This is the first stage. Then Life becomes fascinated with this new wonder, and asks to be admitted into the charmed circle. Art takes life as part of her rough material, recreates it, and refashions it in fresh forms, is absolutely indifferent to fact, invents, images, dreams, and keeps between herself and reality the impenetrable barrier of beautiful style, of decorative or ideal treatment. The third stage is when Life gets the upper hand, and drives Art out into the wilderness. This is the true decadence, and it is from this that we are now suffering" (Works, p. 917).

This decadence is probably what A. E. Rodway has in mind when he accuses the "end-of-the-century patriots," Rudyard Kipling and W. E. Henley, of a "decadence of intelligence." 10

Wilde's well-known theory of the artist as liar, presented most concisely in "The Decay of Lying," appears again in the parable of the old man who returns to his village every evening and tells of having seen "'a faun in the forest playing a flute, to whose music a troop of woodland creatures were dancing'" and of having seen "'three mermaids, at the edge of the waves, combing their green hair with a

golden comb.'" When one day he actually sees these sights, however, he tells the villagers he has seen nothing. The parable is recorded by André Gide in his memorial volume on Wilde, who he says points the moral of the fable: The work of art is more beautiful than the world of nature because it is unique.\textsuperscript{11}

Wilde's philosophy of art, insisting upon the complete separation of art from morality and from nature, is manifested in many of his poems, plays, and prose narratives. Often beauty coexists with evil in a character that has no life outside the realm of the imagination, as in the recurring figure of the \textit{femme fatale}. The fatal woman is characterized by an outward appearance of feminine sensuality and by a contrasting hardness of heart, such as that of Salomé. Salomé is the beautiful but deadly daughter of Herodias and the stepdaughter of Herod. She identifies herself with the cruel, sexually frigid moon. "The moon is cold and chaste," says Salomé. "I am sure she is a virgin, she has a virgin's beauty. . . . She has never defiled herself. She has never abandoned herself to men, like the other goddesses" (\textit{Works}, p. 540). Virginal as she claims to be, Salomé is passionately desirous of Jokanaan's white body,

\textsuperscript{11}Oscar Wilde (London, 1951), pp. 18-19. In "The Decay of Lying" Wilde had written in this connection: "The only real people are the people who never existed. . . . The justification of a character in a novel is not that other persons are what they are, but that the author is what he is. Otherwise the novel is not a work of art" (\textit{Works}, p. 914).
his black hair, his red mouth, his perfumed voice. Spurned by this holy man, she proves disastrous to him by having him beheaded. And she is equally cruel to the lecherous old Tetrarch, with whom she refuses to cooperate.

In his story "La Sainte Courtisane," the courtesan Myrrhina is another femme fatale who is believable only as art. Like Salomé, she goes to the holy hermit with the intention of seducing him. Honorius in his cave of renunciation, convinces her to renounce the body as she convinces him to renounce the soul. The end result is that she tempts him, wins him, but will not requite him. She believes God has used her so that Honorius should "see Sin in its painted mask and look on Death in its robe of Shame" (Works, p. 690). Exchanging roles with the man, she has proved fatal to him.

A similar figure appears in "La Bella Donna Della Mia Mente." In this song to the "Lovely Lady of my memory," Wilde creates a pre-Raphaelite portrait of a woman who is beautiful but treacherous. "She is too fair for any man / To see or hold his heart's delight," but she affects him adversely: "My limbs are wasted with a flame." Her hair, her lips, her neck, her hands—all are sensually appealing. But she is never to be fully enjoyed, for her "delicate / White body" is made for both "love and pain" (Works, pp. 735-36).

"The Sphinx," like Pater's reflections upon the portrait of Mona Lisa, is an impressionistic reverie. The
narrator asks in this poem a series of rhetorical questions to the silent statue of this "exquisite grotesque," the "lovely languorous Sphinx." He imagines this beast-woman to have observed or to have participated in every exotic and violent act during her "thousand weary centuries." He supposes her to have an unslakable lust for men and animals alike. Even the embalmed Egyptian kings within the pyramids and the very gods themselves have been her bedfellows. Her face, however, like Lady Lisa's, is an enigma: "How subtle-secret is your smile! Did you love none then?" (Works, p. 815).

In his personal life, no less than in his artistic, Oscar Wilde and his personae are fatally enamored of the beautiful images originating in their own minds and projected upon external reality. Wilde's aesthetic ideal was, of course, no masculine woman; it was rather the effeminate young man who attracted him and functioned as the ever-receding, never-fulfilling object of desire.

In an excerpt from If It Die, printed in his book on Wilde as "Wilde in Algeria," Gide comments on the relationship of Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas. He describes Douglas as a rather sadistic femme fatale and Wilde as a masochistic lover:

... [Wilde's] admiration for Douglas, and a kind of lover's infatuated pleasure in being mastered, were manifest [in Wilde's desire to be seen and known as Douglas's lover]. And indeed Douglas's personality seemed much stronger and much more
marked than Wilde's; yes, Douglas's personality was overweening; a sort of fatality swept him along; at times he seemed almost irresponsible; and he never attempted to resist himself, he would not put up with anyone or anything resisting him either.  

By his own admission, too, Wilde found Douglas's manner fascinating; he was, in a word, Wilde's aesthetic ideal. Frequently Wilde wrote to his "dear boy" to tell him of his great importance to him; "... you are more to me than any one ... has any idea; you are the atmosphere of beauty through which I see life; you are the incarnation of all lovely things" (Letters, p. 363). But in the long letter to Douglas written from prison and published later as De Profundis, Wilde wrote: "While you were with me you were the absolute ruin of my Art..." (Letters, p. 427). Douglas, it appears, was very much as Gide has remembered him: little more than a wilful child—or mistress—who continued to fascinate Wilde even as he tormented him. "Your desires," continues Wilde retrospectively in De Profundis, "were simply for amusements, for ordinary or less ordinary pleasures. They were what your temperament needed, or thought it needed for the moment." All in all, Wilde regarded his succumbing to Douglas's demands as a "weakness that paralyses the imagination" (Letters, p. 427).

The word "fatal" is Wilde's favorite adjective to describe Douglas's influence on his life. He speaks of his "fatal yielding" to Douglas's demands and of their "fatal

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12Gide, p. 78.
friendship" (Letters, pp. 429, 432). And yet he counts his suffering as beneficial, in a sense cathartic: "Suffering . . . is the means by which we become conscious of existing; and the remembrance of suffering in the past is necessary to us as the warrant, the evidence, of our continued identity" (Letters, p. 435). He notes that his own life and tragedy had been "foreshadowed and prefigured" in his art: "... a great deal of it is hidden away in the note of Doom that like a purple thread runs through the gold cloth of Dorian Gray" (Letters, p. 475).

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890), according to Mario Praz, is "the classic of the Decadence in England." It is the story of a narcissistic young man who becomes insensitive to the needs of others and ignores all human responsibilities in order to devote full time to "la culte de soi-même." As his vanity increases he grows more decadent and less concerned about the destructive effects of his beauty on himself and on others. Directly and indirectly, he causes several suicides, commits at least one murder, and is responsible for countless broken lives, among whom are Sir Henry Ashton, Adrian Singleton, Lord Kent's son, the young Duke of Perth, and Alan Campbell. He is able to escape the censure of society because he radiates angelic beauty. Inwardly, of course, he is depraved. He thinks to have

disposed of his conscience by keeping it shrouded and silent, but it is there, passing judgment on him all the while. Finally he makes an effort to free himself forever from the judge of his selfish actions. By destroying his conscience he destroys himself.

The plot and theme of Dorian Gray are fundamentally Faustian. In both stories a man gives up his soul in return for a life of worldly pleasure. Eventually he becomes greatly disappointed in not being able to sustain his initial high ecstasy. In the case of Dorian there is no explicit pact with a demon but only a supernatural answer to a heartfelt wish that instead of aging and growing ugly he should remain young and beautiful while his portrait undergoes these natural changes in his stead. It is a wish that Life be exchanged for Art. The story, as it unfolds, reveals Wilde's awareness of the disastrous effects of worshipping an aesthetic ideal for its own sake and at the expense of moral commitment; but it shows, too, Wilde's knowledge that a truly decadent aesthete is fatally attracted to such an ideal and cannot act otherwise than to let himself become ensnared by the bewitching beauty of such aesthetic forms as proceed from his imagination.

But Wilde's novel is more than the story of the dual life of Dorian Gray (as experienced by him and by Basil Hallward's portrait of him); it is also the story of Lord Henry Wotton, a quasi-Mephistophelian dandy, and of a painter,
Basil Hallward, an instinctual worshipper of natural beauty and therefore a foil to both Dorian and Lord Henry, who cultivate a taste for the artificial and exotic.\(^{14}\)

Dorian Gray's self-idolatry is paralleled in Basil Hallward's idolatry of Dorian. Each is in love with a conception of ideal beauty as it is bodied forth in an aesthetic object. For both, that object is Dorian. Though a male, Dorian affects the painter not unlike a merciless female. For this reason I believe *Dorian Gray* deserves to be categorized among those novels which represent the artistic imagination in the symbol of the *femme fatale*. Basil's account of his initial meeting with Dorian sounds, indeed, like the passionate encounter of young lovers: "'When our eyes met, I felt I was growing pale. A curious sensation of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself. . . . I had a strange feeling that Fate had in store for me exquisite joys and exquisite sorrows" (Works, p. 21). Agonized ecstasy is the usual emotion of one fascinated with ideal beauty. Later, Basil confesses directly to Dorian the nature of his

\(^{14}\)It might be said that whereas Basil would admire a white carnation, Dorian and Lord Henry would wear green carnations in their lapels because green carnations are unique and not to be found in nature but in art only. See Robert Hichens' contemporary satirical portrait of Wilde and his disciples, *The Green Carnation*, first published by William Heinemann in 1894 and republished by The Unicorn Press in 1949.
idolatry; and again the tenor of his language suggests that Dorian is an outward manifestation of the artist's feminine soul: "'Dorian, from the moment I met you, your personality had the most extraordinary influence over me. I was dominated, soul, brain, and power by you. You became to me the visible incarnation of that unseen ideal whose memory haunts us artists like an exquisite dream. I worshipped you.'"

Like a jealous lover, he has not wanted to share Dorian with anyone else (Works, p. 93). His presence has inspired Basil's best paintings, and Dorian therefore becomes indispensable to the artist. For this selfish reason, Basil flatters him and fawns over him; even though Dorian "'is horribly thoughtless, and seems to take a real delight in giving [him] pain'" (Works, p. 25). Like Lord Alfred Douglas, or like the archetypal femme fatale, Dorian thinks only of himself and uses all men to serve his own needs.

As Basil is enamored of Dorian, so Dorian is enamored of Lord Henry, the effete gentleman. Basil begs Lord Henry not to influence and woo his beloved Dorian away from him: "'Don't take away from me the one person who gives to my art whatever charm it possesses; my life as an artist depends on him'" (Works, p. 27). Interested only in amusing himself (the governing impulse of the true femme fatale), he decides to make a plaything of Dorian. "... he would try to be to Dorian Gray what, without knowing it, the lad was to the painter who had fashioned the wonderful portrait. He would seek to dominate him. ..." And so he does. At a dinner
party Lord Henry consciously endeavors to fascinate Dorian with his wit and charm. And "Dorian Gray never took his eyes off him, but sat like one under a spell. ..." (Works, pp. 41, 45).

Lord Henry succeeds in reshaping Dorian's life into a beautiful piece of art. And as a work of art, incarnate Beauty, Dorian excites the imaginations of those who see him, but he always affects them disastrously. Whatever he touches withers and dies. His friendship is "fatal to young men," as Basil later observes (Works, p. 117). Basil's loss of Dorian's exclusive love results in his failure to produce works of art. Lord Henry comments to Dorian that Basil's "'painting seemed to have lost something. It had lost an ideal. When you and he ceased to be great friends, he ceased to be a great artist'" (Works, p. 160). But even when they were "great friends," Dorian did not make life easy for the painter. Like a coy mistress, Dorian kept his lover on his knees, pleading for favors. Under Lord Henry's influence, Dorian now finds more pleasure in loving than in being loved. Lord Henry concurs: "'Being adored is a nuisance. Women treat us just as Humanity treats its gods. They worship us, and are always bothering us to do something for them.'" Furthermore, they "'inspire us with the desire to do masterpieces, and always prevent us from carrying them out'" (Works, pp. 69, 70).

Dorian, then, is fated as well as fatal, for he is
both beloved and lover, both artifice and artificer. Basil, who has been responsible for making Dorian aware of his own beauty and worshipping it, must suffer as a lover suffers when he introduces his sweetheart to a friend who steals her away. But Dorian suffers, too. His passionate self-idolatry has prompted the Faustian exchange of his soul (or conscience) for perpetual youth and beauty. Once he is no longer burdened with a conscience, he is free to seek in sensation the fulfillment of all his self-centered ideals. The problem is, however, that with the ability to satisfy every wish, he finds himself more susceptible to ennui. Wilde wants it made clear, I think, that Dorian's great gift is, paradoxically, his great curse. The pleasurable attainment of any ideal is always accompanied by the annihilation of desire.

Dorian's desire for and conquest of Sibyl Vane is illustrative of this phenomenon. She fascinates him as an aesthetic object and is clearly a projection of his own psychic ideal. When he is at the point of consummating his love, Sibyl ceases to interest him.

This episode in Dorian's life demands a more detailed treatment. It begins when, soon after he has transferred his soul to his portrait, Dorian fancies he has fallen in love with the little actress. However, it is her voice and not her person that interests him, for it is her art and not her life that is beautiful. Dorian tells of his first encounter with the beautiful girl: "'... I could hardly
see the girl for the mist of tears that came across me. And her voice—I never heard such a voice. It was very low at first, with deep, mellow notes, that seemed to fall singly upon one's ear." The pure aesthete, Dorian does not listen to what she says but to the beautiful manner in which she says it. As always, he is impressed with the form of things. He compares the qualities of her voice to the music of flutes, hautbois, violins, and nightingales (Works, p. 51). He loves her because she is perpetual novelty, the incarnation of a succession of beautiful images: she is Juliet one night, Rosalind another, and Imogen yet another. He supposes, without giving it much real thought, that her existence is limited to her artificial life behind the footlights. When Lord Henry asks, "'When is she Sibyl Vane?'" Dorian replies, "'Never'" (Works, p. 53).

15 Germaine de Nerval's love for the actress Jenny Colon seems either a source or an analogue of the story of Dorian Gray and Sibyl Vane. Arthur Symons writes that Gérard had early asked of God "that I might have the power to create my own universe about me, to govern my dreams, instead of enduring them"—a prayer not unlike that made by Dorian in Basil Hallward's studio. But, says Symons, Gérard was a dreamer of "illimitable dreams." Hoping to find a new incarnation of his first sweetheart, Adrienne, "it was the fate of Gérard to incarnate his ideal in the person of an actress. The fatal transfiguration of the footlights, in which reality and the artificial change places with so fantastic a regularity, has drawn many moths into its flame, and will draw more, as long as men persist in demanding illusion of what is real, and reality in what is illusion. The Jenny Colons of the world are very simple, very real, if one will but refrain from assuming them to be a mystery. But it is the penalty of all imaginative lovers to create for themselves the veil which hides from them the features of the beloved. It is their privilege, for it is incomparably more entrancing
Something of the relationship of the artist and his creative imagination, then, is represented in Dorian's affair with Sibyl Vane. She is his aesthetic ideal as Dorian is Basil's. She is, in fact, Wilde's only real femme fatale in the novel. Although she does not destroy Dorian as Dorian destroys Basil, she does disappoint him and, in effect, kills the beautiful vision he had nurtured. He has wanted to marry her; and, as he has adored her as a goddess of Art, so she has worshipped him as a god of Life. But when she has hopes of exchanging her artificial world of painted sets for the reality of Life, she ceases to create convincing roles on the stage and Dorian is despondent. "'You have killed my love,'" he tells her. "'You used to stir my imagination. Now you don't even stir my curiosity. . . . I loved you because you were marvelous, because you had genius and intellect, because you realized the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art'" (Works, p. 75). In short, she was beautiful in Art, ugly in Life; beautiful as he imagined her to be, but commonplace as she actually was. Dorian knows that Sibyl's sudden display of
to fancy oneself in love with Isis than to know that one is in love with Manon Lescaut. The picture of Gérard after many hesitations [reveals], to the astonished Jenny that she is the incarnation of another, the shadow of a dream, that she has been Adrienne and is about to be the Queen of Sheba; and she utters a "very human little cry of pure incomprehension, Mais vous ne m'aimez pas!" (The Symbolist Movement in Literature [New York, 1958], pp. 6, 11-12). The resemblance between Jenny's and Sibyl's amazement is remarkable.
bad acting shortly after his profession of love has resulted from her discovery of Life and the "reality of love." When Life (Dorian's disavowal of love) disappoints her, she dies "'as Juliet might have died. She passed again into the sphere of art'" (Works, p. 90).\(^{16}\)

Sibyl's suicide causes Dorian little remorse; his portrait experiences that for him. As a result of his successful detachment from the emotional and moral life ("'I don't want to be at the mercy of my emotions. I want to use them, and to dominate them'" [Works, p. 89]), Dorian becomes, as he puts it, "'too much concentrated on myself.'" He cultivates all his senses for their own sake and becomes more and more the embodiment of his own aesthetic ideal. Lord Henry tells him: "'Life has been your art. You have set yourself to music. Your days are your sonnets'" (Works, pp. 154, 163).

Indeed his life is his art. But art is a kind of death. The aesthetic imagination requires novelty; and as each new aesthetic experience bears fruit for Dorian, he passes on to something different to avoid being bored. Any experience, criminal or otherwise, provides its particular pleasure. The truth of the matter is that he is a masochist but not a sadist. His imagination delights not from the pain he inflicts on others but from the torment he causes his own soul. The picture hidden in the old schoolroom fairly

\(^{16}\)Sibyl Vane bears more than a passing resemblance to Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, who survives only in the insular palace of art.
wriggles with agony. Dorian's greatest enjoyment is to con-
template the irreparable damage he is doing to his eternal
soul, to observe the deterioration of the portrait. And
when he exhausts all possibilities of making his soul suffer,
he believes the ultimate pain (i.e., ultimate pleasure) he
can inflict on his soul is its death. But here lies a
strange irony. For Dorian's pleasure has always been predi-
cated upon the existence of his soul. To destroy the soul--
that hidden, unconscious aspect of himself that undergoes
innumerable tortures to sustain the conscious self--is to
destroy the conscious self.\footnote{Wilde puts a different construction on Dorian's
final act. In a letter to the \textit{Daily Chronicle} (June 30,
1890) Wilde describes Dorian as "extremely impulsive,
absurdly romantic, and . . . haunted all through life by an
exaggerated sense of conscience which mars his pleasures for
him. . . . It is finally 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" \cite{Wilde}. I agree that
Dorian is haunted by his conscience and that he kills himself
in trying to kill it. However, Dorian only \textit{thinks} his con-
science "mars his pleasures"; the undeniable fact is that the
picture is absolutely necessary to his pleasures and actually
heightens them. Dorian's impulsive thrust of the dagger
into the portrait is therefore tragically ironic. Thinking
to increase his happiness, he loses his life; but in destroy-
ing himself as a subject of beauty, he perfects himself as
an object of beauty. His picture remains for the world to
enjoy, though he is now gone who most had enjoyed it.}
his ideal by passing from the sphere of life into the sphere of art, as Sibyl Vane does. It is an old wrinkled man who is discovered with the knife in his heart; but smiling over the loathsome creature is the unblemished portrait of a beautiful young man.

Much of what I have said about Dorian Gray and his masochistic attachment to his own soul has been said without reference to the idea of the femme fatale implicit in the relationship. It is true that Wilde has not chosen to use the overt symbol of the femme fatale to embody Dorian's imaginative dilemma. Rather, he has suggested the ambiguous creative-destructive force of Dorian's feminine psyche in the portrait by whom and for whom Dorian lives. It is this aesthetic ideal, detached and indifferent, by which he is enslaved and through which he is liberated. Like Narcissus, he annihilates himself by becoming one with his reflected image. As the water closes over Narcissus and again becomes placid, so the painting after being struck resumes its former beautiful serenity. The imperfect Dorian dies that his ideal self might live.

If in The Picture of Dorian Gray Wilde failed to make the most of the symbol of the femme fatale as the creative imagination of the aesthete, Wilde's fellow aesthete and dandy, Max Beerbohm, made a quite successful use of the symbol some two decades later. His 1911 satirical novel, Zuleika Dobson, echoes much of the philosophy of Dorian Gray and is, I feel, a useful work to examine as a compendium of
the aesthetic attitudes toward life and art.

For all its whimsy, Zuleika Dobson is a fairly accurate portrait (or caricature) of the dedicated artist who destroys himself by craving an impossible union with his aesthetic ideal. In the story of the Duke of Dorset's love of an icy femme fatale, Beerbohm has drawn a verbal caricature of the Wildean aesthete. The Duke, though not a decadent nor even literally an artist, is nevertheless a type of the egocentric and self-sufficient artist: the dandy. Like Dorian Gray or Lord Henry Wotton, he appreciates form for its own sake and enjoys basking in his own radiance.

Miss Zuleika Dobson is the feminine mirror image of the dandiacal Duke. Both are fond of their own reflections, of elegant clothing, and of rituals. And both are given to boredom and distraction. Studying herself in the bedroom mirror soon after her arrival at Oxford (ostensibly to visit her grandfather), Zuleika "seemed to be thinking of herself, or of something she desired, or of some one she had never met. There was ennui, and there was wistfulness in her gaze." "Yet," says the narrator later (with a note of playful irony in his tone), there was "nothing Narcissine in her spirit. Her love for her own image was not cold aestheticism. She valued that image not for its own sake, but for sake of the glory it always won for her."18

The Duke is no less vain. He is, after all, an artistic gentleman "too much concerned with his own perfection ever to think of admiring any one else . . . he cared for his wardrobe and his toilet-table . . . as a means through which he could intensify, a ritual in which to express and realise, his own idolatry." Like Zuleika, he withholds himself from those who admire him. He is, in a sense, "celibate, cloistral." As Zuleika is a veritable nun, so he is a confirmed monk, but "with a mirror for beads and breviary" (pp. 36, 40).

However, this self-adoring Duke is destined to encounter the femme fatale who embodies his ideal of beauty. There has never been, until Zuleika walks into his life, a woman upon whom he could project the image of his own creative unconscious. He sees Zuleika and she immediately casts a spell on him, and thereafter her image is "inexpellable" from his mind.

Beerbohm has given her all the significant attributes of the archetypal femme fatale, not the least of which is her "talent" for magic. But even in this Beerbohm maintains the whimsical touch. A "cruel enchantress," she charms men not because she is masterful in legerdemain but because she is so pitifully naive about her lack of accomplishment. And men are so eager to keep her from being embarrassed that they applaud and are deceived in spite of themselves. Says the narrator of this ingenuous Circe:

I cannot claim for her that she had a genuine passion
for her art. The true conjurer finds his guerdon in the consciousness of work done perfectly and for its own sake. Lucre and applause are not necessary to him. If he were set down, with the materials of his art, on a desert island, he would yet be quite happy. . . . Zuleika, on a desert island, would have spent most of her time in looking for a man's footprint. . . . She was a nymph to whom men's admiration was the greater part of life. . . . As the homage of men became for her, more and more, a matter of course, the more subtly necessary was it to her happiness (pp. 20-21).

She is like Dorian Gray in needing perpetual novelty, and she, too, proves "fatal to young men." Before her arrival at Oxford, Zuleika has triumphed in "every capital of Europe" for a year. What happened in Spain is typical of what happened in France, Germany, Italy, and Russia: "On the Sunday before she left Madrid, a great bull-fight was held in her honour. Fifteen bulls received the coup-de-grâce, and Alvarez, the matador of matadors, died in the arena with her name on his lips" (p. 24). Countless others have pined away for her. Besides Spanish matadors, she has rejected artists, royalty, students, and millionaires. Each new city, including the men in them, she regards as a new toy. Above all, Zuleika wants to be seen, to be admired by as many men as possible. She enjoys being the unattainable frigid virgin. She delights in hearing that lovers never cease to love her: "'I remain their ideal. . . . They cherish the thought of me. They see the world in terms of me. But I am an inspiration, not an obsession; a glow, not a blight" (p. 107). She

\[\text{\footnotesize \textsuperscript{19}}\text{She is identified, like Salomé, with the moon in several passages.}\]
seems quite oblivious to the destruction she leaves in her wake wherever in the world she goes.

But Zuleika is not a "basilisk," according to the narrator; for she has the capacity to love. Her problem is that there are none worthy of receiving her love: "Whithersoever she had fared, she had seen nothing but youths fatuously prostrate to her—not one upright figure which she could respect. . . . She was an empress, and all youths were her slaves. Their bondage delighted her. . . . But no empress who has any pride can adore one of her slaves" (pp. 28-29). She is therefore understandably delighted when she meets the aloof Duke of Dorset, who apparently is not to become one of her slaves: "At last, here was the youth who would not bow down to her; whom, looking up to him, she could adore" (p. 35).

However, this would-be misogynist is smitten as ordinary men have been: "He declare[s] his intention of lying prone and letting Miss Dobson 'walk over' him. . . ."

He admits to having become "enslaved" by her, to having been fettered at both wrist and ankle. Like a comic Shelley falling on the thorns of life, the Duke cries out: "'I droop. I stumble. Blood flows from me. I quiver and curse. I writhe'" (pp. 142, 143). With such feminine debility the Duke is certainly no suitable mate for Zuleika, whose ideal has always been the masculine counterpart of herself. She has dreamed of a kind of sadistic lover who would fulfill
his own desires while leaving her unsatisfied and suffering. She tells the love-sick Duke that her pleasure has depended upon his indifference toward her, and that his infatuation with her has spoiled everything. He is no better than any of the others. "'I thought you would take a listless advantage, make a plaything of me—the diversion of a few idle hours in summer, and then, when you had tired of me, would cast me aside, forget me, break my heart. I desired nothing better than that.'" But, says Zuleika to the Duke, "'I left off loving you when I found that you loved me'" (pp. 60, 62). Dorian Gray, likewise, could not love Sibyl Vane upon the instant she returned his love. There can be no reciprocity of affection among sado-masochists. There must be the lover and the beloved, the tormented and the tormentor, the enslaved and the enslaver.

The Duke finally recognizes the hopelessness of his love for Zuleika: "On the isle of the enchantress he was stranded for ever. For ever stranded on the isle of an enchantress who would have nothing to do with him! What, he wondered, should be done in so piteous a quandary?" (p. 93). Dandy that he is, he sees only one acceptable resolution to the dilemma: ostentatious suicide. He takes great pleasure in contemplating the act of dying artistically in full view of an admiring public—and especially in the presence of and for the cause of his beautiful but indomitable Zuleika: "He realized that to die for love of his lady would be no measure
of precaution, or counsel of despair. It would be in itself a passionate indulgence—a fiery rapture, not to be foregone. What better could he ask than die for his love? Poor indeed seemed to him now the sacrament of marriage beside the sacrament of death. Death was incomparably the greater, the finer soul. Death was the one true bridal." "He wanted to die because he would thereby so poignantly consummate his love, express it so completely, once and for all. . . ." His death he conceives as a supreme work of art in which he will achieve union with his aesthetic ideal. "The great thing . . . was the consummation of his own love, for its own sake, by his own death" (pp. 94, 97, 113). He goes to perfect his dream, like Narcissus, by plunging into the river. He goes willingly, religiously: "'I am no lamb led to the slaughter. I am priest as well as victim. I offer myself up with a pious joy. . . . Self-sacrifice—bah! Regard me as a voluptuary. . . . All my baffled ardour speeds me to the bosom of Death. She is gentle and wanton. She knows I could never have loved her for her own sake. . . . She knows well I come to her because not otherwise may I quench my passion.'" "To love and be loved . . . was all that mattered. . . . The one woman who had loved him had turned to stone because he loved her" (pp. 144, 245).

On the day of his sacramental suicide, the Duke dons his regalia as Knight of the Garter. He wants to make his exit from the world in impeccable taste. He is a true dandy,
and "the true dandy is always capable of such high independence. He is craftsman as well as artist." The Duke is able, therefore, to buckle, tie, hook, pin, button, and wrap himself into his ornate costume and then to walk vainly to the mirror to admire the effect he has wrought (pp. 278-79).

As the ecstatic aesthete sinks magnificently beneath the water with the name "Zuleika" on his lips, his cold goddess looks on. She knows he is as happy in this sacrificial gesture as she is in being thus honored. Like Dorian Gray, he has achieved in self-annihilation the perfect communion with his otherwise unattainable ideal.  

If the Duke of Dorset is the incarnation of Beerbohm's notion of the quintessential dandy, it is small wonder that Ellen Moers calls Beerbohm himself "the last of the dandies." The Duke possesses all the positive attributes of the fin-de-siècle dandy and at least one outstanding negative characteristic. "Fabulously wealthy, miraculously gifted, consummately dandified," says Moers, "he is also—and this is the point which makes Zuleika the very last of the dandy novels—wholly insufferable." Beerbohm has been able to

20 That Zuleika's fatal influence is felt by all men and not only the Duke is evidenced in the mass suicide of the Oxford undergraduates who, one and all, drown themselves in her sight rather than suffer the pangs of unrequited love. Like Cleopatra on the barge, Zuleika stands "bright-eyed in the dimness; alone, as it was well she should be in her great hour; draining the lees of such homage as had come to no woman in history recorded" (p. 300).

21 *The Dandy*, pp. 316, 327.
treat his own dandyism impudently and detachedly in this satirical portrait of one of his own kind. His method, as always, has been irony, indirection, and obliqueness. But the lightness of his manner has not detracted from the validity of his commentary upon the aesthetic dandy.

By comparison, Wilde's literary dandies (including Lord Darlington in *Lady Windemere's Fan*, Lord Goring in *An Ideal Husband*, and Lord Henry Wotton in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*) are less satirically drawn than Beerbohm's dandies (among them, Lord George Hell in *The Happy Hypocrite* and the Duke of Dorset in *Zuleika Dobson*). They appear even more earnest in their dandyism than Wilde himself, who, according to Moers, pursued dandyism "along the aesthetic path."

Wilde and the other dandies of the nineties—especially Beerbohm, Beardsley, and the members of the Rhymers' Club—"built a literature around themes from the dandy tradition: the worship of the town and the artificial; grace, elegance, the art of pose; sophistication and the mask."

But not all drew artistic portraits of the dandy, nor did those who drew the dandy represent him the same. An interesting contrast to the literary dandies of Wilde and Beerbohm is the wholly fantastical creature of Aubrey Beardsley's imagination: the Abbé Fanfreluche, the dandy-hero

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of "Under the Hill." As Wilde's Lord Henry Wotton is a rather convincing representation of the dandy-aesthete (having a name and a fortune, he had early "set himself to the serious study of the great aristocratic art of doing absolutely nothing" [Works, p. 38]), and as Beerbohm's Duke of Dorset represents a satirical view of the dandy, so it is that Beardsley's Abbé Fanfreluche exists only in the realm of pure art, a creature of fantasy. Unlike Lord Henry and the Duke, the Abbé has no prototype in life--either to be copied or to be satirized. It is true that Lord Henry is extraordinarily perverse, but there are models for him in life. And the Duke of Dorset, while hardly credible as a human being, at least shares enough of the eccentricities of the true dandy to seem fundamentally life-like. But in the case of the Abbé Fanfreluche, Beardsley does not expect his readers to give him any more credence than they would to a figure in an erotic fantasy; he exists in the realm of pure art, pure imagination. And his adventures are designed to delight the cerebral lecher or the mental onanist.

Thus the study of the late Victorian dandy-aesthete is not complete without a side-glance at Beardsley's ingenious attempt at fiction. His story of the dandiacal Abbé Fanfreluche in "Under the Hill" is a symptom of, as well as a depiction of, an extreme decadent aestheticism.

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Written for The Savoy in 1896, the novel progressed only as far as the fourth chapter, at which point it was discontinued because of Beardsley's continued severe illness. In 1907 Leonard Smithers privately printed an unexpurgated erotic version of "Under the Hill" in which the original four chapters were expanded to ten but which was still not a completed work. Making liberal use of the Tannhäuser legend in both versions, Beardsley emphasized the sensuous appeals of an aesthetic and erotic paradise. His decadent aestheticism is especially evident in the version generally referred to as Venus and Tannhäuser, in which the names of the principals are changed from Helen and Fanfreluche to Venus and Tannhäuser. In both versions, however, the mistress of the pleasure grottoes under the Venusberg is a femme fatale and

25 Recently John Glassco has re-edited and completed Beardsley's erotic version of the novel, to which he has given the title: Under the Hill; or, the Story of Venus and Tannhäuser, in which is Set Forth an Exact Account of the Manner of State Held by Madame Venus, Goddess & Meretrix, Under the Famous Horselberg, and Containing the Adventures of Tannhäuser in that Place, His Journeying to Rome, and Return to the Loving Mountain (Paris, 1959).

26 Beardsley was probably most familiar with the Tannhäuser legend as popularized by Wagner, but he apparently had no intention of using it except as a starting point for his tale of fantasy. The traditional legend tells of the wandering knight who enters Venus's love mountain, where he indulges in every kind of fleshly pleasure until with contrite heart he seeks absolution for his sins in Rome. Upon the pope's refusal to forgive him until his staff burst into bloom, Tannhäuser returns in despair to Venus, unaware that in the meantime the staff has miraculously bloomed and he is actually pardoned. Tannhäuser's plight is essentially tragic in the Greek sense, for he dooms himself by imperfect knowledge of the degree of his own responsibility by impulsive actions.
the enraptured gentleman is a dandy-aesthete. The main difference in the stories is, of course, in the nature of the love-making scenes. Since the aesthetic hero is no less dandiacal, no less decadent in "Under the Hill" than in *Venus and Tannhäuser*, it seems to me that the more "public" version makes a better companion-piece to *Zuleika* and *Dorian*.

The first paragraph of "Under the Hill" stresses the dandiacal nature of the hero and, at the same time, reveals something of Beardsley's decorative prose style:

> The Abbé Fanfreluche, having lighted off his horse, stood doubtfully for a moment beneath the ombre gateway of the mysterious Hill, troubled with an exquisite fear lest a day's travel should have too cruelly undone the laboured niceness of his dress. His hand, slim and gracious as La Marquise du Deffand's in the drawing by Carmontelle, played nervously about the gold hair that fell upon his shoulders like a finely-curled peruke, and from point to point of a precise toilet the fingers wandered, quelling the little mutinies of cravat and ruffle.27

Beardsley's language here is as elaborately descriptive as any of the finely detailed illustrations that accompany the text. The sensuous texture of a pen and ink drawing is conveyed in the accumulation of such "precious" terms as "exquisite," "niceness," "Slim and gracious," "nervously," "finely-curled," "precise," and "little mutinies of cravat and ruffle." One is able to visualize the delicate arabesques and the stark beauty of black on white by the power of Beardsley's verbal magic: there stands the narcissistic

27*The Savoy*, I, No. 1, 156.
young gentleman, fondling his long hair and his ruffles and preparing to enter the "mysterious Hill." "Would to heaven," he sighed, 'I might receive the assurance of a looking-glass before I make my début.'

Awakening in his elegant bedroom after the first night "under the hill," the Abbé Fanfreluche exclaims over the "frilled silk pillows," the wallpaper, and the pictures. His thoughts rove over many things but dwell on those which concern himself. He thinks, for example, of the "wonderful pair of blonde trousers he would get Madame Belleville to make for him." When he finally gets up out of bed it is nearly noon. He slips off his "dainty night dress" and stands before his bath "like Narcissus gazing at his reflection in the still scented water. . . ." After his bath (which in the erotic version is accomplished only with the loving assistance of his attendants who, fish-like, swim between his legs), the Abbé hurry "to bid good-morning to Helen."

Helen is, of course, the epitome of wantonness. Beardsley's description of her leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that she delights in her own seductive beauty and in her ability to cause men anguish: "She was adorably tall and slender. Her neck and shoulders were wonderfully drawn, and the little malicious breasts were full of the

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28Ibid., I, No. 1, 159.
29Ibid., I, No. 2, 187, 195.
irritation of loveliness that can never be entirely comprehended, or even enjoyed to the utmost.\textsuperscript{30} 

Although she is a \textit{femme fatale}, Helen does not appear to hold the Abbé Fanfreluche's destiny directly in her hand. She is fatal to him indirectly because she rules the pleasure domain and all that that represents. The Abbé is enthralled by the promise of infinite novelty. Helen's role as \textit{femme fatale} is more clearly demonstrated in her relationship with Adolphe, her pet unicorn. The pitiable beast is kept in a golden-barred palace, an "artful cage." Every morning Helen comes to feed him and (like the temptress she is) to taunt him. The unicorn, of course, is without mate and, though beautiful and loving, is quite lonely. Unfortunately, the Adolphe episode concludes the fourth and final installment of "Under the Hill" in The Savoy. But it is a significant stopping place; for Adolphe's plight points the dilemma of the aesthete. Annette Lavers argues that it is the unicorn in \textit{Venus and Tannhäuser} and not Tannhäuser that is the symbol of the artist: "This is the only character in the novel whose behaviour expresses feelings and not the physiological whim of the minute; but his animal form forbids him any direct contact with his divine mistress, by whom he daily fears to be abandoned."\textsuperscript{31} The erotic version of the episode

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., I, No. 2, 163.

elaborates on the scene at the close of "Under the Hill." Venus (i.e., Helen) arrives each morning to satisfy the appetite of her "amorous unicorn"; and each day she threatens to leave before he has been fully requited. Her method of gratifying him is implied in one of the very last sentences of "Under the Hill": Adolphe is described as a forlorn creature, "proud and beautiful, knowing no mate, and coming to no hand except the queen's itself."32

The artist, like the unicorn, lives by and for his cruel-fair mistress. With her, he has a raison d'être and hope; without her, none. But with her, he can never have true and complete fulfillment. The unicorn and the dandy together express Beardsley's particular awareness of the aesthete's dilemma. It is the unnatural natural condition of the unicorn to be unique, a misfit, and as much at home in a golden cage as an artist is in his own palace of art. Fanfreluche (or Tannhäuser) is destined to live out his life in an artificial world of his own devising. As the unicorn's helplessness is a consequence of his being a unicorn, and as the decision to enter the loving mountain is predetermined by Tannhäuser's being Tannhäuser (i.e., an aesthete), so Beardsley's decision to create his literary fantasy was implicit in the quality of his creative imagination. Beardsley's aesthetic ideal arose from his unconscious, and

32The Savoy, I, No. 2, 195.
he sought to objectify it in art, just as Venus appeared to Tannhäuser and caused him to sacrifice his eternal soul to be perpetually in her company. Had Beardsley carried his story to its logical conclusion, Tannhäuser would have realized the aesthetic ideal as in the Germanic legend: by forfeiting the natural world. But even without Beardsley's ending, the *femme fatale*, the projection of an aesthetic ideal, is still triumphant once again over an artist who tried to maintain the ecstasy of a "hard, gemlike flame" in his life as well as in his art.

Some general conclusions can be drawn about the symbolic function of the *femme fatale* in fiction by novelists sharing the obsession of such dandies as Dorian Gray, the Duke of Dorset, and the Abbé Fanfreluche for the decorative, or formal, element in life and art. Oscar Wilde, Max Beerbohm, and Aubrey Beardsley understood that a true aesthete is an uncompromising egotist with no room in his life for altruistic concerns. He worships his own images of ideal beauty and his power to project those images upon objects in the natural world. In short, the aesthete as represented by these three writers has a sense of self-sufficiency to the point of narcissism. In life, the aesthete finds his chief pleasure not in action but in the imaginative pursuit of that aspect of his own psyche which Jung and Neumann have called the anima; the archetype of the creative unconscious which is projected upon the phenomenal world as a *femme*
fatale. The aesthete—and especially the decadent aesthete—actually takes pleasure in tormenting himself with whatever beautiful object seems to embody the image of his own creative imagination. Wilde, Beerbohm, and Beardsley have been able to show symbolically in the three novels I have examined in this chapter the effects of communing perfectly with the aesthetic ideal. The three dandy-heroes pass from Life into Art and achieve their longed-for union only in self-annihilation (or, in the case of the Abbé, in a forfeiture of a "natural" life). Their respective anima projections, Sibyl Vane (if not Dorian's portrait), Zuleika Dobson, and Helen exist as femmes fatales only by virtue of the imaginative powers of such men as come to adore them. All three novels make the point that only by giving up life can the true aesthete fulfill himself in art. All three novels also demonstrate the aptness of the figure of the dandy to symbolize the extreme narcissism of the aesthete.

In the next two chapters I am concerned with late nineteenth-century writers who rejected the dandyism and decadence characteristic of Swinburne, Wilde, Beerbohm, and Beardsley. Henry James and Joseph Conrad, though sharing with them the problem of realizing an aesthetic ideal in a work of art, are somewhat less fond of flaunting their masochism and making a spectacle of their suffering. James, however, was not averse to expressing in fiction his own dilemma as an artist; indeed, his desire to objectify in art
the aesthetic patterns arising from his creative imagination was a governing passion incapable of being allayed.

The recurring figure of the beautiful but domineering woman, the *femme fatale*, in James's fiction bodies forth, I believe, both James's deep love of artistic order (form, pattern) for its own sake and his belief in the moral significance of his craft. But the figure also suggests that James knew that his commitment to art necessitated a rejection of life. In *Roderick Hudson*, the novel to which I have chiefly addressed myself, James illustrates that frustration and despair are often the results of being too fondly attached to the unattainable image of ideal beauty which the artist projects upon the imperfect world of nature.
CHAPTER V

HENRY JAMES

Almost everything that Henry James wrote reflects in matter and manner his predilection for reorganizing the aesthetically unpleasing arrangements of persons and events in the natural world for the purpose of creating an artificial world of more perfect harmony. When James's theory and practice of artistic creation are examined in his life and in his works, his adoration of artistic excellence for its own sake appears to have all the characteristics of a passionate love affair with the images of aesthetic form originating in his creative mind. Viewed through the eyes of a Jungian psychologist, James actually seems to have considered himself self-sufficient and to have craved union, not with a woman in Life, but with his own unconscious psyche, or anima, in Art. The improbability of such a union, instead of extinguishing all hope, in effect served to keep him fired for an eventual conquest. Both as subject and as theme in James's works, the apprehension of a perfect aesthetic pattern is the goal of his "sensitive" heroes, just as it was for James. In this chapter I examine several shorter works and one novel which speak of James's worship of the
imaginative faculty in the metaphor of a frustrated love affair with a beautiful but heartless *femme fatale*.

It is difficult to place Henry James finally in a single literary tradition. In many respects he belongs in the mainstream of the "art for art's sake" movement; in other respects he shares certain Philistine views that smack of "art for morality's sake." And yet again he appears to be the synthesis of these antithetical positions.

Most scholars maintain that in his development as a writer James passed through phases corresponding to all these artistic attitudes. Edouard Roditi is one critic who argues that not enough attention has been given to the early James as an aesthete along with Oscar Wilde and others. In his fiction before 1890, says Roditi, James reveals his conception of the Artist as Aesthete. "The Madonna of the Future" (1873), "The Author of Beltraffio" (1884), and "The Lesson of the Master" (1888), to cite his examples, "are all three redolent of the Pre-Raphaelite or Italianate Aestheticism of English or American expatriates who derived many of their beliefs and tastes from Ruskin or Pater. . . ."¹

Roditi mentions that F. O. Matthiessen neglects to speak of Oscar Wilde in his otherwise able introduction to *Stories of Writers and Artists*. In the period of these tales, remarks Roditi, "James seems to have been a complete

¹"Oscar Wilde and Henry James," *University of Kansas City Review*, XV (Autumn 1948), 54.
Aesthete, but one who was constantly reminded of his apostasy by guilty memories of Bostonian traditions and standards of morality." Roditi also points out another serious oversight in recent Jamesian scholarship. F. W. Dupee's *The Question of Henry James*, he charges, has "entirely neglected Wilde's brief discussions of Henry James." To have consulted Wilde, Roditi demonstrates, would have yielded comments which link James and Wilde in the tradition of aestheticism. Some of Wilde's criticism of the scientific exactitude of many contemporary writers, for example, may have been an implicit warning to James that his fondness for psychological portraiture would ruin his gift for crafting a beautiful work of art for its own sake.²

Although after 1890 James became increasingly dissatisfied with the aestheticism he once shared with Wilde, still certain subtle aesthetic ambiguities are to be found in "The Real Thing" (1893), "The Figure in the Carpet" (1896), and "The Great Good Place" (1900). These are of the same sort, claims Roditi, which appear in Wilde's "Thè Model Millionaire" and "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.": "namely, the ambiguities of the work of art's relationship to its model's nature in real life and those of the hidden meaning of an inexplicit work of art." Roditi concludes his remarks on the affinity of James and Wilde with an assertion of the continuing influence of James's early attitudes on his later works: "Henry

²Ibid., pp. 54, 52, 53.
James, in his evolution from Aestheticism to a doctrine of ethics and aesthetics of his own, had shifted slowly from the discordant realism which Wilde had condemned because it conflicted with the tastes of a hierophant of beauty, to a far more mythopoeic or poetic art. The Ambassadors, The Golden Bowl and the later works no longer made any concessions to popular demands for facts in fiction and still displayed, in their settings, all the tastes of the Aesthetic decades.  

As he matured as an artist James combined his concern for the craft of fiction with the art of living and, as a result, placed his "aestheticism" in a new relation to his "moralism." In "The Art of Fiction" (1884), his most comprehensive statement about his profession early and late he writes: "... questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution; questions of morality are quite another affair. . . . There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. . . . No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind. . . ." But James does not mean by "superficial mind" a mind that is immoral but, rather, one that cannot perceive the significance of life, is not a

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3 Ibid., pp. 55, 56.

sensitive register for all that passes before it. F. R. Leavis's introduction to the volume of *Selected Literary Criticism* of Henry James makes this point: "The creative writer's concern to render life is a concern for significance, a preoccupation with expressing his sense of what most matters. The creative drive in his art is a drive to clarify and convey his perception of relative importances."\(^5\)

But there remains the implicit dichotomy of life and art in any discussion of Henry James, regardless of how he or his critics may endeavor to reconcile the two. Leavis sheds some interesting light on the problem, maintaining that art and life are one by virtue of their creativity:

An intensity of addiction to an Art that is set over against life, an addiction that offers to manifest itself creatively in the rejection of life . . . must certainly be held to be a major default of intelligence. James doesn't actually say that, but his criticism, in its constant habit, conveys and enforces a refutation of aestheticism as clear and basic as its dismissal of the opposite kind of fallacy ["la platitude bourgeoise"]. In many ways he expresses his charged sense that the creativity of art is the creativity of life— that the creative impulsion is life, and could be nothing else.\(^6\)

If Leavis is correct in his assumption that James thought a rejection of life through art was "a major default of intelligence," James must have suffered a great deal through steady self-castigation. The fact is that James knew only too well that the law of compensation governed the affairs of ordinary men and the artist alike. Experience

\(^5\)Ibid., p. xviii. \(^6\)Ibid.
showed him that, try as he might, he could not create a beautiful artificial world without rearranging, and effectively destroying, the natural world. But the price of the aesthetic vision for an artist is not so much the loss of inferior patterns of life as it is the accompanying painful truth that patterns of Ideal Beauty exist only in the imagination and can never be perfectly realized in works of art.

Before the art of Henry James can be examined in the light of such assumptions, it is necessary to look at the life of the writer for evidence that he was, throughout his career, preoccupied with the craft of composition and that, furthermore, his preoccupation had all the earmarks of a passionate love affair. With James, as with other artistic sensibilities, his all-consuming devotion to the superior patterns of beauty of the imagination took its toll in his alienation from the world of men, not to mention his feeling of failure ever to realize the highest potential of his creative imagination.

The personal life of any artist who dedicates himself uncompromisingly to art is destined to be all but devoid of the pleasures of human relationships. By regarding art as the greatest good, he nurtures his creative instinct but allows his personal development to atrophy. Henry James, like most other "dedicated" artists, seems to have been fated to prefer art to life and to live always with a genuine mistrust of real personal attachments. Joseph Warren Beach, in his review of The Notebooks of Henry James, says he is struck
with the "essential loneliness" of the man who ironically "touched life at more points" than anyone else, albeit "he seems to have touched it with the imagination, at a distance, with a steady maintenance of aesthetic detachment." Beach finds "something pathetic in James's references to his own intensities of 'living' in the seclusion of his workshop--living, that is, in the passionate reconstruction of the lives of imaginary beings."\(^7\)

Somehow James manages to look on his bitter-sweet existence as the only life for the artist.\(^8\) There are, besides his fictional creations, statements in the Notebooks of "almost religious fervor" which Beach counts as evidence

\(^7\)"The Sacred and Solitary Refuge," *Furioso*, III (Winter 1947), 25. In this connection Thomas Moult has written that James "gives little sign that he smelled or tasted flesh and blood, beheld tears and lust, listened to laughter, or grew hot with the pride of life that kills as well as inspires." By dedicating himself to art, says Moult, James seems to have sworn an oath "to commit slow suicide," at least for "the human three-fourths of him" ("Dedicated to Art," *English Review*, XXXI [August 1920], 185).

\(^8\)Elizabeth Stevenson observes that "James makes over and over the important point that his artist remains in the world and is enamoured of it even while suffering from it in many practical ways" (*The Crooked Corridor* [New York, 1949], pp. 68-69). And Helen Horne shows how James is able to give up life and still count himself among the most fortunate men in the world: "The artist, as has become clear, must sacrifice his own personal life to his art. But the life he leads as an artist is as intense and rewarding as that which he must forego. 'What is art but an intense life--if it be real? . . . Everything else is so clumsy,' asks Miss Fancourt [in 'The Lesson of the Master']" (*Basic Ideas of James' Aesthetics as Expressed in the Short Stories Concerning Artists and Writers* [Marburg, 1960], p. 149).
of the "profound satisfaction, the 'sacred' joy, taken by the artist in the devoted exercise of his craft." Beach may have in mind one particular entry, dated August 10, 1855. At its conclusion James writes an apostrophe to art, suggesting that his dedication to art is, paradoxically, both a blessing and a curse: "Oh art, art, what difficulties are like thine; but, at the same time, what consolation and encouragements, also, are like thine? Without thee, for me, the world would be, indeed, a howling desert. The Princess will give me hard, continuous work for many months to come; but she will also give me joys too sacred to prate about."10

Walter Wright quotes a portion of James's letter to William Dean Howells in 1908, in which James expresses a similar thought; but here he seems to stress his love of challenges and obstacles for their own sake: "I find our art all the while, more difficult of practice, and want, with that, to do it in a more and more difficult way; it being really, at bottom, only difficulty that interests me."11 Such a confession— that difficulty is the source of his satisfaction— points to the masochistic impulse in James the artist, a clear-cut example of how the artist delights in wooing the pitiless Muse who continues to torment him. James

9p. 36.

repeats the testimony, but in language more explicitly passionate, in the Notebook entry for October 23, 1891: "To live in the world of creation—to get into it and stay in it—to frequent it and haunt it—to think intently and fruitfully—to woo combinations and inspirations into being by a depth and continuity of attention and mediation—this is the only thing. . . ." 12

There is no doubt that James conceived of the artist-writer's attachment to the craft of fiction in metaphors of disastrous love affairs. However, at times the image of the beloved object in the relationship is conceived as more masculine than feminine, but it is consistently characterized as a destructive force in the life of the artist. He speaks, for example, of Balzac's art as a "serpent," a "Frankenstein monster," and "a beast with a hundred claws." At the same time, James acknowledges that it is "the fellow craftsman who can most feel for him [Balzac]," who can best understand the pleasurable agony of being embraced ("hugged to death") by the immensity of his artistic vision. 13

Surely James knew that pleasurable agony. Stuart P. Sherman argues that James's particular sophisticated type of aesthetic consciousness as revealed in his literary art has its "closest analogue" in that of Walter Pater, one truly enamored of beauty:

12p. 112.

13Selected Literary Criticism, p. 201.
James is like Pater in his aversion from the world, his dedication to art, his celibacy, his personal decorum and dignity, his high aesthetic seriousness, his Epicurean relish in receiving and reporting the multiplicity and intensity of his impressions, and in the exacting closeness of his style. There are distinctions in plenty to be made by any one curious enough to undertake the comparison; but on the whole there is no better sidelight on James's "philosophy" than Pater's Conclusion to the "Studies in the Renaissance" and his "Plato and Platonism"; no better statement of his general literary ideals than Pater's essay on Style; no more interesting "parallels" to his later novels than "Marius the Epicurean" and "Imaginary Portraits." To make the matter a little more specific let the curious inquirer compare the exposure of Pater's consciousness which is ordinarily known as his description of Mona Lisa with the exposure of James's consciousness which is ordinarily known as the description of a telegraph operator ("In the Cage").

But to compare James with Pater is not meaningful without a brief examination of those tales which demonstrate what Sherman calls the "white-hot ardor of [James's] passion for beauty." Among those to be considered are "The Figure in the Carpet," "The Lesson of the Master," and Roderick Hudson, in each of which, according to Sherman, James is "interpreting the spirit of the artist or treating the conflict between the world and art." One could name others which are thematically related, such as those included in the collection edited by F. O. Matthiessen. Notable are "The Madonna of the Future," "The Author of Beltraffio," "The Middle Years," and "The Story in It," as well as such additional stories as

15 Ibid., p. 397.
"In the Cage," The Spoils of Poynton, and The Sacred Fount. Although "The Author of Beltraffio," "The Madonna of the Future," and Roderick Hudson make James's point about the artist's painful relationship with his Muse through the metaphoric figure of the femme fatale, several other works—in particular, "The Story in It," "The Figure in the Carpet,"

"In the Cage," The Spoils of Poynton, and The Sacred Fount—demonstrate without the aid of this particular metaphor James's preoccupation with the artist's self-destructive sense of omniscience. These are particularly well suited to illustrate James's conviction of what Naomi Lebowitz has called the "deep analogy between human and artistic engagement" to be found in James. In "The Story in It," for instance, James implies the superiority of imaginative creation to actual experience but shows, too, that imagined love can never be consummated. Maud Blessingbourne, the "artist" of the piece, tells her friend Mrs. Dyott that she has a "story" but that "to tell it would be to express it, and that's just what I can't do." It is her secret love for Colonel Voyt, which if spoken of would cease to have charm. Mrs. Dyott and Colonel Voyt are lovers in life, not in art, but they agree that Mrs. Blessingbourne's imaginative affair must never be brought into the realm of "life": "Her consciousness, if they let it alone—as they of course after

16 The Imagination of Loving (Detroit, 1965), p. 18.
this mercifully must—was, in the last analysis, a kind of shy romance. Not a romance like their own . . . but a small scared starved subjective satisfaction that would do her no harm and nobody else any good. Who but a duffer . . . would see the shadow of a story in it?" (p. 346). The "artist" has chosen to worship her ideal in the solitary shrine of her own imagination.

Like Maud Blessingbourne, Hugh Verecker, the author in "The Figure in the Carpet," takes secret, private, subjective pleasure in never revealing the "figure" in his "carpet." James makes the point that the significance of art, like the significance of life, derives from the degree of awareness one has of its manifold implications. Art is no art as life is no life until its pattern or texture is uniquely known and "felt" in the core of one's being. Verecker calls his secret "'the joy of my soul'" and "'the loveliest thing in the world'" (p. 289). In fact, so great is his love for the product of his own imagination that Verecker chooses to go to the grave with his "secret" still locked tightly within him. One may suppose that Maud Blessingbourne will do the same with her "story."

Another example of an artistic temperament enamored of its own imagination is "In the Cage." Here the

17In Stories of Writers and Artists, ed. F. O. Matthiessen (New York, n.d.). Hereafter, unless otherwise indicated, page citations in the text to James's short stories are to this work.
telegraphist in the wire cage is, like the artist, isolated from general humanity. However, she observes and comes to "know" men and women through the pregnant messages which they leave at her desk to be wired. In her growing sense of power over their lives (she it is who makes all the vital "connections" for them, and they cannot communicate without her), she finds it increasingly difficult to believe herself less "out of the cage" than they. The cage, though it is a physically confining place, allows her to escape imaginatively by "a certain expansion of her consciousness." She is, moreover, a willing prisoner. The young lady is throughout designated as "the betrothed of Mr. Mudge," suggesting in that phrase her reluctance to join the prosaic world this enterprising young grocer offers her. She realizes that to procrastinate about leaving her present job is, in some respects, foolish, for "the fascination of the place was, after all, a sort of torment. But she liked her torment. . . ." The chief part of her torment is her secret, subjective love affair with one of her customers, Captain Everard, upon whom she projects her private image of the perfect gentleman. She fancies an ideal relationship between them and thrives on the hope that some day she may be able to engage in real communication with him; there is always, she believes, "The divine chance of his consciously liking her"
The upshot of the story is that her imagination deceives her; and as her beautiful artificial world collapses, she decides to leave the cage of fantasies, accept Mr. Mudge for what he is, and settle into the even more confining cage of unimaginative life in the suburbs.

The hyperactive imagination of the telegraphist has provided her with an adventure which is paradoxically her greatest joy and her greatest sorrow. James does not suggest that she ought not to have been led into such dangerous fantasies; he is saying that she is one of those fated to be tyrannized by the imagination. He is saying, too, that a person thus dominated by a powerful imagination is necessarily a tyrannical force in the lives of others. Whether the private aesthetic vision dominates the artist, or whether one person dominates another, the result is disaster for the one tyrannized. And yet, the very fact that James presents his manipulators and predators sympathetically is a sign that he regarded the tyrannical instinct as a tragic necessity in many individuals. Those who attempt to order the lives of others are themselves cruelly destined to lives of comparative unfulfillment. They, too, are somehow tyrannized by powerful forces acting through them.

James's most noteworthy predators, vampires, and cannibals, though they direct the fates of others, have

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virtually no control over their own lives. Madame Merle, Maude Lowder, Mrs. Light, Mrs. Gereth, Rowland Mallet—all these shapers of destinies are themselves directed by a ruling passion which, in almost every case, is self-jeopardizing. The impulse to tyrannize seldom arises from malevolence but rather from a fatal fascination with creativity per se—a fascination which becomes a monomania. With an arrogance growing out of their sense of self-sufficiency, these men and women are actually types of the artist. Maud Lowder and Mrs. Light share Madame Merle's obsession with the idea of making "some dream of one's youth come true" (III, 286), and they never cease their task of reordering circumstances so that reality will at last correspond to the dream. Seldom, however, do they achieve their goals without a large measure of frustration and failure.

Mrs. Gereth, of *The Spoils of Poynton*, is typical. Seeing that Fleda Vetch has the same aesthetic sensibility as herself, Mrs. Gereth intends that Fleda become a second self, capable of appreciating the artistic "spoils" she and her husband have collected over the years. "They were our religion," she tells Fleda, "they were our life, they were us!" Married to the unappreciative heir, Fleda would be the perfect mistress of Poynton, Mrs. Gereth believes. "You know, you feel as I do myself, what's good and true and pure. . . . You would replace me, you would watch over them [the contents of the house], you would keep the place
right . . ." (X, 30-31, 32). As she attempts to arrange everything to suit her, to correspond to her notion of ideal order, Mrs. Gereth indeed resembles the artist. And like the artist, too, she is dismayed when she fails to make a pleasing arrangement of her materials: the lives of Fleda and her son.

Even Rowland Mallet, in a novel to be discussed more fully in another section of this chapter, is himself a type of the artist who is ensnared by the object of his passion. Connoisseur and collector, he allows himself to become intensely absorbed in Roderick Hudson as a beautiful personality; and when that disintegrates, Rowland senses that he, too, has failed: his "creation" has obstinately refused to be shaped as he would have liked.

What James is saying through such characters as these is that the creative artist is often tragically fated to project upon the chaos of reality his private vision of order, a vision that is necessarily conditioned by the quality of the imagination from which it arises.19 Much the same

19Sister Jane Marie Luecke argues (albeit in another context) that Rowland Mallet, Hyacinth Robinson, Isabel Archer, and Lambert Strether share a "propensity for seeing only what [they want] to see in others . . . and they fill in from their own imaginations and desires the missing details of the mental images. Because these images are more real to them than the actual reality, they suffer bewilderment and often real sorrow when the imaginary constructions are finally destroyed by the reality" ("The Princess Casamassima: Hyacinth's Fallible Consciousness," Modern Philology, IX [May 1963], 275).
happens to the artist-narrator of *The Sacred Fount*, a story which, "if it is 'about' anything, is about life and the relationship of art to life." The narrator is not "sinister," as Ralph Ranald argues\(^{20}\) but rather pitiable in his inability to distinguish between art and life. For him, as for James and James's artist, "the world is little more than a stage or a canvas," according to Robert Perlongo.\(^{21}\) James, as well as his artist-narrator, is fated to see life as art, as disastrous as this vision may prove to be for him.

Several accounts of "what happens" in *The Sacred Fount* offer convincing evidence that James is again demonstrating the tyranny of the imagination. Jean Frantz Black-all rightly interprets the novel as the story of a man who is governed by the artist's illusion that he is omniscient. Because of its concise articulation of the relevant thematic details, her summary merits quoting. This "proud and analytic" man, the narrator of the tale,

undertakes to account for certain characteristics he observes in other persons in terms of a governing concept. Some people are vampires, and others, because they love their respective vampires, are victims. Presently he builds up his concept into an elaborate set of hypotheses to embody all he observes and infers. He becomes so preoccupied with his concept that he throws common sense, sound means of investigation, and good manners to the winds,


\(^{21}\)"The Sacred Fount: Labyrinth or Parable?" *Kenyon Review*, XXII (Autumn 1960), 646-47.
becoming a snoop, a bore, and the victim of an overriding obsession to perfect and validate his theory. 22

He falls in love with May Server (one of the victims) but cannot declare his love because that would destroy the artistic pattern he has been building. Unknowingly, he himself has become a kind of vampire, too. The result is that, like the artist, his inordinate love for the product of his own imagination necessitates the sacrifice of potential relationships in the external world. Both victim and victimizer, the narrator deprives himself of a real love affair as he tries in vain as an artist to preserve an aesthetically superior vision of order.

Tony Tanner also offers a clear argument that James may have intended to "[epitomize] the artistic instinct" in The Sacred Fount. The narrator's concern, like those of the artist, consist in "the whole question of discerning or imposing a principle of order in or on the world. He talks about his theory very much as many critics have talked about a work of art." And Tanner quotes the narrator's sublime sense of "that special beauty of my scheme through which the whole depended so on each part and each part guaranteed the whole." Moreover, the narrator shares the artist's alienation from the world which threatens to return his

beautiful creation to the chaos from which he had formed it.23

It is the opinion of Mrs. Blackall that The Sacred Fount should be placed beside the Notebooks and the Prefaces as "a source of insight into the mental processes of the artist."24 Even though this claim could be made for "In the Cage" and any number of other stories, the dilemma of the narrator in The Sacred Fount is an especially poignant account of what happens to James himself. When, at the end of the story, in the face of all evidence to the contrary, the narrator steadfastly clings to his own version of the silent drama he has witnessed, he approaches the "insanity" of the artist. His private, subjective pleasure is that which is common to all of James's artists. His "secret success" is a Pyrrhic victory characterized by "lonely liberty" and "intellectual joy." Hugh Verecker in "The Figure in the Carpet" is no less lonely for the immense satisfaction he takes in his secret success.

In The Sacred Fount, as in many of James's novels, the law of compensation seems to be in full force. Everything must be paid for: a life for a life, pleasure with pain, one man's success with another man's failure, a beloved's


24p. 36.
happiness with the lover's agony. It is a law whose effects are those which Osborn Andreas refers to generally as "emotional cannibalism." Love, especially any intimate, personal relationship, is usually the source of all vampirish or cannibalistic acts. It is impossible that both the lover and the beloved should long remain healthy and prosperous as each continues to feed off the other. Usually the beloved waxes as the lover wanes, a phenomenon paralleled by the persistence of the image of artistic perfection at the expense of the artist's emotional stability as he attempts in vain to body forth that image.

Whether the theme of The Sacred Fount be labeled "emotional cannibalism" or, as Leon Edel prefers to call it, the "vampire theme," James is clearly preoccupied with the role of self-serving love as a "depleting force." Even if the depleting effect of love is not the only theme of his stories, a good number of them do speak of the problem, sometimes explicitly, sometimes metaphorically. Mark Ambient in "The Author of Beltraffio," for example, struggles


26Edel provides biographical evidence that James saw in his own family the "process of nourishment and depletion." From what James must have experienced at home as a youth, Edel draws this conclusion: "In Henry James's mind—and in his fiction—love was a force capable of depleting and destroying. Women could influence men, change them for good or bad, and what resulted usually was a stultifying dependency" (Introduction to The Sacred Fount [New York, 1953], p. xxvii).
for mastery over both his life and his art, but he is doomed to suffer both as a man and as an artist.

"The Author of Beltraffio" contains at least two metaphorical statements about the relation of the artist to his art, and both suggest that inordinate love is injurious. It can be read, first, as a story primarily about the conflicting claims of society and the artist concerning the value of a work of art. In broad outlines it shows that Mark Ambient's love for a beautiful woman (initially for love's own sake) has produced a beautiful but fragile child, the natural outcome of their union. The child, beloved by both, is claimed as private property by each, and their rivalry for his exclusive love seems to drain his life away. As they proceed to consume him with love, his parents are not unlike the "emotional cannibals" of The Sacred Fount. Mark sees in his son much of himself, and his love becomes a kind of self-love, as destructive as it would be to feed cannibalistically on oneself. His love for his son is paralleled in his love for his literary masterpiece "Beltraffio," which also contains much of himself. This love of his own artistic creation is equally self-idolotrous and self-destructive.

Diametrically opposed to the father, the mother insists that the child belongs to her world—the world of manners and morality—and must not, at any cost, become like his father, a self-pleasing hedonist. To "save" their sickly child from his father's "immoral" passion for art and thus to
triumph over her husband, she refuses to administer the necessary drugs but instead "[presses] him to her breast" with a murderous embrace. The deliberate destruction of the boy is a metaphoric statement about the deadly righteousness with which the "world" refutes the premises of "art for art's sake": by effectively destroying the works of the creative man. Mark has foreseen the outcome of this fight for the possession of the boy, who functions as the apple of discord between the parents. "'As for my small son, you know, we shall probably kill him between us before we've done with him!'' he tells the narrator early in his visit (pp. 93, 63).

With a shift of emphasis from the fate of the child (work of art) to the fate of the artist, a second metaphoric statement focuses on the artist's personal tragedy arising from his quest for perfection. James illustrates here as elsewhere that a dedication to art necessitates a sacrifice of life. Mark Ambient is a type of the artist with which James had a close affinity. His commitment to art is conveyed in his Bohemian dress and manner. "He was addicted to velvet jackets, to cigarettes, to loose shirt-collars, to looking a little dishevelled." In short, anyone "would easily have guessed his belonging to the artist guild." The narrator is also struck by the resemblance of the writer's cottage with its vine-covered garden walls to some "masterpiece of one of the pre-Raphaelites" (pp. 54, 55).

In his literary masterpiece, no less than in his
residence and his life, Mark Ambient embodies the doctrines of aestheticism. "Beltraffio," the narrator informs the readers, "was the most complete presentation that had yet been made of the gospel of art; it was a kind of esthetic war-cry. People had endeavoured to sail nearer to 'truth' in the cut of their sleeves and the shape of their sideboards; but there had not as yet been, among English novels, such an example of beauty of execution and 'intimate' importance of theme. Nothing had been done in that line from the point of view of art for art" (p. 51). With his love of the "beauty of execution" and of "intimate" themes, Mark Ambient is enough like Henry James to be the artist's symbolic portrait of himself, emphasizing the painful struggle for artistic success which is achieved only at a tremendous sacrifice of his personal life. Like James, he is cursed with a passion for form akin to a religious fervor which summons a man to consecrate his every action to a higher good. His was "the desire to resolve his experience of life into a literary form." This attempt at perfection of form he compares to the quest for the holy grail and "[regards] imperfection not only as an esthetic but quite also a social crime" (p. 68). With reference to the novel Mark Ambient is currently writing, the narrator pronounces him "in love with his idea." Because of his desire to be "truer than I've ever been" and his seeing in the crescent moon an implicit "promise to fill the disk," Mark's "act of execution had in it as much torment as joy."
He fervently believes his latest novel will be "a golden vessel, filled with the purest distillation of the actual." The real aesthetic value of the work is in "the shaping of the vase, the hammering of the metal." And yet the urn, no matter how well wrought, is always to be a disappointment for the idealistic craftsman: "My dear fellow, if you could see the surface I dream of as compared with the one with which I've to content myself. Life's really too short for art . . ." (pp. 75-76). And Mark Ambient is doomed to a frustration and despair inversely proportional to the intensity and vividness of his dream of aesthetic perfection.

Mark's wife Beatrice is James's subtle portrait of the ambivalent femme fatale. The narrator makes especial note of her classic beauty, several times comparing her to the graceful elegance represented in the paintings of eighteenth-century Royal Academicians. She is "slim and fair, with a long neck and pretty eyes," and she is "delicate and quiet" (p. 57); but the narrator is suspicious, for she also seems "detached and inscrutable" (p. 66), not unlike another incarnation of Leonardo's vampirish beauty, Mona Lisa. He wonders briefly whether Mark "were perchance hen-pecked," though he finds "no obvious disparity" in their union. She in fact strikes him as not incapable of "[gratifying] the poetic fancy" of her husband (p. 61). Even though she denies being "literary" or "artistic," her great beauty has somehow been transferred not only to their child but also
to the literary artistry of her husband who, "ten years before, had simply and quite inevitably taken her for an angel, without asking himself of what." Perhaps consciously comparing her to her namesake, Dante's beloved, the narrator supposes "that [Mark] might well have owed her a brief poetic inspiration" (p. 79).

Now, however, Mark's relationship with his wife is marked by "coldness" and "mechanical submission." She is not only a domineering wife but a possessive mother, seemingly insensitive to the needs of either her husband or her son. Mark is powerless either to take the child from her to have access to him. The narrator, a type of the artist himself (like his counterpart in The Sacred Fount), seeks to fathom Beatrice's mystery, to ascribe a motive to her behavior. He believes that beneath her façade of unimaginative Philistinism lies a deep aesthetic faculty. He even imagines the beautiful dying child to regard his mother as having "the kind of sensibility she has represented to you as lacking. . . . I'm my great father's child, but I'm also my beautiful mother's. . . ." (pp. 84-85). Her decision late in the story to withhold the promise of the child's aesthetic perfection in adulthood is sufficient proof that the narrator has misjudged her; it is also proof of the corollary: that the artist has been betrayed by a beautiful woman's implicit promise that their union will result in the incarnation of an aesthetic ideal.
To look at the character of Beatrice as a *femme fatale* reveals James's conviction that the same power which inspires creativity can also withhold life. Mark confesses that he was amazed to discover that a beautiful woman could look disparagingly upon those who admire beauty. The sexual frigidity which the narrator infers by her general behavior is both literal and figurative. Lacking a maternal instinct, she destroys what she has unwillingly helped to create. For her callousness belies her charm, as her actions contradict her appearance. Though beautiful, she is vicious, and she "loves" with murderous intensity. By the end of the story her selfish act (she kills the child to satisfy her own notion of what is right) is performed with the cool deliberateness and the air of "bland detachment" which characterize the *femme fatale*. James has once more made the point that the artist's love of the ideal always dooms him to the agony of unfulfilled dreams.

In "The Madonna of the Future" the artist's love affair with an aesthetic ideal is portrayed again in the familiar metaphor of the relationship between a masochistic man and a sadistic woman. The beloved in this case is the city of Florence, who affects the artist much as a *femme fatale* affects any man who falls under her spell. James's narrator in this story relates that the artist, Theobald, "talked of Florence as a devoted lover might still speak of an old incomparable mistress who remained proof against time;
he like to describe how he had lost his heart to her at first
sight." The city, he says, is "the sole perfect lady" of all the
cities. It has charmed him, held him captive, and
rendered him ineffectual as an artist and as a man (p. 28).
Ultimately, this "perfect lady" slays him, and he dies her
unrequited lover, like Gautier's young man who gives up his
life for one night with Cleopatra.

Theobald, as an aging artist, resembles all of James's men who
discover too late that life has passed them by.

Sitting in front of his twenty-year-old blank canvas, Theo-
bald cries out to the narrator:

"That was to have contained my masterpiece! . . .
Since I've been sitting here taking stock of my intellects, I've come to believe that I've the
material for a hundred masterpieces. But my hand's paralysed now and they'll never be painted. I
never began! I waited to be worthier to begin--I wasted my life in preparation. While I fancied my
creation was growing it was only dying. I've taken the whole business too hard. Michael Angelo
didn't when he went at the Lorenzo. He did his best at a venture, and his venture's immortal"
(p. 48).

And so Theobald dies a failure for never having ventured any-	hing that might have proved a failure. Like Dencombe in
"The Middle Years," he realizes this truth: "Something or other is everything." Or as Doctor Hugh (in the same tale)
puts it: "'What people "could have done" is mainly what
they've in fact done'" (pp. 210, 208).27

27Reginald Turner's story of the dedicated literary
artist, Alan Herbert, is quite Jamesian in its philosophy
and method. Alan, the central figure of "A Chef-d'Ouvre,"
The artist's failure to embody his dream in a work of art is both a cause and an effect of the tyranny of his imagination. The creative unconscious functions like the archetypal *femme fatale* who promises more than she is willing to grant. And the artist, aroused by the stimulus of this vision of beauty proceeding from his imagination, is sure to suffer deeply when he finds that a perfect embodiment of ideal form in base matter is an impossible dream. He suffers principally because he is incapable of a Browning-like philosophy of imperfection, for to be resigned to a life of mere "striving" makes of him a perpetually unsated Tantalus. It is better by far, he believes, to act the part of Narcissus and gamble his very life for the possession of an ideal worth having.

Another of James's artists, and the very essence of masochistic narcissism, is Roderick Hudson, an incurable idealist. Christina Light, the image of his ideal, is a destructive woman who ensnares a man with her beauty and then-withholds herself from him like the *belle dame sans merci*. It is in *Roderick Hudson*, perhaps more than in any other of James's sustained works, that the artist's dilemma is lives for his art, hoping one day to write a masterpiece worthy of himself. He clings to an ideal (found in Balzac) and refuses to set pen to paper until he feels capable of embodying his ideal. Like Theobald in "The Madonna of the Future," Alan discovers that he is incapable of creating the masterpiece he has dreamed of and, as a consequence of the disillusionment, dies heartbroken, a failure.
presented in such convincing metaphors. Although it is an early novel (1875), it is nevertheless a consciously and conscientiously crafted work and merits careful reading.

**Roderick Hudson**, briefly, is the story of a romantic young American sculptor and his discovery in Europe that idealism can be too much of a good thing. Roderick leaves his provincial New England life to study and sculpt abroad, particularly in Rome. Rowland Mallet, his benefactor, and others in the art colony try to convince Roderick of the importance of being aware of his limitations as an artist. The headstrong young man will of course not heed their dark warnings but instead is attracted by the radiance of an ideal beauty in the person of Christina Light, hovering always just beyond his immediate reach.

His fatal love affair with Christina, including his anxiety and despair when she promises and then refuses to be his, is analogous to his devotion to art and his subsequent frustration when he cannot sculpt artistic reproductions of his idealized concepts. Instead of making the point that an artist suffers as his aesthetic visions flourish, or that as art prospers so life wanes, James has constructed in **Roderick Hudson** an artistic pattern in which the *femme fatale* functions as a thematic metaphor as well as a factor in the story of Roderick's rise and fall. It would be a mistake to regard the novel as primarily about the effect of a *femme fatale* on an artist, for Roderick is at no time torn between
art and life. His first love is always sculpture; Christina serves him only as an inspiration, as his Muse. When he seems to be fervently in love with her as a sexual companion, he is only in love with his idealized conception of her as a beautiful aesthetic form which he desires above all else to make his own and to embody in a work of art.

From the moment she first walks into his life, Christina Light appears as a beautiful but dangerous woman which it is not Roderick's fate to possess. Roderick's initial glimpse of her is that of an artist thunderstruck by beauty: "'Beautiful? She's beauty's self--she's a revelation. I don't believe she's living--she's a phantom, a vapour, an illusion!'" She is an elegantly dressed girl of twenty: "A pair of extraordinary dark blue eyes, a mass of dusky hair over a low forehead, a blooming oval of perfect purity, a flexible lip just touched with disdain, the step and carriage of a tired princess. . . ." As she passes near them with her white poodle, Rowland remarks to Roderick: "'I hope . . . the young lady has nothing in common with Mephistopleles [sic]. She looked dangerous.'" And Roderick responds: "'If beauty's the wrong thing, . . . she's the incarnation of evil'" (I, 95-96).28

Roderick intends this paradoxical observation to be taken as an absurdity, for he can conceive of nothing more

28See supra n. 18.
improbable than that beauty and evil should be attributes of the same being. Gloriani, a more mature artist of his acquaintance, is aware that "'there is no essential difference between beauty and ugliness; that they overlap and intermingle in a quite inextricable manner; . . . that hideousness grimaces at you suddenly from out of the very bosom of loveliness, and beauty blooms before your eyes in the lap of vileness' . . . '" (I, 107). He is evidently aware of the insidious charm of the Medusa, about which Mario Praz has written in The Romantic Agony. As a matter of fact, the perceptive Gloriani sees in Christina the living embodiment of the beautiful but murderous Salomé, "'who pranced up to the king her father with a great bloody head on a great gold tray'" (I, 190).

Others in the novel from time to time comment upon Christina's ambivalent personality. Miss Blanchard thinks she "'looks half like a Madonna and half like a ballerina,'" by these terms implying her physical as well as her spiritual attractiveness; Madame Grandoni refers to her as a "'veritable sorceress'"; and the pompous Mr. Leavenworth, upon seeing a bust of Christina, inquires whether the work be "'a fanciful representation of one of the pagan goddesses--a Diana, a Flora, a naiad, a dryad?'" (I, 195, 373, 300). He has instinctively discovered in Christina the capriciousness of the woodland nymphs and the frigidity of the moon goddess. Rowland refers to her as a vampire and compares her to a Siren (I, 226, 294).
On his second encounter with Christina, when she and her mother visit the studio, Roderick is struck both by her "systematic indifference" and her extraordinary beauty. He continues to look at her "as he would have done at the Medicean Venus," and begs to model her bust (I, 151, 157). Although he admits to Rowland that he is "'damnably susceptible, by nature, to the grace and beauty and mystery of women, to their power to turn themselves "on" as creatures of subtlety and perversity'" (I, 142), he falls all too willingly under Christina's spell, as a Ulysses who "'refuses to be tied to the mast'" (I, 294). The reason is simply that he is "'intoxicated with her beauty'" (I, 203), a condition which prevents his making a more sober assessment of her character as a whole. On the perfection of her beauty Roderick says, without awareness of her perfidy: "'Her face is the most exquisite piece of modeling that ever came from creative hands. Not a line without meaning, not a hair's breadth that's not admirably finished. And then her divine mouth--it might really be that of a goddess! It's as if a pair of lips had been shaped just not to utter all the platitudes and all the pretences'" (I, 187).

That Christina is as perverse as she is beautiful is illustrated a number of times in the novel. Once, she and her white "necromantic poodle," Stentorello, come upon Roderick sleeping on the grass under the Italian sky. Despite Rowland's plea for forbearance, Christina cries: "'What delicious oblivion! . . . Happy Man! Stentorello . . . wake
him up!'" (I, 234). To awaken a man from a peaceful nap is not really to hazard his life, but it is enough to show her cool disregard for his tranquillity. Nor is she especially malevolent. Rather, she acts impulsively to ward off ennui. She regards herself as "rather bold and bad" and "frightfully egotistical" but with no ability to change herself (I, 208). At another time, however, she actually seems to calculate certain disastrous consequences of her act. Knowing full well that upbraiding Roderick only "'[makes him] feel as if [he] could scale the skies,'" Christina points to a little blue flower growing across from them in a vertical wall of the Roman Coliseum. Roderick, inspirited by the verbal flagellation he has just received, is eager to try for the prize. "'Do you suppose I want you to get it for me? . . . Are you crazy? Do you mean to kill yourself?'" After she has thus dared him, only Rowland's timely appearance as a deus ex machina prevents Roderick from plunging to his death from the crumbling heights (I, 260, 264-65). Later, alone, Rowland remarks to Roderick: "'Your companion seemed to me to know very well how to handle you. . . . She was twisting you round her finger. . . . your preposterous attempt to pluck the flower was a proof that she could go all lengths in the way of making a fool of you.' 'Yes,' said Roderick meditatively; 'she's quite wiping her feet on me'" (I, 267).

The truth of the matter is that unless he is in her presence, he cannot be inspired to create, and he is willing to risk his life to guarantee that she will not desert him. But he seems to have no control over her coming and going.
As Prince Cassmassima begins his courtship of Christina and she sees less and less of Roderick, the sculptor grows more and more slothful and unproductive. A chance meeting with her while he is in this morbid state of mind works wonders, however. After an hour-long ramble with her, Roderick announces to Rowland that he is returning to his work. "'An idea has come to me, by a miracle, and I must try to set it up while I have it'" (I, 256). Christina, it would appear, has made herself indispensable to Roderick's continued artistic productivity. In short, she has become his only Muse.

After Christina marries, Roderick comprehends what it means to have been charmed into a state of dependency. He confesses that he has become totally "'empty, distracted, debauched'" because of Christina:

"My head was filled with her; I could think of nothing else; I would have sacrificed everything to her. . . . She pretended to care greatly for all this, and to be willing to make any sacrifice in return. . . . She led me to believe that she would send her Prince about his business and keep herself free and sacred and pure for me. This was a great honour, and you may believe I valued it. It turned my head, and I lived only to see my happiness come to pass. She did everything to encourage me to hope it would; everything her infernal coquetry and falsity could suggest" (I, 428-29).

"'You told me she was dangerous,'" he says to Rowland, "'and I pooh-poohed you. You were intensely right; you're always so intensely right. She's as cold and false and heartless as she's beautiful--which is saying all. . . .'" (I, 430). Roderick has discovered, to his everlasting dismay, that
Gloriani—or even Leavenworth—has a firmer hold on reality than he ever can. The beauty of Christina is indeed inextricably bound up with her potential for destruction. She is a *femme fatale*.

For Roderick there exists some kind of correlation between the idea of beauty and the experience of sensual pleasure. An artist such as Roderick must surround himself with the forms of beauty to help him conjure up the ideal, or else he projects upon them the archetypes of his unconscious mind. He indulges less in the pleasures of the senses than in the pleasures of the imagination; for only in the mind can there be the fulfillment of his dreams. In a trance-like state Roderick soars beyond the pangs of temporal disappointment and, on at least one occasion, beyond the present to an anticipation of future joys too profound to admit of description. When, just before Christina's wedding becomes a reality, she suddenly breaks off the marriage, Roderick is ecstatic to a degree of which only he is capable. Rowland discovers him absorbing his sensuous surroundings, which seem objective correlatives of his present psychic condition:

He found him in his sitting-room, which had been closely darkened to keep out the heat. The carpets and rugs had been removed, the floor of speckled concrete was bare and lightly sprinkled with water. Here and there, over it, certain strongly-odorous flowers had been scattered. Roderick was lying on his divan in a white dressing-gown, staring at the frescoed ceiling. The room was deliciously cool and filled with the moist sweet fragrance of the circumjacent roses and violets. . . . He was
smelling a large white rose, which he continued to present to his nose. In the darkness of the room he looked exceedingly pale, but his beautiful eyes quite shed a light. He let them rest for some time on Rowland, lying there like a Buddhist in an intellectual swoon, a deep dreamer whose perception would be slowly ebbing back to temporal matters (I, 393-94).

Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether Roderick fancies himself the "Complete Aesthete" or the reincarnation of Byron. He moves erratically between these poles of self-indulgence and self-expression. Two things are certain: he enjoys striking a pose and he has a lust for novelty. Roderick burns with a "hard gem-like flame," like one of Pater's young men who sense the need to "be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy." Life for him is a series of impressions which flood into his being, and, as they do, "'others come treading on their heels and sweeping them along,'" until "'they melt like water into water and settle the question of precedence among themselves'" (I, 87-88).

Roderick has told Rowland early in their acquaintance-ship that "'the more the mind takes in, the more it has space for.'" And Rowland has observed of Roderick that, indeed, the young artist's "appetite for novelty was insatiable, and for everything characteristically foreign, as it presented itself, he had an extravagant greeting; but in half an hour the novelty had faded, he had guessed the secret, he had plucked out the heart of the mystery and was clamouring for
a keener sensation" (I, 88, 89).

This quest for novelty takes Roderick into the realm of the supersensible. Here, in the paradise of the imagination, the appetite can at last be satisfied, for in thought all things are possible. As fast as images rise from the unconscious to the conscious they are "felt" and enjoyed. But he who lives only in imaginative fantasies is not free to repeat in the external world the kind of pleasures he has experienced within. At the time an artist discovers that he can never perfectly embody the image of his own creative unconscious in a work of art, he suffers the frustrations and despair that Roderick experiences. Roderick undergoes the classic reversals from prosperity to adversity and from ignorance to knowledge. With the "pride that goeth before a fall" Roderick early vaunts his excellences and too late realizes how little of his triumph he owes to himself. Most of his good fortune and all of his bad fortune he then attributes to Christina Light, his fatal Muse.

The key to Roderick's susceptibility to Christina's beauty is his aesthetic idealism and his own audacious confidence in himself as the perceptor and revealer of an aesthetic absolute. He is convinced that he can never "'make anything ugly'" (I, 115), as Theobald (in "The Madonna of the Future") had vowed never to "'manifest [himself] by imperfection'" (p. 22). At the time of his arrival in Rome
and his initial success as a sculptor, Roderick confidently announces that he will continue to create masterpieces for the rest of his life. However, Gloriani prophesies that one day Roderick's Muse will fail to descend. Says Roderick, passionately, "'If I break down, . . . I shall stay down. If the Muse deserts me she shall at least have her fidelity on her conscience'" (I, 124). Still intoxicated by present success, Roderick does not at this time consider the loss of inspiration a real possibility.

But his Muse is Christina Light, a *femme fatale*, and she is indifferent to the suffering of men. Her "infidelity" weighs only ever so lightly. With her own well-being in jeopardy, Christina deserts the bold genius and marries an effete but wealthy prince, to whom she is equally indifferent. The effect of her marriage on Roderick is disastrous. No longer able to create and filled with self-pity, he grows altogether despondent and world-weary. On a grassy hillside with Rowland near Lake Como, Roderick is suddenly overwhelmed by the sense of his failure:

"I shall never be anything again; it's no use talking! . . . I know what I've lost and I think it horrible. Mind you, I know it, I feel it. Remember that hereafter. Don't say that he was stupefied and senseless, that his perception was dulled or his aspiration dead. Say he trembled in every nerve with a sense of the beauty and sweetness of life; say he rebelled and protested and struggled; say he was buried alive, with his eyes open and his heart beating to madness; say he clung to every blade of grass and every wayside thorn he passed; say it was the most pathetic thing you ever beheld. Say . . . that it was a sacrifice and a scandal" (I, 466-67).

As for Christina, "'She didn't at all come up to my original
idea of her" (I, 480). Roderick's "idea" of Christina, as of his sculptures, has always transcended the realm of human experience. Whenever she has neglected him, his account of himself has been that of a crestfallen idealist:

My illusions are all broken-winded; they won't carry me twenty paces. I can't laugh and forget; my laugh dies away before it begins. Your friend Stendahl writes on his book-covers (I never got further) that he has seen too early in life la beauté parfaite. I don't know how early he saw it; I saw it before I was born—in another state of being. I can't describe it positively; I can only say I don't find it anywhere now. Not at the bottom of champagne glasses; not, strange as it may seem, in the extra half-yard or so of shoulder that some women have their ball-dresses cut to expose. I don't find it at supper-tables where half a dozen ugly men with pomatumed heads are rapidly growing uglier with heat and wine... Everything's mean and dusky and shabby... Nothing is good but one!... Those things of mine were pretty devilish good... But my idea was so much better... (I, 272-73).

His idea, of course, was the image of Ideal Beauty, whose archetype he had seen "in another state of being." He has not yet come to realize that aesthetic perfection might be the synthesis of opposing realities; that Christina's power to fascinate him might have resulted from the combination of her power to engender life and her power to destroy it. Once she has given him cause to believe his dreams will be fulfilled, she abruptly withholds the treasure of herself from him. Roderick's reaction to the actual marriage is predictable: his passionate attachment to her, he tells Rowland, has been caused by "'the wonderful nature of her beauty. . . . It was all her beauty—so fitful, so alive, so subject to life, yet so always there and so interesting and
so splendid. In comparison the rest was nothing. What befuddled me was to think of it as my own property and possession—somehow bought and paid for. I had mastered it and made it mine; no one else had studied it as I had, no one else so understood it" (I, 482).

Only a few pages from the end of the novel Roderick and Christina meet for the last time. The scene is the Alps, where Roderick has come to recuperate from his loss of Christina and where, by coincidence or design, Christina and her husband have come on their honeymoon journey. Even this brief encounter with his Muse has brought Roderick out of the abyss of despair into which he has let him fall. He tells Rowland that he desires to follow Christina to Interlaken because "'her beauty has the same extraordinary value as ever and ... it has waked me up amazingly.'" "'She makes me live again—though I admit there's a strange pain in the act of coming to life,'" he confesses. And with an implicit acknowledgment of her inscrutability he adds: "'I only know that she makes my heart beat, makes me see visions'" (I, 499, 500, 501). Her final desertion of him shortly hereafter plunges him into a literal abyss out of which he can never come. His death is understood to be a suicide. The femme fatale, indifferent to the suffering of men, has destroyed another worthy devotee.

Whether one chooses to regard Christina Light as a woman upon whom Roderick Hudson projects his creative unconscious; or whether one chooses to see this femme fatale
simply as a conscious metaphor of the artist's psychic dilemma, the novel stands as a storehouse of Jamesian ideas about the nature of art and its relation to the artist. With a propensity toward masochism, James's artist allows himself to be charmed by a Medusan beauty, a creature as dangerous as she is desirable. This dedication to a tormenting loveliness is analogous, it has been seen, to the artist's dedication to his art as an end in itself--an end whose complete significance is known only by the artist who, of course, possesses its "secret."

The dubious blessing of having a mind inclined toward imposing subjective patterns upon objective reality is a view expressed not only by Henry James but by Joseph Conrad as well. Conrad was as deeply concerned as James about the dilemma of the artist in an indifferent, if not hostile, world. Like James, he was dedicated to his craft and accepted the moral responsibilities implicit in the task of suggesting through literary form man's ideal relationship to the universe.

In the following chapter I make a detailed analysis of Conrad's *Victory*, a novel which concerns the life and death of an introspective observer of life who has made the mistake of James's Lambert Strether: he has not "lived" all he might have lived, and he realizes this fact too late. Lena, the *femme fatale* of the story, symbolizes Conrad's double ideal of aesthetic excellence and ethical significance in all things.
CHAPTER VI

JOSEPH CONRAD

Probably no other literary artist of the early modern period perceived the conflicting demands of life and art with the acuteness of Joseph Conrad—nor was there a contemporary superior in ability to present symbolically the terms of this conflict. With as much sensitivity as Henry James and as much image-making skill as either James Joyce or W. B. Yeats, Conrad felt and expressed the polarization of aesthetic and moral responsibilities as a curse of his generation. He counted himself a symbolist but not a member of the "Symbolist School"; he valued aesthetic experience but was not an "Aesthete." He understood that it was the artist's lot to suffer many disappointments but that it was his special privilege as well to partake of unique joys.

The artist, for Conrad, was a creator of beauty, an imposer of self-conceived order upon the comparative chaos of the world. But too often the artist remained a detached and lonely creator, silently contemplating his own beautiful artifice. To solve the problem of the alienation of the artist from the natural world, Conrad thought it important for him to be dedicated to a man's responsibilities as well as to a god's privileges. Since an artist is, after all, a
creature before he is a creator, he should not, according to Conrad, deny his essential relationship with the rest of natural creation.

One of Conrad's most poignant symbolic statements about the dilemma of the introspective artistic personality in a natural world that intrudes upon his well-ordered artificial one is the 1915 novel Victory. In this work appears the figure of the femme fatale in a symbolic role. However, she functions far differently from those symbolic sirens portrayed in the works of Swinburne, Wilde, Beerbohm, and even James. She embodies in Victory more than the unattainable aesthetic ideal; as a projection of Conrad's creative unconscious, she necessarily reflects Conrad's particular condition of mind, which, I have noted, was concerned equally with aesthetic and moral aims. Since she embodies the ideals both of beauty and of moral action, the novel tells of the artist's dedication to his private, artificial world but also of the allurement of the natural life he has tried to renounce. Consequently, the femme fatale in Victory lures the artistic hero into accepting her as both the means and the end of his existence. True to her paradoxical nature, however, she destroys in order to create; the imperfect perishes in fire and the new arises, phoenix-like, to join in a symbolic ideal union beyond temporal limitations. John Donne's words prove to be an especially fitting pronouncement upon the condition of Conrad's troubled artist: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the
continent, a part of the main." The artist must needs be "involved in mankind."

Joseph Conrad, though not sharing with the "incomplete" artist an aversion from the world, was himself a "dedicated" artist and was alternately joyful and despondent in his dual commitment. The task of attaining his aesthetic goal may be best described as a genuine labor of love. A survey of his attitudes and practices of literary craftsmanship reveals that the order in his private world was not easily achieved and led to as many frustrations as joys. If one is to look closely at Victory as a reflection of some of his deepest concerns as an artist, it is instructive to examine first a few relevant remarks of his commentators and a number of his own. The following testimony makes it evident that Conrad's beloved ideal in both life and art was conceived in images of beautiful women whose proffered pleasures were made available only to those who hazarded their lives.

Richard Curle, Conrad's young friend during the novelist's last twelve years, writes that Conrad had a "passionate interest . . . in his own art of prose,"¹ a view shared by others who knew him well. A more recent admirer, Walter F. Wright, comments: 'Whatever Joseph Conrad wrote, whether fiction, criticism, or general observations on life,

reveals in its imagery and rhythms the passionate dramatic intensity with which he pursued his art. Then, too, there is the symbolic correlation between Conrad's life as a sailor and his life as an artist. Curle believes that Conrad's "love of sailing ships was in essence an artistic love."

Perhaps, he speculates, Conrad took "a deep artistic satisfaction from the appearance and performance of his ship and from the thought of her austere and ordered life amid the loneliness of the empty sea." Indeed, Conrad's 1919 Note to The Mirror of the Sea bears out this theory, making his love of the sea sound something like an erotic relationship with a fatal woman, as well as an agonizing aesthetic experience. He speaks of his "relation with the sea" as some "great passion the inscrutable gods send to mortals."

Beginning in mystery, says Conrad, his relationship proceeded through the tempestuous stages of a love affair, including exultation and anguish, delight and disillusionment.

Writing of the sea and comparing her to a femme fatale, Conrad could as easily be commenting also about his passion for art: "Subjugated but never unmanned I surrendered my being to that passion which, various and great like life itself, had also its periods of wonderful serenity which even a fickle mistress can give sometimes on her soothed breast,

2Introduction to Conrad on Fiction (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1964), p. ix.

3Curle, p. 130.
full of evils, full of fury, and yet capable of an enchanting sweetness." Conrad's love of work for its own sake, according to Wright, "took possession of a sailor—or an author—without his conscious awareness, and yet it blessed only those who deliberately accepted the rigors of their trade and eternal threat of tragedy." The artist—or the sailor—who refuses to accept life as inscrutable and therefore unmasterable is doomed to exist in sterile isolation from all that matters in life. Under the illusion that withdrawal from life allows him to escape pain and suffering, he is doubly cursed: in attempting to avoid life's hazards, which he must face anyway, he cuts himself off from life's joys. The secret of success—both for the sailor and for the artist—is to submit to the mixed texture of life, to embrace the fickle mistress today even though she desert him tomorrow.

Idealism is always a cause of anguish. To aim for perfection and then to settle for something less is often to despair of ever reaching the goal. In practice Conrad frequently chased an elusive ideal. In his earlier years, according to Curle, Conrad wrote both day and night. "He would write, indeed, until the world about him vanished and he was living intensely in his own created world. And yet even in those days, when he lost count of time and place,

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4In Wright, p. 130.  
5Ibid., pp. x-xi.
his work was always a frightful toil. The effort to make his full vision materialize tortured him unceasingly. I do not suppose that he ever felt completely satisfied." Curle comments further on Conrad's aesthetic idealism: "Perfection in art seemed to him an almost impossible ideal, and he felt that his own work fell, for the most part, far short of his aim. He pursued his will-o'-'the-wisp with tireless devotion, as a man is forced on and on by some inner necessity of his soul." One particular anecdote in this connection makes the point with the implicit metaphor of the lover fatally attracted to an unyielding woman. Curle recalls Conrad's telling him "how much safer it was for a woman to be married to a roué than to an idealist. The roué might often be unfaithful but he would always return, whereas the idealist, by very virtue of his idealism, would go off for ever if he ever did go off."  

If Conrad did not "go off for ever," like some of his contemporaries, he did go off imaginatively for long periods of time in pursuit of his artistic goal. And often the pursuit was characterized by fears and doubts about the end results. Edward Garnett, Conrad's friend and a reader for publisher T. Fisher Unwin, attests to Conrad's agony in the

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6Curle, p. 72. Curle's observations are at times contradictory. "Conrad," he says, "was never finicky; as long as the writing was adequate to the subject matter his artistic convictions were satisfied" (p. 121).

7Ibid., pp. 123-24. 8Ibid., p. 55.
midst of composing a novel. One of many letters from Conrad shows this especially well. Speaking of the "fatal manuscript" of *The Rescuer*, Conrad vividly conveys his frustration in not being able to create: "I knock about blindly in it till I am positively sick—and then I give up saying—tomorrow! And tomorrow comes—and brings only the renewed and futile agony." Other passages in the letter show Conrad's deep-seated fears that he lacked sufficient "imagination" to continue with the book.9 The act of composition of a work of art was for Conrad decidedly painful, and yet he continued in quest of his ideal.

In another of his letters to Garnett (29 March 1898), Conrad complains bitterly of his "bewitchment"—that he cannot write when he wants to: "I ask myself sometimes whether I am bewitched, whether I am the victim of an evil eye? . . . I assure you—speaking soberly and on my word of honour—that sometimes it takes all my resolution and power of self-control to refrain from butting my head against the wall." He rages further about his fitful sleep and his

9Letter of 5 August 1896 in *Letters from Joseph Conrad*, ed. Edward Garnett (Indianapolis, 1928), p. 64. This and other letters reveal a writer on the brink of despair: "I am paralyzed by doubt and have just sense enough to feel the agony but am powerless to invent a way out of it" (p. 64). "To be able to think and unable to express," he says in another letter, "is a fine torture" (p. 59). Again, with reference to *The Rescuer*, Conrad writes: "I dream for hours, hours! over a sentence and even then can't put it together so as to satisfy the cravings of my soul" (p. 58).
awakening to the "horror of that powerlessness I must face through a day of vain efforts." In these moods he resembles James's Roderick Hudson when his Muse has deserted him. The will to sculpt or write is in itself insufficient. There must also be that inspirational force that seems to come from without. And the ideal remains a phantom, an apparition, says Conrad: "... that story I can't write weaves itself into all I see, into all I speak, into all I think, into the lines of every book I try to read. ... My story is there [in my head] in a fluid—in an evading shape. It is all there—to bursting, yet I can't get hold of it no more than you can grasp a handful of water." And although he does not characterize this "evading shape" as a woman, one feels that in his moments of frustration, the ideal "story" functions very much like the mysterious, elusive, and yet omnipresent femme fatale who violently affects the men who seek to possess her.

Conrad can be classified neither as a mere spinner of yarns nor as a complete aesthete. He did not hold with Wilde and other aesthetes that "all art is quite useless"; rather, he felt that art had a deep obligation to make men "see" (imaginatively, sensually, symbolically) the essential truths of life. His purpose in writing was of large dimensions, embracing the two-fold goal of aesthetic excellence and moral purpose. In a letter to Sidney Colvin in 1917 Conrad

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10Ibid., p. 135.
admits that he has never "been very well understood" by his general readers, who insist on calling him, variously, "a writer of the sea, of the tropics, a descriptive writer, a romantic writer--and also a realist." The truth of the matter, he tells Colvin, is that he has been concerned always and only "with the 'ideal' value of things, events and people. . . . Whatever dramatic and narrative gifts I may have are always, instinctively, used with that object--to get at, to bring forth les valeurs idéales."^11 He admits in his 1905 essay "Books" that there is evil in the world but that the artist ought not to be pessimistic about it; he must "believe that there is no impossibility of its being made [good]."^12

Nor is he a didactic writer. He denies any intention of writing with the aim of offering a particular moral lesson, even though he is obliged to render life as he views it with his own individual moral perspectives. Besides, "every subject in the region of intellect and emotion must have a morality of its own if it is treated at all sincerely; and even the most artful of writers will give himself (and his morality) away in about every third sentence."^13 Above all, the work of art is an integral whole, with neither

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^12In Wright, p. 81.

^13Note to Chance, in Wright, p. 209.
purpose nor method claiming autonomy. Wilson Follet, in his 1915 study of Conrad, has observed that in Conrad artistic technique is no mere "expediency of getting the artist's largest purpose expressed." The reader can see both method and purpose working together. Follet assesses the whole as "a philosophy of discovered purposes and values in life at its largest, and the parts a score of ingenious tricks for reducing those values to the order and symmetry of art."

If artistic patterns are to be derived from life itself, says Follet, "Art for Art, Art for Life, Life for Art--the terms are practically interchangeable in the transmuting of a personality that renders all things in terms of the social conscience and its entrained virtues of service and fidelity." Follet claims that for Conrad life was a "supremely engrossing spectacle" and man's whole duty was "to be engrossed by it." A work of art, therefore, should be as engrossing as life itself, if art is to embody the ideals of life.

Conrad's two main concerns as a literary artist, then, were to express the "ideal value of things," and to do so in a work of art perfectly suited to suggest that moral purpose. But Conrad had a great deal to say, too, about the precise nature of his artistic method. On 24 April 1922 Conrad wrote a scathing letter to Richard Curle in connection with an article Curle was soon to publish. In the letter Conrad

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14 Joseph Conrad: A Short Study (Garden City, New York, 1915), pp. 73, 72, 79, 76.
objects strongly to Curle's exposure of Conrad's artistic methods:

It is a strange fate that everything that I have, of set artistic purpose, laboured to leave indefinite, suggestive, in the penumbre of initial inspiration, should have that light turned on to it and its insignificance (as compared with, I might say without megalomania, the ampleness of my conceptions) exposed for any fool to comment upon or even for average minds to be disappointed with. Didn't it ever occur to you, my dear Curle, that I knew what I was doing in leaving the facts of my life and even of my tales in the background? Explicitness, my dear fellow, is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying an illusion. You seem to believe in literalness and explicitness, in facts and also in expression. Yet nothing is more clear than the utter insignificance of explicit statement and also its power to call attention away from things that matter in the region of art.15

A year later (17 July 1923) Conrad wrote Curle again: "I have always tried to counteract the danger of precise classification, either in the realm of exoticism or of the sea. . . . You know how the public mind fastens on externals, on mere facts, such, for instance, as ships and voyages, without paying attention to any deeper significance they may have."16

In statements like these Conrad reiterates those tenets of his artistic faith which he had stated definitively in 1897, in his Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus." The essential quality of art, he affirms, is its "magic suggestiveness," which prompts the reader (or beholder) to go beyond what is boldly apparent in the work. The presence

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16Ibid., p. 194.
of "magic suggestiveness" guarantees that no single, unchang­
ing meaning may be attached to the work of art; it is truly both "magic" and "suggestive" in its power to be many things. This point he phrases as a "general proposition" in a letter to Barrett H. Clark in 1918: ". . . a work of art is very seldom limited to one exclusive meaning and not necessarily tending to a definite conclusion. And this for the reason that the nearer it approaches art, the more it acquires a symbolic character." ¹⁷ Conversely, he would seem to argue, the loss of the symbolic (i.e., evocative) element, through a dominance of the explicit and factual in both content and method, is destructive of the "art" in the work.

Conrad uses the term "symbolic" without aligning himself either in theory or practice with the Symbolists. To him, "the symbolic conception of a work of art" simply enlarges its sphere of influence. "All the great creations of literature have been symbolic, and in that way have gained in complexity, in power, in depth and in beauty." ¹⁸

The Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus" is the credo of the artist who cares about craftsmanship, but not to the exclusion of matters of universal human significance. He can say along with the aesthetes that a work of art must "carry its justification in every line"; but he can also state that an artist's purpose, like the scientist's, is "to

¹⁷Life and Letters, II, 205.
¹⁸Ibid.
render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe." Whereas the scientist seeks truth by examining external phenomena, the artist seeks truth by "[descending] within himself" to explore the nature of his psychic existence. He appeals through his art, not to the rational faculties but to what Jung would call the "race memory" or the "collective unconscious." The artist speaks, says Conrad, to all that is instinctual, "to our capacity for delight and wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts, to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hope, in fear, which binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity—the dead to the living and the living to the unborn." 19

If this be the noble purpose of art, its method must be, in Conrad's sense of the term, "symbolic." It "must make its appeal through the senses, if its high desire is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotions. . . ." The only way to make a universal appeal is "through complete, unswerving devotions to the perfect blending of form and substance; it is only through an unremitting never-discouraged

19In Wright, pp. 160-61.
care for the shape and ring of sentences that an approach can be made to plasticity, to colour, and that the light of magic suggestiveness may be brought to play for an evanescent instant over the commonplace surface of words: of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage." With the goal of making man more intensely alive to himself and the world, it is not surprising that Conrad declares, in his most frequently quoted statement of purpose, that his mission as a literary artist is to provide a direct sensual experience to engross his reader. "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see. That--and no more, and it is everything." The artist's task is complete, then, when he makes his reader "see" clearly a "vision of regret or pity, of terror or mirth" and become quickened with the sense "of the solidarity in mysterious origin, to toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world."20

Time and again Conrad emphasizes the importance of selecting the most suggestive words for making men "see." In a letter to Sir Hugh Clifford, written in 1899, Conrad criticizes his friend's writing habits, stressing that what appears to be a matter for "a mere craftsman" is actually

20Ibid., pp. 162-63.
"the only morality of art apart from subject." As for his advice to Clifford, Conrad states that "words, groups of words, words standing alone, are symbols of life, have the power in their sound or their aspect to present the very thing you wish to hold up before the mental vision of your readers. The things 'as they are' exist in words; therefore words should be handled with care lest the picture, the image of truth abiding in facts, should become distorted--or be blurred." 21

In choice of subjects, as well as of literary style and technique, Conrad often speaks of the same need to make men see by appealing through the power of suggestion. Some subjects, such as the sea, have archetypal significance. Conrad confesses in his Note to the 1924 collection of The Shorter Tales of Joseph Conrad, that as a young writer he wrote of the sea because of its symbolic import: "... I aimed at an element as restless, as dangerous, as changeable as the sea, and even more vast--the unappeasable ocean of human life." His stories are not to be counted as mere "sea tales"; for they go far beyond the scope of exotic travelogues. "They deal with feelings of universal import, such, for instance, as the sustaining and inspiring sense of youth, or the support given by a solid courage which confronts the unmeasurable force of an elemental fury simply as a thing

21Life and Letters, I, 280.
that has got to be met and lived through with professional constancy." 22

An artist of the complexity and profundity of Conrad necessarily suffers greater anxieties and frustrations than does the writer who strives only for an excellent narrative. Conrad's concern for technical perfection, including his awareness of the symbolic import of "words," was only part of a more comprehensive moral or ethical concern. But both his aesthetic and his ethical ideal are by nature elusive. The Conradian artist is destined to suffer more intensely than is the less profound "aesthete." Conrad has both more to gain and more to lose in each artistic enterprise because he involves the entirety of his being in the work. Such a work is Victory, a novel which symbolizes the struggle which produced it. It is, in another sense, Conrad's parable of the artist who nurtures a dream that he is self-sufficient but who discovers that renunciation of the world does not preclude the possibility that the world will somehow intrude upon him. The protagonist is not literally an artist but an intellectual whose "art" is the arrangement he has made for his life. He withdraws from humanity because he believes it is less dangerous to indulge in self-communion than to try to communicate with others. He shares the artist's feeling of superiority to general humanity by virtue of his keener

22 In Wright, pp. 160-61.
imaginative faculties. To him the greatest pleasures are to be found in reflection and introspection, not in overt action. To act in the world, he believes, is to become soiled by it. The truth is that, regardless of his philosophy, one is destined to become soiled.

Victory, in brief summary, is the story of Axel Heyst, a man initially disenchanted with life who too late becomes enamored of it. He is an island-dweller, preferring the contemplative life of the hermit to the active life of the trader; however, he finds himself necessarily involved in worldly affairs, whether or not he wants to be. He is a man greatly influenced by his cynical father, who warns Heyst to beware the insidious trap of human relationships. It is best, he tells his son, to remain detached, to "look on--make no sound."

But Heyst is twice ensnared by life and tricked into action. His first experience is with Captain Morrison, a humanitarian sea merchant in need of help. When Heyst, on an impulse, aids him, Morrison is so grateful that he makes Heyst his debtor; the agent of Providence is elevated to the rank of savior and is thereby "enslaved" by the magnanimity of the good man he has by chance rescued. The point is well made: all acts--whether committed for selfish or for humanitarian reasons--have a way of involving, and even hurting, the actor.

Heyst's other involvement with a human being culminates
in a belated enchantment with life. It is the story of his love for Lena, the mysterious girl he rescues (impulsively, as he rescued Morrison) from her sordid circumstances and takes with him to his Edenic island. The nature of his fascination alters significantly as the beautiful siren (she is a musician) becomes less an abstraction and more a very personal reality for Heyst. She ceases to inspire only his detached admiration but becomes a necessary part of himself. By the end of the story she has achieved supreme victory over Heyst's body and soul and has absolute sway over his destiny.

In the second "Author's Note" attached to the novel in 1920, Conrad labels Heyst "the man of universal detachment" and says that his detachment has rendered him ineffectual in coping with the hazards of life. He is too much introspective, too little instinctual and lacks the spontaneity which "lead the man to excellence in life, in art, in crime, in virtue and for the matter of that, even in love. Thinking is the great enemy of perfection. The habit of profound reflection, I am compelled to say, is the most pernicious of all the habits of the civilized man." 23

Heyst, then, is not Conrad's model artist. He is, rather, a tragic figure who suffers because of an imperfect attitude to life. He has accepted in toto the "wisdom" of

23 pp. x-xi. All page references to Victory appearing in the text are to the Modern Library edition.
his father, whose books now line the walls of his island cottage. The elder Heyst has written in one of them: "'Of the stratagems of life the most cruel is the consolation of love--the most subtle, too; for the desire is the bed of dreams'" (p. 206). Life must have its victims, writes his father. "'It excuses every violence of protest and at the same time never fails to crush it, just as it crushes the blindest assent. The so-called wickedness must be, like the so-called virtue, its own reward--to be anything at all. . .'" (p. 207).

According to the philosophy Heyst has inherited, the world is full of pain and disappointments and not worth the few fleeting pleasures it provides along the way. The only recourse a man has, then, is to renounce the world and its fruits and cultivate a sense of superiority to those who foolishly allow themselves to be tempted into the ordinary activities of life. It has seemed reasonable to Heyst to make of his life "a solitary achievement, accomplished not by hermit-like withdrawal with its silence and immobility, but by a system of restless wandering, by the detachment of an impermanent dweller amongst changing scenes. In this scene he had perceived the means of passing through life without suffering and almost without a single care in the world--invulnerable because elusive" (p. 87). To avoid the pain that comes with trusting to life, Heyst early decided "to drift"--not "intellectually or sentimentally or morally"
but "altogether and literally, body and soul, like a detached leaf drifting in the wind-currents under the immovable trees of a forest glade; to drift without ever catching on to anything" (p. 89). But for all his will to avoid "contamination," he is involuntarily drawn into human relationships. This "man of universal detachment" cannot actually detach himself from the world. And this is precisely what Conrad wishes to make the readers of Victory "see."

Heyst is a man of profound reflection, a typical romantic idealist, not necessarily "an utopist, a pursuer of chimaeras" (p. 7), as some think, but rather one whose inexperience in life makes him unusually bold and audacious whenever he is at last inspired to act. When he meets Morrison he acts spontaneously, almost whimsically, for his own amusement. Later, he marvels that Morrison will regard him as nothing less than a divine agent, an answer to a prayer. But Heyst clearly enjoys being thought of—erroneously or not—as a godsend. The end of this episode in his life comes with Morrison's death, which leaves Heyst even more embittered toward the world. He believes he has been "beguiled into action" by life and accordingly alters his philosophy of detachment to one of complete isolation (p. 63). He withdraws from society to live alone on Samburan ("the 'Round Island' of the charts"), the principal coaling station of the now defunct Tropical Belt Coal Company, of
which Morrison had made him manager.

Though he is labeled a hermit by others, Heyst is "not a hermit by temperament." When he reappears in Sourabaya after considerable time in self-imposed exile, he "shows that his detachment from the world was not complete. And incompleteness of any sort leads to trouble" (p. 30). Heyst's unconscious yearning to be of the world and not merely in it is a natural impulse, but it conflicts with his essentially unnatural effort to maintain an insular existence. In theory, he prefers solitude to crowds, thought to action, and silence to sound. He is a "dreamer," and, as such, strives to hear "music of the spheres" instead of poor earthly substitutes. Unheard melodies are sweeter, but there is also an "unholy fascination in systematic noise" (pp. 64, 66), such as that produced by the "sirens" of the all-girl orchestra at

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24 Heyst's ultimate immolation by fire is prefigured in the chain of visual images set up in the second paragraph of the novel. Conrad first remarks that Heyst's island is "but the top of a mountain." He next joins this idea to the fact that a neighboring island is an "indolent volcano" and then adds that Heyst's faintly glowing cigar resembles the smoldering volcano (pp. 3, 4). Conrad suggests through these connected images that Heyst, like a volcanic island, is potentially "alive" but that when (and if) he does become active, his activity results in self-destruction. This is the idea which is, of course, carried out in the novel. Lena releases his smoldering creative energies after having lain too long dormant, and the disastrous consequences are predictable.

25 Sourabaya, the social "capital" of the archipelago, functions as the center of the microcosm, which, like the macrocosm of continents it mirrors, is inhabited by wanderers, misfits, and men in exile.
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Schomberg's hotel, where Heyst happens to be staying while in Sourabaya. It is his fate to see and fall victim to one particularly fascinating girl in the orchestra. It is not what she says but what her silence and her demeanor imply that affects Heyst's sympathetic imagination. No audible siren she, but every bit as alluring. "She had captured Heyst's awakened faculty of observation; he had the sensation of a new experience. That was because his faculty of observation had never before been captured by any feminine creature in that marked and exclusive fashion. He looked at her anxiously, as no man ever looks at another man; and he positively forgot where he was. He had lost touch with his surroundings" (p. 68).26

Heyst goes to the girl (whom he later calls Lena), impelled by a natural pity for human suffering. "It was the same sort of impulse which years ago had made him cross the sandy street . . . and accost Morrison, practically a stranger to him then, a man in trouble, expressively harassed, dejected, lonely." He is utterly fascinated by her voice, which "included all the modulations of pathos, cheerfulness and courage within its compass." As Sibyl Vane's voice seduced Dorian Gray, Lena's voice "seduced Heyst by its amazing quality. It was a voice fit to utter the most exquisite things, a voice which would have made silly chatter

26Compare this description of Heyst's rapture with Curle's account of Conrad's devotion to writing. See supra, p. 172.
supportable and the roughest talk fascinating. Heyst drank in its charm as one listens to the tone of some instrument without heeding the tune." Without his customary reflective weighing of the pros and cons of involvement, he acts instinctually, intuitively, "unchecked by any sort of self-consciousness" and begs her to "command" him (pp. 69, 74, 71-72, 70).

Here, then, is the beginning of the conquest of the self-sufficient recluse by Art and Life in the person of this femme fatale. Her charm is not at this point erotic or physical; Heyst is stimulated, rather, by the "magic suggestiveness" in the image of this beautiful "maiden in distress." He does not think of her as a potential mistress but unconsciously enjoys her as a being upon whom to project the image of his feminine psyche.27 Symbolizing that vast, unknowable area of Heyst's own mind, she is appropriately inscrutable: "... her grey, unabashed gaze forced upon him the sensation of something inexplicable reposing within her; stupidity or inspiration, weakness or force—or simply abysmal emptiness... ..." (p. 182). Such, too, are the

27 Garnett speaks frequently of Conrad's mixed nature. He recalls that Conrad was "so masculinely keen yet so femininely sensitive." "There was a blend of caressing, almost feminine intimacy with masculine incisiveness in his talk," he says. And again: "There were to natures interwoven in Conrad: one, feminine, affectionate, responsive, clear-eyed; the other, masculine, formidable critical, fiercely ironical, dominating, intransigent" (Letters from Joseph Conrad, pp. 3, 6, 10).
attributes of Life, whom she also symbolizes. The mind and the external world are equally incomprehensible and uncomprehending.

So immense are the possibilities of "meaning" in her look, one can suppose that she is capable of anything. Heyst thinks so from the beginning. At a particular moment of danger to her in the hotel, Heyst urges her to smile and she immediately creates the impression she is "joyous, radiant." He quickly concludes that the faculty to deceive men completely must be a "special aptitude" inherent in women (pp. 77, 79). Nevertheless, Heyst takes her with him to his island home, where circumstances dictate the nature of her future dissimulations.

Lena proves fatal to more men than Heyst, though none but Heyst are so paradoxically fortunate. Before her effects on the artistic hermit are examined, it will be helpful to acquire some perspective by looking briefly at least at one other whom Lena affects with particular violence.

With the exception of the arch-misogynist, Mr. Jones, every other male character in the novel finds Lena attractive,

28"'I can't stand women near me,'" says Jones. "'They give me the horrors... They are a perfect curse'" (p. 98). Later, when he discovers that Ricardo has been drawn to Lena, he tells Heyst that he has nothing but contempt for a man "'that cannot exist without [women]'". Because of Lena, Ricaro has deserted Jones and Jones is raging with jealousy: "A woman, a girl, who apparently possessed the power to awaken men's disgusting folly." He is at a loss to account for her mysterious "power" (pp. 362, 363, 366).
but she finds none but Heyst worthy of her love. The spurned hotel owner, Schomberg, is beside himself with jealousy and unrequited passion when he learns that Heyst has taken her from him. But Schomberg's story is not really developed. The chief victim, other than Heyst, is clearly Ricardo, who professes to be untamable and yet allows himself to be trapped by Lena and then destroyed by Jones's murderous jealousy.

Ricardo's infatuation with Lena suggests that her powers to lure and destroy—the fatal attributes of Life itself—are felt by men of all temperaments; and their reactions, if not equal in kind, are equal in degree of intensity. At Schomberg's hotel the mere idea of the girl is enough to arouse lust in Ricardo, who then begins to scheme to make Jones interested in going to Heyst's island. Once there, Ricardo is drawn to Lena as if she were "a concealed magnet," and "falling under an uncontrollable force of attraction," he enters the house and proceeds directly to the bedroom, where he finds her sitting, concealed by a veil (suggesting her inscrutability) and combing her dark tresses. He is seized by a violent urge to "ravish or kill" and, animal-like, springs upon what he believes to be an easy prey (pp. 267-70). To his amazement, however, she overpowers him, leaving him convinced of her superiority and thereby of her greater desirability.

Later, near the end of the novel, Ricardo again visits her, believing this time he will at last satisfy his
lust. He begins immediately to bombard Lena with "ferocious phrases of love" and "wooing accents of entreaty." But Lena orders him "'No nearer!'" Subsequent protestations of love are in the language of the masochist who looks upon his beloved as some sort of sadistic partner. He tells her that his passion for her has made him feel unnaturally weak. He is "'as tired as if I had been pouring my life-blood here on these planks for you to dabble your white feet in.'" "'For you!'" he continues. "'For you I will throw away money, lives--all lives but mine! What you want is a man, a master that will let you put the heel of your shoe on his neck;'29 not that skulker [Heyst], who will get tired of you in a year--and you of him. . . . we'll go on wandering the world over, you and I, both free and both true." And just as he thinks himself about to be rewarded, "Ricardo felt himself spurned by the foot he had been cherishing . . ." (pp. 370-73). Lena is even more "free" than Ricardo has suspected; she remains indomitable.

About this time, Heyst and Jones spy on them, and they see Lena symbolically "enthroned" with "Ricardo seated on the floor . . . one side of his upturned face showing the absorbed, all-forgetful rapture of his contemplation" (pp. 366, 367). Jones, deprived of homosexual companionship, proclaims Ricardo "'has found his soul-mate'" in Lena.

29The image conjured up by Ricardo is hardly that of a masterful man.
"'Behold the simple Acis kissing the sandals of the nymph, on the way to her lips, all forgetful, while the menacing fife of Polyphemus already sounds close at hand—if he could only hear it!'" (p. 368). And Jones, close at hand, soon disposes of his traitorous lover.

The comparison of Lena to Galatea is appropriate, for she is indeed worshipped by princes and monsters alike. Perhaps there is also an implied comparison to that other Galatea—the beautiful but unyielding statue which fascinated its sculptor. Only through divine intervention was Pygmalion's wish fulfilled. Not so for Ricardo and his carnal lust. Not so, either, for Heyst and his aesthetic devotion. Lena remains a piece of cold marble for all who look upon her. Her brow is smooth, her cheeks are but "faintly coloured" and her arms are white. Even dressed in a Malay sarong she is little more for Heyst than an aesthetic object. He notices her smooth hair and her "sculptural forehead" and has "a moment of acute appreciation intruding upon another order of thoughts. It was as if there could be no end of his discoveries about that girl. . . . She stood poised firmly, halfway between the table and the curtained doorway, the insteps of her bare feet gleaming like marble on the overshadowed matting of the floor. The fall of her lighted shoulders, the strong and fine modelling of her arms hanging down her sides, her immobility, too, had something statuesque, the charm of art tense with life" (pp. 236-37).
At another time her "uncovered flank" gleams "coldly with the immobility of polished marble" (p. 285).

Heyst has been initially fascinated by Lena as an aesthetic object, a creature capable of arousing subjective appreciation and intellectual curiosity. Like a work of art, she is both beautiful and mysterious, seeming to conceal in her beauty a "secret" of even greater value than the beauty by itself. Whatever her appeal to Heyst is, it is anything but physical. At first she is but a voice, whose "magic suggestiveness" makes him desirous of knowing her completely. When he takes Lena from her tormentors, he acts to preserve his conception of her. Not until they reach the island does he discover that Lena is both more and less than the image he had projected upon her. He continues to worship her in a detached and contemplative manner up until the moment when, high atop the forested mountain in the center of his island, he acknowledges her physically and consummates this new relationship. Thereafter, he feels keenly the paradox of human love: he is happier than he has ever been before and yet he is miserable because he is powerless to maintain the ecstasy of this paradisal union. It is significant that during the very hour of his submission to Lena's physical charms, the boat containing the "envoys of the outer world" arrives on the island, and the destructive element enters, unbidden, into their paradise. The relationship of these two events is only causal on the symbolic level. Lena's
increased value to Heyst implies an increased threat to his happiness and, ultimately, leads to his self-immolation.

For the artist, the attraction to a beautiful object undergoes a similar transformation, culminating in his tragic awareness of its necessary moral relationship with the scheme of things. The artist's original fascination with it is detached and "pure." Once he becomes captivated by the idea of it, however, he begins to respond with something like the totality of his being. What at first appealed solely to his aesthetic sense enlarges its sphere of influence to include the physical and moral dimensions. The artist discovers that somehow a work of art is—and ought to be—a part of the larger pattern of existence and, acknowledged by him or not, relates to more than his love of beauty for its own sake.

To Heyst, the essence of the girl is in her name or her voice rather than in her person. Conrad suggests the symbolic import of her name by the artistic care with which Heyst invents it. She has heretofore been called Magdalen and Alma, both names highly allusive. "Alma" means "soul" and the Biblical Magdalen personifies carnality. But Heyst is not in the beginning interested in her body. "'Your voice is enough. I am in love with it, whatever it says'" (p. 85). He is clearly more impressed with the idea of the girl than with the girl herself. Lena, the name he gives her by "combining detached letters and loose syllables," is the
diminutive of both Magdalen and Helen, names whose literary and historical associations class them as standard designations for *femmes fatales*. Her other name, Alma, Heyst ignores, perhaps because he cannot recognize her as his soul, the principal part of his being, with whom he actually craves communion. As a symbol of his soul Lena is conceived as a disembodied voice, a spirit. When she arrives in Heyst's home she enters "the twilight of the big central room . . . and then the deeper twilight of the room beyond." Her voice comes to Heyst from this dark inner sanctum with the suggestion of "unexpected possibilities of good and evil" (pp. 173, 174). As a *femme fatale* of the magnitude of Eve, she embodies all the potentialities of Life itself. She is both "other" than Heyst and identical with him. As his "secret sharer," his unknowable unconscious self, Lena commands Heyst's reverence and at times is the silent partner in his self-communion. In "addressing her, he was really talking to himself" (p. 186). But she is also the flesh-and-blood woman upon whom Heyst has projected the image of his soul. As a person, no less than as an unconscious psychic force, Lena determines Heyst's fate. The love of Alma, the new voice that sounds from the center of his island, is for Heyst a tragic necessity. For his own soul is actually inseparable from the living "other" in whom it is mirrored.

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30Heyst wonders "'whether [Lena represents] something as old as the world'" (p. 337).
Having brought her to his island, Heyst has implicitly acknowledged his need for communion with that "other," yet he remains strangely aloof and detached. Recounting for Lena the episode in his life when he rescued Morrison, Heyst admits that he saved him upon an impulse and without regard to the consequences of his action. As an "'agent of Providence,'" in an accident of time and place, Heyst involved himself in the life of another human being. "'I had, in a moment of inadvertence, created for myself a tie'" (p. 188). Now with Lena he has formed another tie and considers himself lost. "'The germ of corruption has entered into his soul.'" But the possession of Lena gives him "a greater sense of his own reality"—regardless of how utterly destructive that realization proves to be. His greatest fear has always been the question "'... in what way would life try to get hold of me?'" And first Morrison and then Lena inspire human compassion. He tells Lena: "'When one's heart has been broken into in the way you have broken into mine, all sorts of weaknesses are free to enter --shame, anger, stupid indignations, stupid fears--stupid laughter, too'" (pp. 191, 198).

Heyst tells Lena that she is inscrutable and that he is burdened by her. He confesses that he wants "the impossible" from her. "'Nothing less. And it isn't because I think little of what I've got already. Oh, no! It is because I think so much of this possession of mine that I
can't have it complete enough.'" Even in their close communion "there still lingered in him a sense of incompleteness not altogether overcome—which, it seemed nothing ever would overcome—the fatal imperfection of all the gifts of life, which makes of them a delusion and a snare" (pp. 199, 200-201).

Life itself is like a *femme fatale*, seductive and ungratifying. He becomes suddenly overcome with a sense of "emptiness, desolation, regret. His resentment was not against the girl, but against life itself—that commonest of snares, in which he felt himself caught, seeing clearly the plot of plots and unconsolled by the lucidity of him mind" (p. 203).

As long as Heyst responds to Lena as merely a "voice," she remains for him an abstraction to be contemplated with something like aesthetic detachment; she is but an interesting and pitiable object but separated from him physically and emotionally. But they are destined to come together; and when they do, her effect on him alters in both kind and degree. As they hold hands in the dark and he senses that she is real and "no mere darker shadow in the obscurity," he comes strongly under her influence. "The warmth of her hand gave Heyst a strange intimate sensation of all her person. He had to fight down a new sort of emotion, which almost unmanned him" (p. 349). This new emotion is precisely that sudden instinctual awareness of Lena's intrinsic value and
the simultaneous understanding that he is emotionally (as well as morally) bound to protect, honor, and obey her. In short, he has become enamored of Lena, of beautiful but dangerous Life itself, and is no longer absorbed in his exclusive and sterile private world. Lena has made all the difference in Heyst's life. She has forced him to enter the world and get soiled by it. "'You stole into my life,'" he remarks, and this fact "'means that I could lie and perhaps cringe for your sake.'" Furthermore, he notes that he has already been guilty of dissembling, of being "'diplomatic in [his] relation with mankind'" (p. 304). She has forced him to play false with his own principles to try to protect her. But the irony is that he is incapable of protecting her. "'I haven't the power.'" He is, as his Chinese servant has intuited, a doomed man. After Wang steals Heyst's only revolver and then deserts him, Heyst sums up the situation for Lena: "'Here we are repulsed! Not only without power to resist the evil, but unable to make terms for ourselves with the worthy envoys, the envoys extraordinary of the world we thought we had done with for years and years'" (pp. 324, 327). Love for Lena has made his own life more significant and potentially more tragic. "He no longer belonged to himself" because he now cared about someone (p. 231).

He cares against his will. He had vowed "'never [to] lift a little finger again.'" But "'Woman is the temptor'"
(pp. 55, 331); and Lena is Woman, is Life. As she dies in
his arms she claims total victory. She had made Heyst care
enough for her (in life) to join her "in the shades of
death." Characteristically his liebstode draws him to
Lena's side. His suicide by fire suggests both a purgation
of the poisons of his scepticism and also his present
despair in discovering too late that life has joys too sweet
to miss but that having once missed them, there is no point
in continuing. His final words reveal the depth of this
profound truth: "... woe to the man whose heart has not
learned while young to hope, to love--and to put its trust
in life!" (p. 383).

Heyst's situation has been complicated by his realiza-
tion that abstinence from life is unthinkable. For the world,
he discovers, has a way of intruding even on the hermit.
Besides, to have renounced life because it is evil and ugly
is to have missed its goodness and beauty. But Heyst has
never really had an alternative. Because of his artistic
sensibility he has been isolated from other men but at the
same time attracted to them. He has not been able to live
alone successfully but neither has he been able to live
successfully among them. The artist always possesses a
certain fatal wisdom that makes his life peculiarly cursed.
He understands more than others and therefore has a greater
sympathy for the lot of mankind. This pity somehow blinds
him to his own human needs, however.
With his death, Heyst has become a symbol of the artist who, seeing that the private paradise cannot stand for long in the midst of a seductive universe, is equally convinced that his choice ought to have been to embrace life to begin with and somehow work toward forming his "beautiful" patterns with an ethical purpose.

But Conrad does not limit his portrait of the incomplete artist to Axel Heyst. By way of pointing the essential humanity latent in such an apparent social misfit as Heyst, Conrad juxtaposes the equally self-serving Mr. Jones as a type of the absolutely amoral artist. Whereas Heyst is all the while a sensitive and compassionate observer and designer, Jones is inhumanly selfish in his "artistic" machinations. He is the embodiment of what is destructive in life because of his own eccentric, merely aesthetic notions about arranging his existence. Both Jones and Heyst have an abnormal fear of women--i.e., of any entangling alliances. They are both antisocial creatures, aliens among men. Their difference is epitomized in the nature of their contempt for the world. Jones plays a private game with life, pleased with his successful manipulation of men. The early Heyst, on the other hand, would rather withdraw from life altogether and decline to play any game. The trouble with Heyst's position is that Life seeks him out and he must play, whether or not he wants to. He is the innocent bystander, passive and detached; but he is not without an instinctual sympathy for
individuals (his philosopher father has told him that pity is the most perfect expression of contempt and that he should cultivate it for others but ought not to expect any for himself [p. 164]).

Mr. Jones's meticulous concern for a well-executed plan of action, for the beauty of an evil act, for an aesthetically pleasing arrangement of the details of even the most heinous crime—all this love of perfection for its own sake makes him a decadent artist of the same mold as Dorian Gray. He is a "gentleman," says his devoted "secretary," Ricardo. And gentlemen "'don't lose their temper. It's bad form. You'll never see him lose his temper. . . . Ferocity ain't good form, either,'" Ricardo explains to the intrigued Schomberg. Instead, Jones enjoys cool, calculated actions—for example, the unemotional deliberateness of slaying Pedro's brother in Central America. "'He just nods the least little bit, wipes his fingers on the plantain leaf, puts his hand behind his back, as if to help himself to rise from the ground, snatches his revolver from under his jacket, and plugs a bullet plumb centre into Mr. Antonio's chest. See what it is to have to do with a gentleman. No confounded fuss, and things done out of hand.'" Ricardo admits that the murder of Antonio "'took it out of me something awful'" but that Jones "'hadn't turned a hair. That's where a gentleman has the pull of you. He don't get excited'" (pp. 129, 133, 134). One is reminded of the unruffled composure of Dorian as he slays and later disposes of Basil Hallward.
But Jones is an artist in more than his detachment from his work; he also suffers the artist's ennui, which comes from the lack of novelty in his life. He has frequent "fits of laziness," as Ricardo calls them. During one of these spells he "'lay all day long in a dark room,'" the uncomprehending Ricardo relates. "'He just lay there full length on a mat, while a ragged, bare-legged boy that he had picked up in the street sat in the patio, between two oleanders near the open door of his room, strumming on a guitar and singing tristes to him from morning to night'" (p. 143). Jones might easily have been a Des Essientes or a Lord Henry Wotton or a Dorian Gray—or an Oscar Wilde, for that matter.

Elsewhere, Jones becomes a detached observer of Ricardo's antics, as if his partner afforded him some sort of aesthetic pleasure. He watches "with amusement concealed in a death-like composure" (p. 257). Jones is amused, too, with the behavior of Heyst and invents an artistic plan to destroy him. Heyst will be invited to play cards with Jones, and Jones will behave decorously until he has tortured him sufficiently. Ricardo, on the other hand, prefers "'to plug him or rip him up.'" The artistic gentleman's way prevails, of course. "'I mean to have some sport out of him. Just try to imagine the atmosphere of the game—the fellow handling the cards—the agonizing mockery of it! Oh, I shall appreciate this greatly. . . . I shall enjoy the
refinement and jest of it. . . . I promise myself some exquisite moments while watching his play" (p. 314). During the anticipated interview, Jones says to Heyst, with echoes of a Paterian philosophy of life: "'All my life I have been seeking new impressions, and you have turned out to be something quite out of the common'" (pp. 360-61). Heyst is for Jones what every other rich experience in life has been: a novelty and a stimulation of his imagination. Jones can appreciate equally the refined sensibility of a Heyst or the crude animalism of a Pedro. All experiences that give him a keener sense of his own life are valued.

Like the existential anti-heroes of Camus or Beckett, Jones conceives of himself as an alien in a world that is essentially meaningless. The coexistence of a finite man and a purposeless cosmos is an absurdity; and the only way to make one's own life meaningful is to exercise the will and act deliberately, in defiance of the indifferent universe. The game Jones plays with life is not undertaken with the idea of winning on a cosmic scale; it is, rather, an effort to amuse himself during his brief sojourn. This self-styled "gentleman" is in fact a vagabond, with no place to call "home." He considers himself dispossessed from the continent and not at all a "piece of the main." With only the lack of a moral dimension to make him complete, Jones is very nearly a model of the perceptive and imaginative artist admired by Conrad. All that he does, however, he does for
its own sake, for the aesthetic pleasure it provides him, and with no thought to the ethical implications of his acts.

Conrad has revealed the depth of his understanding of the problem of the artist by showing in Heyst and Jones two kinds of artistic freedom which counterpoint each other in the novel; Lena is the fatal deus ex machina that destroys them both, but in different ways and for different reasons. Lena intrudes into Jones's "perfect" life with Ricardo and causes him to act desperately. And yet she causes Heyst to accept her intrusion into his "perfect" life as a good, even though he, too, must die because of her. Heyst's attempt through suicide to realize his new-found ideal is actually an affirmation of life as he has found it in Lena. "'I've saved you! ... Who else could have done this for you?'' she whispers to Heyst as she dies, martyred for him. And he, by choosing to die with her, truly takes her "into the sanctuary of his innermost heart--forever" (p. 380), and is thus redeemed.

Jones dies ambiguously; but one supposes that this grim aesthete's death is by design rather than by accident. Sensing that "his game [is] clearly up," he probably chooses to end the game of life on his own cowardly terms, by drowning himself--again a counterpoint to Heyst's ennobling suicide by fire. When Jones's exotically robed body is discovered at the foot of the wharf, it resembles Dorian Gray's beside the beautiful portrait: a wretched sight, the mere
ghost of what he had pretended to be. Jones is found "huddled [sic] up on the bottom between two piles, like a heap of bones in a blue bag. . ." (p. 384). Lena is ultimately responsible for the suicides of both types of the incomplete artist.

Conrad's ideal artist is, of course, preoccupied with ethical matters as well as with aesthetic ones. His concept of the conscientious artist resembles that of James, yet neither writer seems able to draw a successful portrait of the "complete" artist. Usually, the portrait is of an artist with either an excess or a deficiency of one of the essential qualities, and the flaw makes him a tragic character. James's many artist-narrators are often obsessed with an idea, with the need to make an artificially ordered pattern, even at the expense of destroying what is human and good in the natural world they reshape. The megalomaniacal narrator in *The Sacred Fount* is an example of the type of artist who loses the imperfect real world in his effort to gain an imagined superior one. Axel Heyst in *Victory* is another example. The implication in the novels of both James and Conrad is that it is morally wrong to make personally satisfying aesthetic patterns at the expense of larger ethical matters.

Frequently Conrad tries to reconcile the two duties, but the method is not to paint the ideal but to suggest it by showing the pitiable spectacle of the man who "might have
been." There exists in Axel Heyst, for instance, the potential for completeness, for he is aware of the dichotomy of his needs. His conscious desire to create a private island-universe is complicated by an unconscious urge to participate in the affairs of the world. Heyst appears in striking images of self-sufficiency which also hint of his inevitable connection with the rest of mankind. Captain Davidson observes him dressed neatly, wearing white shoes, with a book in his hand, standing alone on the wharf of his empty island. All these details function symbolically. The book suggests the dominance of ideas and all that goes with the purely contemplative life; his careful and spotless attire despite the absence of social pressures, \(^{31}\) his devotion to the purity of form for its own sake; the island itself, his isolation from the affairs of men; and his appearance on the wharf, his unconscious yearning for connection with mankind.

Heyst is temperamentally a brother to the Paterian aesthetes, who create private palaces of mental pleasure by allowing their imaginations to play freely upon the changing patterns of phenomenal reality. Heyst has deliberately chosen to remain isolated and has surrounded himself with the furniture, the books, and other concrete remains of his

\(^{31}\)In this he resembles the chief accountant at the outer station in *Heart of Darkness*. Though thousands of miles from European civilization, and in the intense equatorial heat, the accountant continues to wear his cuffs and starched collars.
father's house. The contemplation of these objects—especially the perusal of the books—is a source of aesthetic pleasure for Heyst by engaging his imagination creatively. Like the "artist for art's sake," Heyst cultivates his private life as an end in itself. For him, patterns of order and efficiency are important not for what they accomplish but for what they are: intrinsic beauty. It is Wang, the inscrutable, omnipresent and yet invisible servant who makes for most of the order on the island; and Heyst enjoys both the order and the ordering principle, just as the artist delights equally in the aesthetic images proceeding from his creative unconscious and the process of creation itself. It is interesting to note that Wang's desertion—the failure of the ordering power to maintain order in Heyst's private kingdom—is, literally, a direct consequence of the encroachment of the outer world on the inner. Like all "incomplete" artists, Heyst loses the chance of sustaining his vision of aesthetic perfection upon the moment he acts toward fulfilling the needs of an ideal that lies outside the enchanted circle of his little world. As long as he remains alone on the island, he is able (by means of Wang) to make and enjoy his private paradise of the imagination. But this beautiful garden is barren and essentially meaningless. And, as he extends himself into the chaotic public world, which, if not always beautiful and satisfying, is at least potentially fruitful, he exchanges an impotent static life of "being"
for a dynamic life of "becoming."

The frustration and despair of Conrad and, for that matter, of any Heystian artist, comes with the recognition that neither philosophy is perfect. The detached and sterile aesthetic ideal is devoid of meaning beyond itself; and the ideal of moral commitment, which is richly meaningful and ennobling, asks that a man hazard his own life and even relinquish his hope for perfect happiness. To act exclusively in one's own behalf (to embrace oneself, as it were) necessarily makes of the world a rival and a menace. But to embrace the world does not lessen the destructive potential of the world. Whatever his aim—the private ideal or the public, the aesthetic or the ethical, the stasis of "being" or the dynamism of "becoming"—the artist must face the hazards of life like anyone else. The island will be invaded; the world will have its way. Happiest is he who makes the world a significant part of his private dream. Such a man was Morrison, to whom Heyst was attracted probably because he embodied the best of all possible attitudes toward a world that destroys the good and the evil indiscriminately. Morrison, it will be recalled, was a trader who "advanced" goods to the natives but never got around to "squeezing" them for payment. He was "a true humanitarian and rather ascetic than otherwise" (p. 10). Trading was for Morrison what art should be for the ideal artist. Of his ship Morrison declared: "'She is not only my livelihood; she's my life'"
Morrison lived by and for his work; he successfully combined vocation with avocation and found aesthetic pleasure within an ethical framework. Chance, the only factor over which no man has any control, Morrison responded to with a healthy defiance. Even when he almost despaired of recovering his ship, he showed amazing staying power. The universe could indeed be cruel, but it could also answer prayers. Chance dictated Morrison's suffering and his eventual death in England, but it also provided, through its agent Heyst, a great solace for a brief time. One's attitude toward an indifferent universe is all important. Heyst learns too late that submission to life, to the destructive element, is the secret to the life well-lived.

This novel is, as I have asserted, a supremely successful expression of the tragic dilemma of the artist who comes to realize that a dedication to Art should not preclude his dedication to Life. By metaphor and symbol (i.e., by "magic suggestiveness") rather than by explicit statement Conrad has shown the sterility of an exclusive love of the inner, or cerebral, life. But he has also shown that to embrace the outer, or physical, life, is by no means a guarantee of psychic harmony. The artist is necessarily involved in both worlds--the physical and moral as well as the mental and aesthetic--and he is destined to suffer from his dual commitment.

The character of Lena, the femme fatale in the novel,
is the central symbol of the fusion, if not the resolution, of the artist's two conflicting allegiances. Dedicated to the preservation of the well-ordered solitary life, Heyst views her as an abstraction, as if she were only a mental phenomenon, a creature of his own cerebrations. She seems but a beautiful and melancholy idea, as lonely as the artist who imagines her. But she is no less a *femme fatale* for all her immateriality: she seduces him physically as well as imaginatively and draws him, moth-like, to the flame. Since the artist is also a man, he is moved to satisfy the needs of the man as well as those of the artist. Lena, besides being the beloved object of his self-pleasing thought, is the reason for his charitable action. To put it another way, Heyst is moved equally by a conservative, selfish motive and a liberal, selfless one. Together, these paradoxical desires comprise the love-death theme that underlies the story of the introspective artist.

Heyst's attitudes toward Lena are complex and contradictory. For apparently selfless reasons he admits the distraught girl into his private sanctuary and only afterwards seeks to protect her for more selfish reasons. But his "selfless" humanitarian deed is in fact the manifestation of a rather narcissistic love of playing with the projections of his own imagination. And his "selfish" desire to possess Lena physically is actually his implicit acknowledgment of her worth as another person distinct from himself. And yet
all the while, she remains a vague and indeterminate quantity, both more and less than the creature Heyst believes her to be.

Conrad's great artistic and moral triumph in *Victory* is Lena. Lena is Art and she is Life; she is all that appeals to the mind and all that appeals to the senses; she is the object of thought as well as the object of action; she is that immoderately cherished being by and for whom men live and die. She is, from first to last, in the microcosm of the mind and in the macrocosm of the world, the beautiful but dangerous *femme fatale*, in whom men fulfill themselves, if at all.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

I have argued that a number of serious writers of fiction of the late Victorian period were enamored of their own beautiful but potentially unsatisfying aesthetic ideals, and that they nevertheless enjoyed being ensnared by them, as by a "belle dame sans merci." But there is, perhaps, some need, by way of conclusion, to review the key assertions of my dissertation.

First of all, the type of writer about whom I have been speaking is fated to view life "artistically"; that is, in terms of imaginative patterns that are imposed upon natural ones. Wilde, for example, could not avoid trying to make a beautiful work of art out of his life. His attempt and his failure are dramatized in Dorian Gray's life. Both Wilde and his persona are governed by unconscious creative-destructive forces within themselves. The same was true of Swinburne. By the time he was a young man Swinburne was unalterably in love with an "unnatural" ideal in life that was self-destructive. His literary counterparts, Redgie, Denham, Herbert, Chastelard, and others, are equally disposed, perhaps congenitally, to cultivate patterns of
behavior which result in pain or death. For James, the "artistic" point of view was a necessary way of looking at the world. He saw patterns of compensation in the relationships of friends and family and could not help imposing similar patterns imaginatively upon larger and yet larger spheres of action, so that at last all of Europe and America became part of a complex system of innocence and corruption. His fiction, like his life, shows his sensitive "central registers" to be caught up in the dramatic action they witness unfolding before them, and they begin to manipulate as well as to observe. Mrs. Gereth, Madame Merle, Rowland Mallet, the telegraph operator of "In the Cage," and the narrators of The Sacred Fount and other stories—all are inveterate "artists," creators of patterns; and all to some degree suffer from the patterns they have made. Roderick Hudson is one of the most complete of James's portraits of the artist. In the story of the idealistic sculptor are embodied all the joys and sorrows of the fated lover of self-generated beautiful forms which can never be perfectly incarnated in a work of art. Conrad, practically unique among the great literary artists of the early modern period in his two-fold dedication to aesthetic form and to ethical matters, was, like the other writers I have discussed, inescapably a "maker." (He early saw a significance in the sea, both as a fact to be reckoned with and as a symbol.) And in his fiction, such as "Typhoon," "The Nigger of the
Narcissus," and "Heart of Darkness," Conrad often shows that a love of the destructive element brings about a sense of heightened existence.

Besides the necessity of an "artistic" vision for these men as novelists, all four experienced paradoxically severe though pleasing rewards for their subservience to their ideals of beauty. I have suggested that this pleasure growing out of anguish is a type of masochism, common to all artists thus enamored of perfection. In Swinburne the craving for flagellation and other forms of masochism was not so successfully sublimated as it was for the others. Swinburne took delight in being scourged by the whip, by the sea, and by women; so, too, do the male protagonists in Lesbia Brandon, Love's Cross-Currents, and Chastelard, as well as the nameless speakers in several of the more sensational poems in the first Poems and Ballads. Wilde seemed to enjoy and profit by the suffering which Lord Alfred Douglas inflicted upon him; and the same kind of masochism is evident in Dorian Gray's pleasure in being haunted by his conscience. James and Conrad accepted loneliness as part of the necessary price to be paid for their private joys; and the same contented loneliness is evident in James's Hugh Verecker, in his narrator of The Sacred Fount, and in Conrad's Axel Heyst. The femmes fatales in the works I have discussed embody this painful element as much as the beautiful and pleasurable in the artist's life.
Each of the literary artists whom I have discussed has employed a fictional *femme fatale* to symbolize the creative imagination of an "artist-hero." Each novelist has, of course, put into the figure those qualities which he as an artist unconsciously regarded as components of his aesthetic ideal.

Conrad, for instance, created Lena, a mysterious and beautiful girl whose effect on Heyst, the intellectual "artist" in *Victory*, is disastrous. Lena is a projection of Conrad's creative imagination, just as Dolores or Lady Midhurst is of Swinburne's, or as Christina is of James's, or as Salomé is of Wilde's. But unlike the *femmes fatales* of the other writers, Lena is more than a projection of Heyst's aesthetic ideal; she embodies an ethical ideal as well. She is beautiful but she is also selfless in her thought and action. For Heyst, as for Conrad, the dual commitment to life and art is as disastrous as the single commitment to art. But the larger commitment is more rewarding.

The *femme fatale* of James, though not as selfless as Lena, is not wholly immoral either; there is the hint that Christina cares about Roderick. But her action speaks more to the point: she deserts him when it profits her to do so. (Had she been in Lena's place, she would have betrayed Heyst and gone with Ricardo.) She is supremely beautiful and, for all practical purposes, amoral.

The fatal woman of Swinburne's fiction is even more
completely egotistical and sadistic. Lady Midhurst callously manipulates the lives of her nephew and grandson, and Margaret Wariston recklessly toys with the passions of Herbert and Denham.

In the writings of Wilde, the *femme fatale* is the epitome of beauty without a heart. Certainly Sibyl Vane is not a full-scale literary portrait, but what Wilde has suggested is that she does not take responsibility for the unhappiness her beauty causes—the same idea carried out in the analogous figure of Dorian's picture. Salomé, although a character in a play and not in a novel, actually is the best example of the Wildean *femme fatale*. She is truly a combination of beauty and death.

For Beerbohm and Beardsley, the *femme fatale* is quite vain about her beauty and naïvely indifferent to the disastrous effects of that beauty upon her lovers. Zuleika's face launches several hundred Oxonians as Helen's had (reputedly) launched a thousand ships; and yet neither seems to feel especially sorry for the multitudes who suffer in her behalf.

The half-century between 1865 (*Chastelard*) and 1915 (*Victory*) gave rise to what has become "modern" fiction. In this dissertation I have attempted to explore the nature of the changing relationships between art and life—and between the artist and his work—which made for "modernity" in certain late Victorian novels. I have found that the *femme*
fatale, a recurring figure among these works, bodies forth the ambivalent and conflicting attitudes of the emerging modern point of view. Traditionally, the novelist had shown man how to live. His advice had been, variously, to heed the canons of virtue and respectability, to seek to reform those elements of society which violated an absolute standard of morality, and to urge social and economic legislation which would create a climate favorable to the attainment of these ideals. But certain novelists of the late nineteenth century, seeing man's problems as largely insoluble, showed not how to eliminate but sought ways to cope with the hostilities of life. On the one extreme was Wilde's way: the substitution of art for life, or "aestheticism"; on the other was Conrad's way: the combining of art with life, or "modernism."

From this vantage point rather late in the twentieth century, it seems to me that Conrad's modernism has prevailed over Wilde's aestheticism as the dominant philosophy of the art of fiction. Although both philosophies acknowledge the supremacy of imagination to dictate the unique shape of each particular work of art, modernism is a far more complex theory to put into practice. Whereas "aestheticism" implies that the work has no important extrinsic values and that its creator has denied his essential humanity, "modernism" suggests that the work takes its aesthetic form from the internal psychic conflicts of man: universal
problems that make up the moral and ethical dimension of life. In short, modernism in fiction is characterized by the author's predilection for using (however disguised) autobiographical materials and for being his own etherized patient. The creative imagination of the modern novelist, whether of the nineteenth or of the twentieth century, takes as his province all matters that directly concern his psychic and physical development and makes them part of the pattern imposed by his private aesthetic ideal. Mann, Proust, Hesse, Gide, Joyce, Woolf, Lawrence, and Forster, no less than James and Conrad, are "modern" in their narcissistic fascination in fiction with the processes of the unconscious mind and for their desire to give artistic expression to their moral concerns for the faulty relationship between the private and the public world, between the individual and society.

By the early twentieth century it had become clear that the writer of imaginative prose had accepted his fate as a lonely and frustrated individual. He had found that a serious commitment to his craft necessarily deprived him of much in the way of ordinary human intercourse. And yet he would not consciously have chosen to gain the world if it meant the sacrifice of his art. He was fatally, tragically, attached to the patterns of order emanating from his own mind. For some writers, like Wilde, Beerbohm, Beardsley, and Swinburne--and to a lesser extent, James--the reflexive
pleasure of the imagination was the *raison d'être* of these artificial patterns of order. For others, like James—and more particularly, Conrad—the artificial patterns existed for their own sake but also to help others "see" the moral significance of human relationships.

What is important to remember is that the increasing alienation from ordinary life in the waning years of the nineteenth century was keenly felt by artists, intellectuals, and other imaginative men; and that in certain works of fiction reflecting a concern for the plight of the alienated artist there appears a dominant symbol of the creative imagination by which and for which the artist lived but from which he could never hope to achieve fulfillment. This symbol, as I have demonstrated in the foregoing chapters, is the *femme fatale*, the archetype of the unconscious creative powers of the modern imaginative writer of fiction.

I have shown that the *femme fatale* is always disastrous to her lovers and that she operates in different ways with different artists. There appear to be four main categories of *femmes fatales* based upon the ways they affect particular types of artists. First of all, there is the artist who actively craves abuse. The *femme fatale* in his life, accordingly, is as morbidly sadistic as he is masochistic. She appears in Swinburne's works as Mary Stuart, Faustine, Dolores, and Margaret Wariston, and in Wilde's works as Salomé.
Then there is the artist who is tragically a victim of his own narcissitic cerebrations and cannot distinguish between reality and fantasy. The *femme fatale* of this type of artist is seemingly not malevolent but merely indifferent to the suffering she causes him. In fiction she appears as Beerbohm's Zuleika or as Beardsley's Helen.

A third type of artist is one who tries to face reality but is nevertheless victimized by an idealistic notion that he is destined to succeed where others have failed. His *femme fatale* is self-serving and at times consciously malicious, or at least coolly indifferent to the anguish she causes. She is best represented in fiction by James's Christina Light.

Finally, there is the artist who is a man who loves his orderly private life but cannot escape involving himself in the disorderly affairs of the world. His *femme fatale* is not only beautiful and destructive but she is generous and self-sacrificial as well. Conrad's Lena is this kind of *femme fatale*.

So it is that not only in the theories of Jungian psychologists but in the concrete literary performances of novelists such as Swinburne, Wilde, Beerbohm, Beardsley, James, and Conrad the imaginative writer is demonstrably in love with an ideal concept of himself usually conceived of as a feminine being—an ideal which, when not realized, results in the agonized ecstasy of eternal anticipation and, when realized, results in his own destruction.
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ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE


DECADENCE AND DANDYISM


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**HENRY JAMES**


JOSEPH CONRAD


VITA

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Title of Thesis:  The **Femme Fatale** as Symbol of the Creative Imagination in Late Victorian Fiction

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Date of Examination:   July 22, 1969