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Loving Self-Reflection:

Paradigms of Narcissism in *The Woman in White*

By Carolyn Laubender

“...[H]e saw before his eyes
A form, a face, and loved with leaping heart
A hope unreal and thought the shape was real.
Spellbound he saw himself and motionless
Lay like a marble statue staring down...
All he admires that all admire in him
Himself he longs for, longs unwittingly,
Praising is praised, desiring is desired,
And love he kindles while with love he burns...
Not knowing what he sees, he adores the sight;
That false face fools and fuels his delight.
You simple boy, why strive in vain to catch
A fleeting image? What you see is nowhere;
And what you love—but turn away—you lose!
You see a phantom of a mirrored shape;
Nothing itself; with you it came and stays;
With you it too will go, if you can go!”¹
(Ovid, 3.415-438)

Detail of “Cool” by Jessica Bandy

Much like the foundational myth of Ovid, Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* also opens onto a landscape of Narcissism. For Collins, though, the terrain has changed: his pennings deal not with literal pond-gazing, but with the more metaphorical manifestations of self-love and adoration that comprise the core of his characters’ interactions with one another (and, for that matter, with themselves). But their particular vanities are various, ranging from comical hypochondria to a sensational and heroic love that serves to self-aggrandize rather than self-sacrifice. The narcissisms embodied by Collins’ characters Fredrick Fairlie, Walter Hartwright, and Laura Fairlie are not Ovidian as much as they are Freudian and Lacanian, with each figure fitting into a different psychoanalytic archetype of (self)love.

Sigmund Freud’s writings on narcissism, when read alongside *The Woman in White*, suggest a shockingly complicated picture of Frederick Fairlie’s character. Though the egocentric and rather odd uncle of Laura Fairlie

The relationships in Wilkie Collins’ novel, *The Woman in White*, resonate almost perfectly with both Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theories of narcissistic impulses. Developed early in childhood, these impulses are said to motivate and structure our experiences of love. Though both theorists wrote after the publication of *The Woman in White*, the novel’s unexpected exemplification of their ideas suggests that the psychoanalytic approaches they developed may indeed articulate some of our more subconscious drives and impulses.

is a flawless depiction of an exaggerated narcissism and ego-centricity, a more radical interpretation of his character suggests that Fairlie is a far more complex expression of repressed psychological desires that lead him to, quite literally, fall in love with himself. His narcissism has progressed beyond the necessary Primary Narcissism that Freud sees in all individuals and has distorted into a totalizing Secondary Narcissism that manifests as hypochondria and is explained by an implicit coding of Fairlie’s character as homosexual.

In Freud’s 1914 essay, “On Narcissism: An Introduction,” he suggests that narcissistic tendencies may not, as previously assumed, be a disorder, but are more likely a normative state of being. Freud theorized that individuals function with the capacity for two different types of libido: ego-libido and object-libido. Ego-libido (narcissism) “is the libidinal compliment to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation” and constitutes an essential piece of “healthy” individuals.² It is, as Freud terms it, a Primary Narcissism. Object-libido, then, is that section of desire that has been directed at objects external to the self and is typically

associated with the love of or desire for another person.

Freud imagines libido as a fixed quantity within the mind, thereby implying that ego-libido and object-libido are engaged in a constant exchange with one another. In cases when the individual’s development of the libidinal stage is somehow “disrupted,” however, the individual may never fully develop an object-libido. This results in Secondary Narcissism, or a psychological disorder where the libido withdraws its attention from the outside world and focuses entirely on an obsession with the self, as seen in cases of hypochondria and megalomania.

Thus the type of hypochondria exhibited by Frederick Fairlie’s character develops when the self becomes so obsessed with itself that it essentially begins to see the entire external world as a threat to either health or sanity. Fairlie’s preoccupation with “the wretched state of [his] nerves”³ which he mentions, without fail, in every conversation he has, is the primary locus of his hypochondriac obsession; he is, by his own estimation, “nothing but a bundle of nerves dressed up to look like a man.”⁴ Consumed by thoughts

of his body, his “nerves,” his mental stability, his physical health, Fairlie often uses his “poor health” or “weak nerves” as excuses to either enact his own desire without being held socially responsible or to redirect conversation back to himself when it has strayed to other topics. He manipulates his “illness” as a way to control the characters around him, insisting that the voices of children, the banging of doors, and the dirt on visitors’ shoes are all things that will disturb his health, thereby enacting his own wishes without necessarily having to view himself as narcissistic. The extremity of Fairlie’s self-love is even noticed by Walter Hartright who, upon his first encounter with Mr. Fairlie, observes that his “self-affectation and [his] wretched nerves [mean] one and the same thing.”⁵ Fairlie’s self-absorption far surpasses any “normal” type of Primary Narcissism envisioned by Freud and so falls into the category of psychological disorders covered by Secondary Narcissism.

Interestingly, Freud often connects cases of libidinal disturbance with homosexuality and sexual “perversion,” implying that homosexuals⁶ over-develop their ego-libido and become in some way clinically narcissistic, crafting obsessions either with themselves or some illusion of their self.⁷ This tendency towards narcissism results as a response to the super-ego’s repression of their normal object desires—namely, individuals of the same sex—which forces the object-libido down while simultaneously increasing the ego-libido. But this repression results in a more complex expression of narcissism because the ego has now been forced to recognize a flaw in itself. The self’s desires are transgressive; unquestioning self-idolization and obsession are thus impossible. As a response, then, an “ideal ego” is created, which takes the place of the actual ego and projects to the individual an idealized (but falsified) image of himself.⁸

Since Fairlie’s brand of ego-libido is not directed at his own *Real* ego, but aimed at an ideal ego—Fairlie’s own aggrandized illusion

of himself—the reading of his character as “homosexual” seems an almost perfect Freudian case. Momentarily suspended in this Freudian immersion (and temporarily setting aside his theoretical “inaccuracies”), Fairlie’s love for his ideal-ego, the ego that falsely sees itself as “one of the most easy-tempered creatures that ever lived,”⁹

The reflective surface of Laura’s eyes project to Walter the version of himself he instills in her, the version of himself as he has always wanted to be.

results from his developmental repression of those unacceptable object-libidos (other men) for whom his super-ego would never allow his id to express a desire. Unable to invest his libido in others, Fairlie instead turns all his desire inward, focusing it on an idealized version of himself rather than on his own flawed reality. This psychoanalytic theory then accounts for the stereotypical characterization of homosexual men as vain, self-possessed, and essentially feminized. For Freud, they, like women, never fully transfer into the world of normative object-libido like heterosexual men because both homosexuals and women are socially limited in their ability to pursue the objects of their desire. Permitted to love no one but himself (even if it is an inaccurate representation of himself), Fairlie’s extreme and even clinical narcissism suddenly transforms. Thus placed under Freud’s observant eye, Frederick Fairlie is no longer just an eccentric and thoughtlessly self-centered uncle, he is now an instance of a type; he has been diagnosed—known—for what he “truly” is: an exemplar of a Freudian mold.

Frederick Fairlie is not, however, the only character consumed by visions of his own image. Much like Fairlie, neither Walter Hartright nor Laura Fairlie ever becomes consciously aware of the underlying narcissism that drives the relationship they have

with each other. But, from the first moment that they meet, Laura’s role as Walter’s figurative “looking-glass” is made quite clear. Walter’s first description of Laura’s physical form covers all of the traditional characteristics commonly recounted on a first encounter—dress, hair color, stature, demeanor—but as he continues he devotes

a disproportionate amount of time to the recollection of her eyes, “large and tender . . . beautiful above all things in the clear truthfulness of the look that dwells in their innermost depths.”¹⁰ Walter’s fascination with Laura’s eyes, the metaphorical “looking-glass” of the soul, is the first hint that his growing love and obsession with her mainly results from her transparency and reflectivity of character. Walter loves her for the “clear truthfulness of the look” she gives him, not because of any particular character trait she herself possesses. Her character is constructed as an empty vessel, carrying nothing innate or unique, and merely serving as a reflecting pool for the wishes, desires, beliefs, and interests of the characters that surround her. Even Walter—who must strain himself to see any of Laura’s faults—is momentarily “troubled by a sense of an incompleteness”¹¹ in her nature that suggests to him “the idea of something *wanting*,” something lacking.¹² Having no opinions of her own, she will literally “believe all that [Walter] say[s] to [her],”¹³ unquestionably reflecting back to him his own ideas and interests in each of their encounters. Walter—in a frightfully colonial way—cultivates her mind and refines her talents, leaving such a permanent and imbedded mark on her otherwise translucent mind that she has no option but

to idealize him and love him dependently. He essentially shapes her perception of him to fit his own narcissistic idealization of himself: a strong, masculine teacher, worthy of admiration despite his class status as her drawing master.

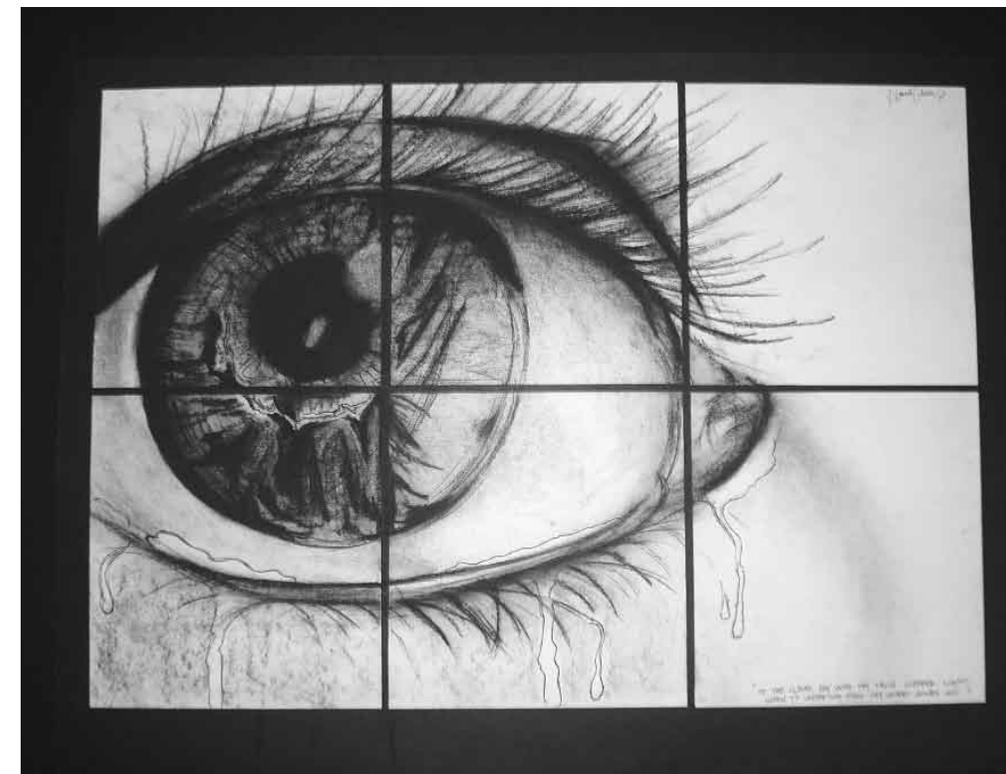
Like Fairlie, then, Walter’s desire is also for an ideal; but in this case, the yearning is best explained by the “Ideal-I” of Jacques Lacan rather than the Narcissism of Freud. Lacanian theories on the gaze, desire, and narcissism pivot on the conception of how the Castration Complex—part of Freud’s Oedipal Complex—structures and destabilizes our ideas of ourselves as autonomous agents.¹⁴ Essentially, Lacan posits that the mirror stage, a formative time in pre-linguistic early childhood when we first recognize an “image” of ourselves and thus begin to view ourselves as subjects, is both the beginning of the “self” and the beginning of the self’s internal anxiety and desire. For Lacan,

a fundamental misrecognition occurs when we—internally fragmented and incomplete—are presented with what appears to be a singular and cohesive external reflection of ourselves. As our infantile selves gaze at our own images and see ourselves as individuals, separate and self-contained, we (for the first time) construct a functional ideal of a “self” and the material body that corresponds to the stability and precision of the reflection. This construction, Lacan then suggests, becomes the root of all of the anxious insecurity we (as subjects) feel later in our adult lives; we will never be able to resolve the feelings of loss or lack that will perpetually plague us as we compare the perfection of the reflective image with the subjective experience of an unstable and inconsistent self.

Contradicting the logical assumption that mirrors would then be subconsciously shunned and avoided, always reminding us of our shameful materiality and instability,

Lacan concludes that we actually view them in just the opposite way, internally obsessing over the image of a stable, coherent, and unified whole. The wholeness of this image fascinates us because it seems to present to us the “Ideal-I” (like Freud’s Ideal ego), or that image of ourselves that we always want to be but never feel like we actually achieve. This complicated relationship signals our transition into the Imaginary Order, a psychological structure predominately characterized by our perpetually narcissistic demand for the stability of the mirror’s reflection.

Our location in the Imaginary Order persists until we acquire language—symbolically representative, for Lacan, of the rules of culture, society, and law—and transition into the Symbolic Order (though he suggests that the narcissistic influence of the Imaginary is always present, even in the Symbolic). In the Symbolic Order, the infant’s demand for the stability and unity of the self s/he sees in his or her mirror image morphs into the adult’s *desire* for objects that s/he views as reflecting back to him or her the stability s/he once saw in the mirror. Thus, all of the relationships we form (with role models, with love objects, etc.) are implicitly narcissistic in that they all cater to our own obsession with our “Ideal-I,” serving as warped looking-glasses that show us pictures of ourselves that are more composed than we actually are. These *objet petit a*s (objects of our desire) function, then, merely as a screen for the projection of our unending desire for our “Ideal-I,” thereby making any actual fulfillment of our desire impossible—even through acquisition of our *objet petit a*—because desire is ultimately concerned with an impossible return to wholeness with the mother, not with the object itself. It is a constant process of projection and deferral. It is in this stage, also, that the final separation from the mother (and the maternal body) occurs; our assumption of the patriarchal Symbolic—the Father’s code—necessitates a parallel denial of the mother who must be excluded as a price for cultural recognition.



“Untitled” by Hannah Cochran

Finally, Lacan's notion of desire in the Symbolic Order includes a phenomenon he terms "The Gaze." For Lacan, The Gaze is not merely the subject's act of looking at an object of desire, but also includes the subject's (almost paranoid) realization that he is being gazed back at by the object. This realization is essentially one fraught with anxiety and insecurity because we are forced to realize that the "object" we are gazing at has the eerie ability to gaze back, almost threatening us with our own "Ideal-I" by forcing us to subconsciously recall the fact that we believe we lack much of what our "object" reflects us to be. Thus, our relationships with objects in the Symbolic Order are similar to our relationship with ourselves in the Imaginary Order; both are characterized by a simultaneous obsession with the image of our ideal selves and a sense of anxiety stirred by the fact that the image forces us to realize that, in the Real, we are not what we want (or pretend) to be.

Logically, then, Walter's desire for Laura deconstructs into an extension of his infantile Imaginary demand for his "Ideal-I"—the



"Untitled" by Margaret Griffiths

competent, unified, perfect self his misrecognizes in the mirror. The reflective surface of Laura's eyes project to Walter the version of himself he instills in her, the version of himself as he has always wanted to be. When she reflects this romanticized idealization of himself back to him, his Primary Narcissism assumes control and he, like Narcissus, is psychologically fated to fall in love with his own image.

The text of *The Woman in White* almost immediately alludes to the underlying problems structuring Laura and Walter's desire for

Their relationship is entirely "wanting": one participant is completely translucent while the other is both in love with and unsettled by his own idealized reflection.

one another. The nature of Walter's desire for Laura—being that it is merely a masked reiteration of Primary Narcissism—implies that, by gazing at her (and having her gaze back at him), Walter is simultaneously feeding his narcissistic idealized self-image and troubling that image by constantly reminding himself of his own lack in comparison to the image. Walter attempts to verbalize this uncanny¹⁵ paradox by again speaking of the ambiguous "lack" in Laura's character, saying that "At one time it seemed like something wanting in *her*; at another, like something wanting in myself . . . The impression was always strongest, in the most contradictory manner, when she looked at me . . . Something wanting, something wanting—and where it was, and what it was, I could not say."¹⁶ The fact that this "wanting" occurs most acutely when Laura is gazing at Walter, fixing her reflective eyes on him, speaks to Lacan's assumption that "The Gaze" is essentially coded with both the narcissism of love for the Ideal-I (as represented to us, in the Symbolic Order, through others) and anxiety over the reality that no one measures

up against our own self-misrecognition.¹⁷ When Laura looks at him, Walter ostensibly recognizes her lack (after all, she is only a mirror); but, more subconsciously, he is unsettled because he is reminded of his own shortcomings, his own "wanting" in comparison to the image she holds of him. Thus their relationship is entirely "wanting": one participant is completely translucent while the other is both in love with and unsettled by his own idealized reflection.

This fundamental anxiety accounts for Walter's almost obsessive drive to look at and

watch Laura whenever possible. The insecurity that his idealized reflection of himself awakens prompts Walter to try to master that anxiety, to overcome it by perpetually staring at it. His repeated glances at and observations of Laura are thereby read not as looks of love, but as an almost colonial desire to gain control over and possess the unstable root of his fear. Despite his best (subconscious) efforts, though, Walter is never able to overcome the anxiety described in Lacan's version of the Castration Complex because, according to Lacan, the insecurity has nothing to do with the *objet petit a*, which functions merely as a screen and has everything to do with our own latent recognition of the fact that we do not measure up to our idealized self-image. This internal disquiet can in no way be overcome by controlling the object, the mirror, the other person, because it stems from something internal to the self rather than external to it.

Unable to master the uneasiness he experiences every time he encounters Laura, Walter decides to leave Limmeridge in an attempt to "cast off the oppression under



"Untitled" by Margaret Griffiths

which [he is] living, at once and forever."¹⁸ Although he verbally justifies his departure as necessary because of Marian's discovery of his attraction to Laura and Laura's pre-existing engagement to Sir Percival Glyde, Walter actually determines to leave Laura days before Marian intervenes and informs him of Laura's fiancé. His acknowledgement of the "oppression" that he feels at Limmeridge is thus unconnected to Marian's actions and can be seen as the result of his own masochistic desire to constantly pursue that which pains him (in this case, Laura Fairlie). Eventually, though, the internal conflict becomes too unbearable and Walter parts with Laura, leaving Limmeridge to seek some kind of mental peace elsewhere.

Walter's communications to Marian after his withdrawal from Limmeridge inform her that he plans to leave London, hoping to be "among new scenes and new people"¹⁹ by taking up a post on a ship sailing to the "ruined cities of Central America."²⁰ Essentially, Walter, thus far a sensitive, observant, upper-class drawing instructor, has engaged himself in a colonial adventure to the wild

and untamed lands of the America's. Unable to colonize Laura and control the insecurity she stirs in him, he literally goes to another country to colonize other peoples, trying to resolve his inability to solve the former situation by succeeding in the latter venture.

Walter returns from the "wilds and forests of Central America"²¹ months later as a self-described "changed man."²² His "wanderings" and his repeated "escape[s] from the peril[s] of death" have "tempered [his] nature afresh,"²³ teaching his will "to be strong, [his] heart to be resolute, [his] mind to rely on itself."²⁴ Furthermore, Walter's hyper-masculine travels are later compounded and intensified by his own sleuth-like actions of surveillance and interrogation as he pursues proof of Laura's existence. At this point in the narrative, Walter's flawless representation of Lacanian theory becomes more complicated. Walter literally transforms himself into the stereotypical model of masculinity that he always wanted himself to be: active, dominant, socially and monetarily superior, omniscient (via his "objective" fact finding), and heroic in his self-sacrificing actions. Throughout the course of the novel,

Laura possesses no self-knowledge or means for self-reflection beyond the stimuli and opinions of the characters that surround her; like the stereotypically "good" woman, she exists for and through others, desiring nothing beyond appeasement.

he morphs from a passive and subordinate drawing teacher to a masculine but beneficent "savior" who literally fights to save Laura's oppressor, Percival Glyde, from a fire. In a sense, through his missionary wanderings and his detective investigations, Walter changes himself into his Ideal-I; he really and truly becomes everything that he previously idealized himself to be and yet subconsciously never quite believed that he was. Interesting-

ly, though his adventures in Central America do not instantly resolve Walter's relationship with Laura, the novel suggests that they do provide him with the unique (and arguably impossible) ability to resolve the foundational insecurity of "The Gaze" by becoming his Ideal-I and thereby conquering Laura, the locus of his anxiety, in the future.

Despite the novel's implication that Walter had, through a radical change of character, overcome the basic anxiety separating him from Laura, the actualization of their relationship is again delayed, this time because of a "problem" in Laura's character. Her traumatic entanglement with the life of Anne Catherick, the woman in white, forces her (via Count Fosco's actions) to adopt the identity, position, and mentality of a "lunatic." This deliberate confusion of identities and Laura's subsequent confinement to an asylum under Anne's name powerfully affects Laura's originally reflective personality, compelling her to not only "play" the part of Anne for mere show, but to actually *become* Anne. Just as Walter is easily able to influence Laura's mind and persuade her to reflect him perfectly, so too does Anne's life

and surroundings leave its mark on Laura, temporarily making her like Anne.

Laura's assumption of much of Anne's mentality and personality, as well as her name, becomes the reason, then, that Walter stops desiring her for a time after her return. In recounting Laura's physical appearance when she returns to Marian and him, he states:

The sorrow and suffering which I had once blamed myself for associating . . .

with the future of Laura Fairlie had set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of her face. The fatal resemblance [between Laura and Anne] which I had once seen and shuttered at seeing, in idea only, was now a real and living resemblance which asserted itself before my eyes.²⁵

His love for her changes from a passionate desire for her former mirror-like state to “an interest of tenderness and compassion, which her father or her brother might have felt”²⁶ because she could no longer serve as a perfectly reflective body. The confusion between she and Anne forces to Laura to take on Anne’s identity for a time, meaning that she is no longer flat and reflective—she had a personality, even if it was not her own. True to all accounts of narcissistic self-love, Walter cannot find Laura attractive and desirable until she stops mirroring Anne’s image and again begins to reflect to him his own. Walter’s love for Laura is so tied to his own Primary Narcissism (which Lacan theorizes that we never truly abandon as we transition

sally relegating her to the role of a passively reflective surface for her dominant counterparts. Laura possesses no self-knowledge or means for self-reflection beyond the stimuli and opinions of the characters that surround her; like the stereotypically “good” woman, she exists for and through others, desiring nothing beyond appeasement.

Laura’s gradual return to her old self—if she can even be said to have an independent “self” at all—likewise signals the progressive reemergence of Walter’s desire for Laura. This “happy change” in her character “awoke” “those imperishable memories of [their] past life in Cumberland”²⁸ and rekindled the flames of Walter’s previous narcissistic desire for Laura. The pair finally “own that [they] love each other”²⁹ and, soon after this declaration, are happily married. Implicitly, through Walter’s reconstruction of his own character, he has literally fashioned himself into his Ideal-I, removing the anxiety that once plagued his earlier relationship with Laura. While Walter

Walter’s final joy in marriage comes from the fact that he can now, fully and completely, own and master Laura; she is his love, his looking-glass, his mirror whose image he can now constantly and securely worship.

out of the Imaginary Order) that he physically cannot desire her until she returns to her former passive, womanly state. Laura does eventually return to her former self, but this return comes at the high cost of her memories, which, “from the period of her leaving Blackwater Park to the period of our meeting in the burial ground of Limmeridge Church, [were] lost beyond all hope of recovery.”²⁷ Her existence again assumes the domain of immanence traditionally attributed to women, characterized as having no ability for analytic thought, and univer-

always feels that something about his former relationship with Laura is “oppressive” or “wanting” because he can never completely master his own shortcomings and incongruities, the novel’s portrayal of the reunited couple as “happy” and contented speaks to the idea that Walter has done the impossible: he has overcome his Lacanian Castration Complex and become his Ideal-I. In the most extreme instance of Walter’s objectifying triumph at finally feeling control over Laura, Walter rants: “In the right of her calamity, in the right of her friendlessness,

she was *mine* at last! *Mine* to support, to protect, to cherish, to restore. *Mine* to love and honor . . . *Mine* to vindicate through all risks and all sacrifices.”³⁰ Walter’s final joy in marriage comes from the fact that he can now, fully and completely, own and master Laura; she is his love, his looking-glass, his mirror whose image he can now constantly and securely worship. His happiness is not the arguably fictionalized and romanticized happiness of loving another person for “who s/he is”; rather, it is the overwhelming pleasure of loving something that reflects back to you your own perfection—a perfection about which you hold no insecurities or doubts.

Although the novel follows Laura and Walter’s matrimonial life for another few months, detailing Laura’s return to her proper social place (only achieved by Walter’s fact-finding), Count Fosco’s murder, and ending with the birth of Laura and Walter’s first child, “Mr. Walter Hartwright—the *heir of Limmeridge*,” the text does nothing to complicate the rather simplistic ideal of the pair’s “happiness.”³¹ In a sense, then, *The Woman in White* resolves itself in a way similar to many Victorian novels: all troubles are overcome, desire is satiated, and the “good guys” triumph. It suggests, through Walter’s character and his relationship with Laura, that the fundamental Lacanian notion of continual self-misrecognition and anxiety *can* eventually be resolved. Lacan’s understanding of *objet petit a*’s as primarily functioning as a screen for our own narcissistic projections requires Lacan to theorize desire as something inescapably and necessarily reproducing. Because our anxiety about our fragmented selves stems from an infantile separation from the mother—an event we can never reconstruct or overcome—our desire for our Ideal-I *can never* be achieved because our Ideal-I, that unified self, can never be returned to. Therefore, in the world away from romanticized and fictionalized constructs, desire can never be satiated; it is a perpetual reiteration of itself, always

re-projecting as soon as the original *objet petit a* is attained.

Perhaps, given my meta-psychoanalytic perspective, I would hold this type of narrative resolution, often seen in fairy-tales, melodrama and fiction of every genre (romance novel, of course, as the exempla *par excellence*), as problematic because it falsely presents to the reader a psychologically impossible (yet desirable) scenario as if it were truth, essentially constructing inaccurate delusions of “reality” in readers’ mentality. Poisoned by the idealistic Victorian ending, lovers of fiction often point to novels as if they are textualized versions of truth, thus falling into the trap (and a seductive trap it is, indeed) of mistaking for reality what is simply fiction. Freud, quite famously, actually seeks to explain this literary and artistic tendency of representing a false yet attractive reality by applying his own theories of narcissism to the artists and writer, reading their urge to materialize lies as representative of the artist’s own fumbling attempts to transcend his or her own anxiety: “The artist desires to win honour, power, wealth, fame, and the love of women; but he lacks the means for achieving these satisfactions” in the “real” world and so turns to art and writing to create a delusional resolution that would otherwise be unobtainable.³² From this Freudian meta-perspective, the artist is necessarily narcissistic because every production, every creative expression, represents nothing more than “an introvert[’s]” own desire to “[make] his dreams come true” and then take pleasure from that creative extension of himself.³³ Artists’ fictionalized worlds are not the result of spontaneous bursts of genius, but are indicative of authors’ own quasi-neurotic states and their vain attempts to stabilize those states through the work they produce. Often, they—like the characters they produce—are subject to being read as a living embodiment of the very paradigms of narcissism Freud assumed to be mentally ubiquitous and are repositioned from the pedestal of “creator” to the couch of the psychoanalyst.



Detail of “Untitled” by Margaret Griffiths