Textual analysis is one of the most important theoretical and practical legacies of 1970s film theory. Recent film theory has moved, as Kaja Silverman has argued, from semiotics to psychoanalysis, with attendant shifts in the notion of the subject, and the changing dimensions of textual analysis in film studies reflect that shift. If Christian Metz's early semiotic analysis in *Film Language* was concerned with specifying the conditions of coherence in narrative film, Raymond Bellour's notion of coherence had far more to do with the "subject" of the film, the ideal yet always imaginary spectator to whom coherence is addressed ("Le blocage symbolique"). Indeed, fictions about the film spectator have shaped the development of textual analysis in film studies, and in that sense textual analysis engages centrally with spectatorship, with the various components of vision, identification, and pleasure that have characterized the way film viewing is constructed.

In the last decade, the field of film studies has undergone considerable shifts, and the theoretical pronouncements of the 1970s, particularly those having to do with psychoanalysis, have been reexamined and sometimes ridiculed. It may well be true that textual analyses of the 1970s relied too exclusively on the formal and technological aspects of the cinema, and therefore gave exclusive signifying authority to the individual film and ignored the complex nature of the cinematic institution. And by exploring in
exhaustive detail the signifying structures of the individual film, textual analysis created film texts that had only the most remote connection with the ways in which films are actually received (an issue which has not been ignored by practitioners of textual analysis; see Bellour, “Le blocage symbolique”). Textual analysis might also be criticized for resurrecting the old dichotomy of text and context, privileging the former and ignoring the latter.

The textual analyses that have become “classics” of film theory are virtually all performed on classical Hollywood films: Stephen Heath’s detailed reading of *Touch of Evil* (“Film and System”), Raymond Bellour’s analyses of a number of films by Hitchcock, especially *North by Northwest* (“Le blocage symbolique”), Thierry Kuntzel’s analysis of *The Most Dangerous Game* (“The Film-Work”). While these analyses are different in scope, they share an emphasis on understanding a classical film narrative as a system of interweaving oppositions, a system that is threatened and restored, corresponding to the overall movement of plot, narrative, and mise-en-scène. Virtually without exception, the “threat” has something to do with Woman. The classical Hollywood system thus excavated by textual analysis is located at the intersection of structuralism—concerned with the various codes that make exchange possible, a privileged mode of which is the exchange of women; and psychoanalysis—concerned with the various ways in which sexual difference is displaced, denied, or otherwise negotiated.

At the same time, textual analysis in film studies is marked by the transition from semiotic studies of narrative, concerned with the overall modes of coherence and stability in the text, to post-structuralist studies, concerned more with what exceeds or puts into question those very modes of coherence and stability. While this shift has influenced virtually all areas of contemporary theoretical endeavor, the changing status of textual analysis in film studies nonetheless represents a particularly important area of inquiry. For the classical Hollywood film, the preferred object for textual analysis, is the kind of dominant, transparently realist text which would, in a classical structuralist analysis, lend itself quite easily to the discernment of a series of predictable patterns. But
through the lens of poststructuralism, classical film puts into question the very notion of a dominant text, realist or otherwise. The influence of Roland Barthes' detailed analysis of "Sarrasine," a novella by Balzac, in S/Z, cannot be overestimated in this context. Just as the classical narrative cinema would appear, in structuralist terms, to be perfectly "readerly," so it would acquire, in poststructuralist terms, a "writerly" status informed at the very least by a notion of "limited plurality."

When described in the somewhat "classical" structuralist terms of opposition and resolution, one could assume mistakenly that textual analysis is concerned with form and structure in a purely aesthetic or thematic sense. In truth, textual analysis in film studies was linked with psychoanalysis, particularly insofar as theories of the subject were concerned; and to a lesser extent with Marxism, particularly insofar as the Althusserian notions of symptomatic reading and interpellation were concerned. Despite the efforts of many theorists to separate absolutely the "subject" from the "viewer"; that is, the "position" from the "body," some slippage occurs, and as a result one of the legacies of textual analysis is a notion of the film viewer as held, contained, or otherwise manipulated by the mechanisms of a cinematic institution which finds its most succinct expression in the various textual strategies of delay, resolution, and containment which engage the spectator. The psychoanalytic and ideological ramifications here are fairly obvious, in both cases connected to a concept of regulation.

The legacy of psychoanalysis for textual analysis has been ambiguous, due in part to an unfortunate tendency to collapse the unconscious with ideology, to tame the unconscious and transform it into another predictable crisis of male subjectivity. Yet a far more pervasive and important psychoanalytic influence is the assumption that whenever a structure is created or imposed, something is repressed. The process of textual analysis therefore is the attempt to retrace the evolution of structure and its attendant process of repression. The assumption is that the film text functions for the spectator in much the same way that Freud saw works of art, as particularly condensed instances of unconscious processes, de-
I note above the importance of the concept of spectatorship for textual analysis of the classical Hollywood cinema. There has been considerable debate in film studies about whether the “spectator” in spectatorship is the subject of the film, the viewer in the movie theater, or both (see Bergstrom and Doane). I find the notion of spectatorship most productive when textual analysis attends to the spaces between the various “positions” one can deduce by analyzing the narrative patterns of a film, and to the hypothetical responses of viewers, which are never adequately understood as pure “positions.” I want to explore the relationship between textual analysis and spectatorship by focusing on a particular case study, the trope of portraiture and its narrative function in a 1945 film directed by Albert Lewin, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Like many of the films that have been immortalized (at least within film studies) through textual analysis, this film demonstrates a visible and foregrounded preoccupation with spectatorship. To some extent, of course, all films do; the advantage, however, of analyzing a film so visibly preoccupied with spectatorship is obvious, since it is an opportunity to observe how the classical cinema creates a narrative about itself, how it engages in self-reflexive myth-making. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is also interesting in that in order to designate a space for viewing, it must engage with potentially controversial material, the most obvious being the gay persona of Oscar Wilde and the gay implications of the novella upon which the film is based. It is not my purpose here to enter into the question of censorship and the impact of the production code on this film, although it is worth noting that one of the most interesting developments in textual analysis of recent years is the exploration of the interaction between film texts and industry texts. Indeed, critics like Mary Beth Haralovich, Lea Jacobs, and Annette Kuhn have suggested that censorship was a dynamic, complex relationship, and not one of simple negativity.
The director of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Albert Lewin, directed only six films, and all of them demonstrate a peculiar blend of the Hollywood commonplace and the excessive (particularly true of *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* [1951]). In his *A Biographical Dictionary of Film*, David Thomson says of Lewin’s films that “arty aspiration showed like a teenage slip” (347). *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is both exceptional and typical; exceptional in that it has obvious pretensions to artistic sensibility and upper-class mores, and typical in that it reflects a core structure evident across a wide range of classical Hollywood films. The question of typicality is a nagging one for textual analysis, although the question may have more to do with excessive claims for an analysis than with the film under scrutiny. The use of textual analysis to find “a” subject position that typifies “the” classical cinema is both futile and pretentious. Rather, individual films—which are always a blend of the typical and the exceptional—offer, through the lens of textual analysis, a series of hypotheses about the varieties of spectatorship. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* may lean a bit more toward the exceptional than the typical, but the figures of spectatorship drawn in the film find parallels in other films.

It is not my intention to engage in a detailed textual analysis of the film. In any case, textual analysis is less a matter of exhaustiveness than of strategy—the recognition, say, that a detail which might initially appear insignificant provides a perspective from which other seemingly insignificant details suddenly emerge in another kind of coherence, or that within the large oppositions that form the overall structure of the film, there is nonetheless a pressure, a sense of something always at the horizon or on the edge of the opposition. It would of course be ludicrous to assume that what I, in the name of film theory and academic film studies, see in my reading of an individual film is necessarily what any and all spectators will see. Unfortunately, ludicrous or not, some practitioners of textual analysis do seem to assume that the critic uncovers an unconscious of the text, and that the unconscious of the viewer is inscribed in the text. While the notion of a textual unconscious is crucial to the development of film studies, the
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necessarily metaphoric implications of that assumption are frequently lost. For texts may inspire unconscious responses, but they don’t “have” an unconscious—only people do.

In Oscar Wilde’s 1891 novella, a triangle connects three men—Dorian Gray, a handsome aristocratic young man; Basil Hallward, a painter; and Lord Henry Wotton, an idle aristocrat who assumes a tutorial role of sorts in relationship to Dorian. The novella opens as Basil puts the final touches to his portrait of Dorian. In the presence of both Basil and Lord Henry, Dorian makes his fatal wish: “If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that—for that—I would give everything!” (42). Influenced by Lord Henry’s philosophy, Dorian pursues pleasure for its own sake. During an outing to a London slum, he happens across a theater where Shakespeare is being performed. The star of the show is a young actress, Sibyl Vane. She possesses an uncanny gift for performance which is highlighted even more by the incompetence of her colleagues. Dorian immediately falls in love. When he brings his two male friends to observe Sibyl’s talents, however, she is wooden and dull.

Sibyl later explains that since she found love with Dorian, she is no longer capable of performing well. That is, having found “art” in the realm of everyday life, she can no longer produce it. Dorian promptly abandons Sibyl. She commits suicide, after which Dorian begins to degenerate—in several senses of the word. But the changes in Dorian’s life are manifested not in his own body, but in Basil’s portrait of him. Dorian eventually shows Basil the transformed portrait, and then murders him. While attempting to destroy the painting, Dorian himself dies. His body finally records the changes previously visible only in the painting, while the painting is restored to its original state.

Even though Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is superficially about heterosexual love, it is widely recognized as gay in inspiration and in its none-too-subterranean subtext. As Richard Ellmann writes, for instance, “More than any other writer of his time in England, Wilde recognized that homosexuality was the great undercover subject. . . . To express his point of view as directly as he
could, Wilde wrote *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. . . Wilde was attacked for immorality, but he had cagily left Dorian's sin unspeci­fied, while clearly implying involvements with both sexes" (6). It comes as no great surprise that the most significant changes made in the adaptation of Wilde's novella to the screen involve the foregrounding of heterosexual desire as the motor force of the film. True, the relationship between Dorian and Sibyl (with Sibyl now a singer in a music hall) functions in the film as in the novella to render somewhat ambiguous the simultaneous identification and desire between Dorian and the two principal men in his life. But another female character is added to the film, Gladys, the niece of painter Basil Hallward. Lewin's film begins, as does the novella, with the completion of the portrait of Dorian, but with the difference that a female signature is added to the painting—Gladys is portrayed as a small child who puts the letter "G" under her uncle's signature. After Sibyl's suicide (provoked in the film by Dorian's rejection of her, only now as a result of failing to refuse when Dorian invites her to spend the night with him), the passage of time allows Gladys to mature into a young woman whose childish devotion becomes adult love for Dorian, with somewhat incestuous overtones since Dorian is so closely affiliated with Gladys's uncle. In the film, Dorian asks Gladys to marry him in an attempt to reform and to atone for his guilt over Sibyl's suicide. The same desire for salvation motivates his destruction of the painting, and—as in the novella—he dies while the painting is restored to its original state.

While the character of Gladys lends a more obvious heterosexual component to the film, there is a link between her and the Wilde novella. Two minor female characters in the novella—one actually named Gladys—have some connection with the film character; one is a hostess at a gathering attended by Dorian and Lord Henry, and the other is Hetty, a briefly mentioned "village girl" abandoned by Dorian to protect her from inevitable corruption through his influence. Most important, however, is the familial connection established with Basil Hallward, since the character of Gladys is largely created by dividing the character of Basil in two. Thus Gladys, present at the portrait sitting and cosigner of the portrait, becomes
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a figure upon whom is displaced any possible sexual attraction between Basil and Dorian.

The addition of Gladys to the film divides the film into two distinct parts, the first dominated by Dorian's relationship with Sibyl, the second by his relationship with Gladys. As objects of Dorian's affections, the two women are not typed according to the virgin/whore dichotomy, but rather according to a dichotomy of class as well as of performance—Sibyl the performer, Gladys a perpetual onlooker. There is a symmetry as well in the representation of the two women, particularly insofar as their male protectors are concerned—Sibyl's brother James, who dies when he attempts to kill Dorian in revenge for his sister's suicide, and Gladys's sometime suitor David, who discovers the secret of Dorian's painting in an effort to obstruct their marriage by whatever possible means.

In what has become known as typical of the classical cinema, then, The Picture of Dorian Gray is structured by a series of rhyming oppositions, and the restoration of order in the film occurs when the painting is restored to its original status, and Gladys and David are united in a relationship that is free of the somewhat incestuous overtones of a possible relationship between Dorian and Gladys. The most obvious and foregrounded oppositions in the film center on the representation of the portrait. While Dorian's portrait is described in Wilde's novella, it is not a description that is—to use Roland Barthes's term—"operable"; that is, much of the force of the portrait in the novella is a result of its status as a function of discourse. Not only is the portrait shown in Lewin's film, but its display introduces a striking opposition between black and white and color, for the display of the portrait at three crucial moments in the film occasions the use of glorious technicolor. The use of color gives the painting(s) a certain autonomy, and also makes the difference between the early and late versions of the painting all the more striking.

In one of the most influential essays analyzing film narrative, "Narrative Space," Stephen Heath begins with an analysis of a scene in Hitchcock's Suspicion. Two policemen arrive at Lina's
(played by Joan Fontaine) home. A play is established in this scene between two paintings, one the realistic portrait of Lina's father which functions as a constant reminder of his law and authority, the other a somewhat abstract "modernist" painting hanging on the wall in the entry hall to the house, and toward which the puzzled attention of one of the policemen is drawn as he enters and again as he leaves. The scene in question demonstrates the construction of narrative space, as a "perfectly symmetrical patterning [that] builds up and pieces together the space in which the action can take place, the space which is itself part of that action in its economy, its intelligibility, its own legality" (20). The tension between the two paintings, one traditional, one modernist, and the function of the modernist painting as "useless" serve "to demonstrate the rectitude of the portrait, the true painting at the centre of the scene, utterly in frame in the film's action" (23). The implication in Heath's analysis is both that the classical cinema constructs a narrative space controlled by the order represented by the father's portrait, and that always at the edges of this construction are the possibilities, so forcefully demonstrated in the Hitchcock scene, of "missing spectacle: problem of point of view, different framing, disturbance of the law and its inspectoring eye, interruption of the homogeneity of the narrative economy, it is somewhere else again, another scene, another story, another space" (24).

A common assumption about textual analysis, and about Heath's contributions to it, is that whatever ruptures, disturbances, or differences emerge are smoothed over and contained by the homogenizing force of classical film narrative. While this is true of some textual analysis, I do not think it is an accurate assessment of Heath's work. This analysis of the scene in Suspicion may demonstrate how the articulation of space in classical film narrative marginalizes and relegates to "uselessness" figurations that threaten to upset its order. But the analysis suggests just as forcefully the way in which classical narrative engages in a constant process of negotiation, of flirtation with its own margins. To be sure, no film directed by Hitchcock can be taken as representative of classical Hollywood as a whole—despite claims to the contrary by those
who have analyzed the mechanisms of male desire in his films—and the whole painting episode could perhaps be described as a typical "Hitchcock joke," as Heath suggests. But the scene analyzed by Heath finds echoes in other classical Hollywood films. The portrait of Dorian Gray does not occupy the center of The Picture of Dorian Gray in the same way as the father's portrait in Suspicion; in Hitchcock's film, the portrait is a metaphoric condensation of the authority that dominates Lina and the film, whereas in Lewin's film, the portrait is much more literally the focus of the film. Yet I find echoes of the scene analyzed by Heath in The Picture of Dorian Gray, specifically insofar as the articulation of narrative space is concerned.

In the film, a mode of spectatorship is constructed in which there are clear and sharp divisions between innocence and corruption, yet those very divisions are more permeable than they first appear. Spectatorship as it is defined in the film operates on two levels. The first has to do with the portrait itself and the responses to it, with the narcissism of Dorian Gray and the nurturance it finds in Lord Henry, all defined as the excesses which the film must put right—all variations on the common theme of male specular identity, of men as mirrors for other men. The second has to do with how the film constructs a scenography that evokes certain codes and conventions of painting, but in ways more diffuse than merely using literal portraits within the film. Here the objects of such painting-inspired *mise-en-scène* are usually women. Put another way, portraiture in The Picture of Dorian Gray occurs on two levels, only one of which has to do with the actual portrait itself; the implications of framing and *mise-en-scène* united the two different levels. Yet the levels are separated by the difference between men and women.

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* begins with Lord Henry in a carriage on his way to Basil's. While Lord Henry reads, a male narrator speaks in voice-over: "Lord Henry Wotton had set himself early in life to the serious and great aristocratic art of doing absolutely nothing. He lived only for pleasure, but his greatest pleasure was to observe the emotions of his friends while experiencing none of his
own. He diverted himself by exercising a subtle influence on the lives of others." The form of spectatorship sketched out here is situated immediately within the realm of an aristocratic aesthete's ideal pleasures. Once he has arrived at Basil's studio, to which he has come out of curiosity about the secrecy of Basil's current painting project, the three men who form the core of Wilde's novella are introduced. Each man performs the activity that will define his spectatorial role throughout the film: Basil creates, Dorian poses and eventually contemplates his own image, and Lord Henry chases and captures a butterfly—presumably yet another metaphoric activity for observing the emotions of others and influencing (not so subtly in this case) their lives. An equivalence is established between these activities as well, since Lord Henry pursues his butterfly at the same time that Basil puts the finishing touches on his portrait and Dorian poses. A dissolve from the live creature, to the dead mounted butterfly, to the portrait makes a clear connection between killing a creature and immortalizing it through art.

While Lord Henry does function in the film, as in the novella, to present a philosophy of pleasure to Dorian, he functions far more obviously in the film as a spectator, to the extent that the portrait is initially as shrouded in secrecy to the viewer as it is to Lord Henry. Rarely if ever do such spectators within the film function unequivocally in the "positions" of address that spectators are assumed to adopt (see Browne). But that a voice-over narrator, never associated with any single character in the film, introduces and contextualizes Lord Henry makes it even more difficult to identify Lord Henry as an authoritative presence in any simple sense. Rather, the central terms of spectatorship in the film are defined by the two polarities which Dorian and Lord Henry represent: for Dorian, mesmerized absorption in his own image; for Lord Henry, somewhat distanced detachment. Basil's role as an artist combines both forms of spectatorship without succumbing to either extreme—he is absorbed and obsessed by his painting, but with the image of another.

While the display of the painting occurs early in the film, in Basil's studio, its appearance is accompanied by enough delay and
foregrounding to make the painting the central enigmatic object of the film. Our first sight of the painting coincides with Dorian’s first look at the finished product. The portrait is thoroughly realist, an example of classical portraiture. The portrait also is a straightforward representation of what has been seen of Dorian, with two important exceptions—the painting is presented in technicolour, and whereas Dorian has posed for the final moments of his sitting before a painting depicting a group of women bathers, the background to his portrait is blank (figs. 1, 2). The other objects surrounding him—a high-backed chair, a statue of a cat, and a clock—remain in the painting, so that the only erasure is that of the painting. The finished portrait is, of course, entirely in keeping with conventional portraiture, but what remains a matter of some curiosity is the placement of the painting of the women bathers in the first place. This painting is not insignificant in the initial mise-en-scène of the studio, since it creates a rhyming structure, against which the still unseen portrait of Dorian is measured.

The next view afforded of the painting occurs within the context of Dorian and Sibyl’s relationship. Knowing that Dorian intends to marry Sibyl, Lord Henry has suggested that Dorian test her by

![Figure 1](image-url)
asking her to spend the night. If she refuses, then she is truly the superior creature that Dorian believes her to be; if not, then Dorian will know not to marry her. But when Dorian asks her to spend the night, she agrees, and Dorian promptly rejects her. The rejection leads to her suicide, after which the portrait of Dorian is shown (again in technicolor) with a subtle change: the appearance of what the narrator, in voice-over, describes as a “cruel look about the mouth” (fig. 3).

The painting is not seen again until it has been completely transformed, with Dorian portrayed as a grotesque old man whose image records the kind of life he leads. The style of the painting has also changed. It is now in an expressionist mode, with excessive strokes, bold colors, and a myriad of indistinguishable objects within the frame (fig. 4). The revelation occurs after Basil has seen the changes that have occurred in his painting, and Dorian murders him. Whereas Sibyl's death caused the “cruel look about the mouth” in the earlier painting, Dorian's murder of Basil causes blood to form on the hands of the deformed and deranged Dorian represented in the later version. Curiously, there is a change as well in the sexual quality of the transformed painting. While the
evocation of aristocratic wealth in the film allows gay sexuality to be summoned and repressed simultaneously in the name of effete taste and effeminate behavior presumed to be characteristic of the wealthy, there is nonetheless a delicate androgyny in the figure of Dorian represented in the first version of the painting. If the women bathers have disappeared in the portrait, it would be just as easy to see them as having been absorbed into it. But in the final painting, Dorian has become a parody of deranged masculinity.

The most striking changes in the painting, then, are the transformation of a young, somewhat androgynous gentleman into a decrepit old man, and the shift in style from realism to expressionism. The painting changes location, as well. The first part of The Picture of Dorian Gray, concerned with the relationship between Dorian and Sibyl, and with the painting as an accurate projection of what we see, contrasts two radically different spaces, the aristocratic home (whether Dorian's or Basil's) and the music hall where Sibyl Vane performs, and where Dorian is treated in awe as a gentleman. The second part of the film, taken up with Dorian's relationship with the grown-up Gladys, contrasts two spaces within the house. When Dorian first notices, the "cruel look about the mouth" in the painting, he decides to hide it away in a room at the
The narrator describes Dorian's decision: "It would be mayhem to allow the thing to remain, even for an hour. Even in a room to which only his friends had access. Henceforth he must always be on his guard. Against everyone. At the top of the house was his old schoolroom, which had not been used for years. No one ever entered it..." The painting thus acquires an aura of secrecy that rhymes with the opening of the film, but transforms secrecy into a threat.

Whereas Dorian negotiated comfortably the spatial opposition between two radically different class environments characteristic of the first part of the film, the tension generated between the two areas of the house initiates conflict heretofore absent, with the added component of temporal opposition as well—the schoolroom is virtually the only reference in the film to Dorian's childhood. While the room is not often shown, it acquires narrative importance. The narrator says, for instance, that "He could not endure to be long out of England or to be separated from the picture. It was such a part of his life." The self-absorption present in the first part of the film is here quite literal. The risk of homosexual implications is managed by drawing an imaginary line across the threshold to
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the room, a line crossed only by men and never by women, thus identifying bonds between men with the past of childhood.

If the problem generated by the play of the two paintings in Suspicion concerns the authority of the father under siege, in this film there is no such equivalence between the classical, realist portraiture of the painting and an authoritative order. Rather, the two versions of the painting are both threats to an implied order, an order which can only be set right by the realignment of reality and representation, and the emergence of that legendary resolution principle for which the classical Hollywood cinema is so famous and so derided—the happy heterosexual couple. For once the death of Dorian brackets the incestuous overtones of his relationship with Gladys, and once the restoration of the portrait to its original state and Dorian’s accompanying death erase implicit homosexuality, the male-female couple, Gladys and her patient suitor David, can be united.

What remain a matter of some curiosity in this relationship among male/female, homosexual/heterosexual, and incestuous/nonincestuous pairs, however, are the different ways painting is evoked in the film to articulate narrative space. For while the portrait of Dorian and its changing status is the obvious center of the film, other devices of mise-en-scène partake of the conventions of painting. Particularly striking in this context is an opposition established early in the film between the portraiture of men and the framing of women. Basil’s studio is defined as belonging to a community of men, with women framed in a literal and ostensible way. Before Dorian’s arrival at the studio at the beginning of the film, Basil and Lord Henry are seated in the garden. In the background we see a woman sewing, framed in a doorway (fig. 5). The pose and the framing are familiar representations of women in Western oil painting, with the woman depicted as if she is observed, unawares, while engaged in a solitary activity, and of which Jean-Honoré Fragonard’s “A Young Girl Reading” (1776) is one representative example. Men are defined in terms of how they “look,” in both senses of the word, while women are defined in terms of how they look in only one sense of the word. That the only
living, breathing female in this scene is the child Gladys emphasizes the rigid sexual hierarchy at work. And Gladys herself enters the scene of the studio through a doorway, while the construction of the shot echoes the scene outdoors.

So far, this sounds like the standard "man looks, woman is looked at" argument—for instance, that painting establishes only an apparent equivalence between the male and female object of the look, one betrayed by the status of woman as only the object of the look (see Mulvey). The matter of curiosity to which I have referred, however, is that the mostly anonymous women who are framed in the film are done so in relationship to the position of the spectator, not in relationship to the three male figures whose spectatorial activities function so centrally. The composition of the woman in the doorway engaged in a solitary activity is repeated when the three men go to the "Two Turtles" to see Sybil Vane perform. We see Sibyl before them, singing in front of a trompe-l'oeil storefront. Behind the three men, at the opposite end of the theatre, is an office, where a woman is seen through the open door at work at a desk (fig. 6). At one point during the performance, we see the stage at such an angle that images of women, framed identically, are seen
on three levels: Sibyl on stage, her mother backstage sewing, and a 
woman dressing before a mirror (fig. 7). Although these women so 
obsessively framed within doorways or stages are stereotypical 
objects of the presumably male gaze, there is a curious contradic­
tion. For the male “spectators”—Dorian, Basil, Lord Henry—seem 
to be less interested in the spectacle before their eyes, and more 
interested in each other. And while each of the women is, on her 
own terms, given a fairly straightforward “frame” of representa­
tion, the juxtaposition of the three levels creates an odd, asymmet­
rical effect. Between the first image of the woman framed in the 
doorway and the image of the three women, there is a relationship 
not unlike that between the original and transformed portrait of 
Dorian, between a conventional composition and a much more 
excessive one.

It is also curious that while this element of framing has been 
written about extensively in relationship to gender in film, in this 
case social class is as much of a determination as gender; at the very 
least, the device of framing results from the intersection of class 
and gender determinations. For the woman framed in the doorway 
at the beginning of the film is a servant, and the women seen at the
Two Turtles are defined not just by their sexual status but by their class status as well. While it is much more common for women to be represented as “framed,” there are some instances where men—either working-class men at the music hall, or servants—are framed in ways similar to that of the woman sewing. At several moments in the film, servants are portrayed standing stiffly at attention while the wealthy people they serve eat or converse, and the effect is quite similar to that of the woman-in-the-doorway motif.

I am suggesting, then, that the trope of portraiture is a figure of spectatorship to the extent that, in each case, a mode of observation—from narcissistic self-absorption to detached mockery—is foregrounded. There is no single position authorized by each individual instance of portraiture, from Dorian’s portrait to the framing of women and servants; rather, spectatorship takes shape as the possible relationships among these different views and their corresponding sites of observation. What seems to me most crucial about this particular example is that it puts into question the automatic equivalence some have assumed between spectatorship in the classical cinema and men possessing women. Not that men
don't possess women in this film, but here "possession" is a complex process involving the negotiation and denial of male homoerotic bonds. In addition, the intersection between gender and class in the film does not reduce in any obvious way to a "pure" example of sexual difference, since the notion of property is so excessively defined in class terms as well as gendered ones.

As an instance of that ubiquitous entity, the classical Hollywood cinema, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is both typical and atypical, as undoubtedly is any Hollywood film. Like many literary adaptations of the 1940s, there is a self-aggrandizing quality about the film, and the numerous references to high art and aristocratic privilege serve simultaneously as windows to a fantasyland and as a self-promoting strategy. Yet unlike other films of the 1940s which deploy opposing definitions of "realist" versus "modern" art in order to elevate the status of the former at the expense of the latter (Waldman), Lewin's film does not condemn any particular version of the aesthetic as inherently corrupt; rather, any and all forms of representation are susceptible to excess. Within the specularity of portraiture in the film is the suggestion that spectatorship involves the simultaneous erection and dissolution of boundaries. Does this therefore mean that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is "subversive," the exception to the rule of classical cinema? I think not. That a film like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* sits so comfortably within the classical cinema, while engaging with an undeniable homoerotic component of spectatorship (at least as far as men are concerned), suggests that textual analysis will perhaps always uncover forms of spectatorship that both conform to and exceed what is assumed to be typical.

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