

Portrait – In the Middle of Reality and Illusion: Analysis on The Picture of Dorian Gray and “The Oval Portrait”

Chiaki Kojima*

Abstract: *A portrait is resemblance of man and a form of painting, which retains the appearance of mortal human semi-eternally. The mysterious aspect of the portrait is used as a motif of stories by fantastic and mystery storywriters.*

In Oscar Wilde’s The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891), beautifully completed picture mars the protagonist’s pure mind. Instead of he growing old and his vices show up in his face, they appear in his portrait. The ugliness of the picture which represents the degradation of the protagonist’s mentality, causes some kind of terror to the readers beyond the category of beauty as an art form.

A half-century before, Edgar Allan Poe wrote a short story called “The Oval Portrait” (1842). A beautiful portrait of a maiden is drawn by her painter husband in lonesome castle. The progress of painting is life-taking processes; as the portrait approaches its completion, she grows weak, and when it is done, her life ends as if it is absorbed by the painting.

The two stories of Wilde and Poe have the common element: the portraits are accomplished in a beautiful state but they destroy the life or the spirit of the model. Here, we see the two aspects of the portrait; a beautiful object as a genre of pictorial art and a mysterious object which semi-eternally retains the figure of the mortal model.

Focusing on the two stories, the first section of the essay considers their subject, a portrait, and analyse the origin and fantasy of it. In the second section, the relation between the human portrait and life is analysed. Because of its characteristics, coping and retaining human’s figure, a portrait is also considered as an object reflects the mind of the model. In the third section, a portrait is compared to the image of mirror and examined as a reflection of self. Finally, in the section four, the illusion of a portrait which interacts with the idea of gothic literature is discussed.

* Mitsuko Ohno is Professor of English Literature at Aichi Shukutoku University in Japan.

Heart-smitten with emotion I sink down,
My heart recovering with covered eyes;
Wherever I had looked I had looked upon
My permanent or impermanent images:
W. B. Yeats, "The Municipal Gallery Revisited"

Prologue

A portrait is resemblance of man in a form of painting. It is likeness; however, it is not mere depiction of human face. Portrait, in some way, has been considered as an object sharing life with the subject as it retains the appearance of mortal human semi-eternally. The mysterious aspect of the portrait is used as a motif of stories by fantastic and mystery storywriters.

The Picture of Dorian Gray (1891) by Oscar Wilde is one of the most important works which represents his aesthetical outlook. It might also be the most famous work of Gothic literature whose motif is a portrait. The picture of Dorian is so beautifully completed that it mars his pure mind. Instead of he growing old, his picture puts on years and in place of his vices show up in his face, they appear in his portrait. The way of the picture becoming ugly represents the degradation of the protagonist's mentality. He even commits murder and his abominable act is clearly expressed in his picture. It causes some kind of terror to the readers beyond the category of beauty as an art form.

A half century before *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was written, Edgar Allan Poe wrote a short story called "The Oval Portrait" (1842). The story is situated in the period when his major works appeared; "William Wilson" (1839), "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1839), "The Murder in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Black Cat" (1843), and "The Golden Bug" (1843). Among these short stories, "The Oval Portrait" is one of the shortest and yet is important in order to analyse the motif of portrait and human's life, and its relation to gothic literature. "I", who visited lonesome castle, found a beautiful portrait of a young woman and was amazed by its "life-likeness of expression". He read about the story of the portrait. It is a portrait of a maiden drawn by her husband, the painter, in this castle. As the portrait approaches its completion, she grows weak, and when it is done, her life ends as if it is absorbed by the painting.

These two stories have the common element: the portraits are accomplished in a beautiful state but they destroy the life or the spirit of the model. Here, we see the two aspects of the portrait; a beautiful object as a genre of pictorial art and a mysterious object which semi-eternally retains the figure of the mortal human model.

Focusing on *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and "The Oval Portrait", the first section of this essay will consider their subject, a portrait, and analyse the origin and fantasy of it. In the second section, the relation between the human portrait and life would be analysed. Because of its characteristics, coping and retaining human's figure, a portrait is also considered as an object reflects not only the appearance but also the mind of the model. In

the third section, a portrait would be compared to the image of mirror and examined as a reflection of self. Finally, in section four, the illusion of a portrait which interacts with the idea of gothic literature would be discussed: in the middle of reality and illusion.

1. The Origin and the Fantasy of Portrait

What is a “portrait”? What kind of genre of paintings or art is it? The Oxford English Dictionary defines the word “portrait” as follows:

Portrait (n.)

1. A figure drawn, painted, or carved upon a surface to represent some object.
 - a. A drawing, painting, or other delineation of any object; a picture, design (in general) Now rare or Obs;
 - b. spec. (now almost always) A representation or delineation of a person, esp. of the face, made from life by drawing, painting, photography, engraving, etc.; a likeness;
2. abstr. The action or art of making a portrait; portraiture.
3. fig.
 - a. Something that represents, typifies, or resembles something else, an image, representation type; likeness, similitude. (In quot. 1623 absol. A striking or impressive sight, a scene.);
 - b. A verbal picture or representation; a graphic or vivid description;
 - c. Typofr. A formal in which the height of an illustration or page is greater than the width, cf, Upright a, 5c. Often used as quasi-adj, or quasi-adv.

OED indicates the first meaning of the word, portrait, as something drawn on an object. It is the oldest original usage of the word, but the usage of 1-b, considered as a general meaning of a portrait nowadays, is also the usage from ancient times as well.

In the ancient Greece, Rome and the initial Christian world, specific individual images have already expressed on a statue, bust, herms, coin, sarcophagus, wall painting, etc. One of the typical examples is *Demosthenes*,¹ a sculptor. This sculpture, made by Poryueclitos, is regarded as a pioneering work of realistic portrayal sculpture. Another early example is a wall painting in Pompeii, *Baker's Couple*.² It is considered to be influenced by Egyptian portraits and Roman portraits of emperors and royalty. And yet, it is a very important portrait example of the one describing ordinary people.

In ancient Egypt, the likeness of royal family were depicted in their coffin when they passed away. During the period of ancient Greece and Rome, the likeness of ordinary people were sometimes drawn and buried in their grave. The idea of making the likeness shows that the concept of leaving a figure of deceased, as he/she was alive, has already recognised as important issue.

Nevertheless, the number of individual portraits became small during the medieval time. Instead of the likeness of ordinary people, the images of Christ and the Saints became the majority in paintings. These images were portrait-like likeness, though they were religious pictures. In the fourteenth century, portraits of individuals such as contributors to church or monarchs were again started to be drawn or woven in tapestries.

Likenesses of individuals were largely produced during the Renaissance. For the first time, they appeared as “contributor” for church or religious paintings like ones in the fourteenth century. One of the renowned examples is Jan van Eyck’s *The Virgin with Chancellor Rolin*.³ Conventionally, contributors were depicted very small in the painting of Christ or Virgin Mary and it merely indicates that he/she is the donator of the picture. *The Virgin with Chancellor Rolin*, however, is different from the previous religious paintings with the figure of the donator; the contributor, Chancellor Rolin, is portrayed as being the same size as the Virgin Mary and the infant Christ. The size of him shows that not only is such a way of portraying the contributor allowed but also that the individual is becoming more valuable in society.

During the period of Renaissance, the concept of modern meaning of “portrait” was established. As John Pope-Hennessy’s studies, *The Portrait in the Renaissance*, shows, painters such as Raphael, Titian, Botticelli, and Domenico Ghirlandaio produced a large number of portraits of individuals in Italy. Albrecht Durer and Hans Holbein the Younger did the same thing in the northern Germany.

The traditional genre of paintings is divided into five categories. The position of a portrait in paintings is the second, following to the history, mythology religion paintings:

1. Historical, mythological and religious painting
2. Portrait
3. Genre painting
4. Landscape
5. Still life

This order shows the hierarchy of the genre of painting. It is considered that the category of historical, mythological and religious paintings are the highest and the still life is the lowest.⁴ It represents the idea of classical hierarchy which regards that the gods are the top followed by human, animal, and plant.

Among these five divisions of painting’s genre, a portrait would strongly relate to the subject of Gothic literature as it marks the emergence of a particular person and it retains the figure of him/her semi-eternally. Alberti, one of the omnipotent men of the Renaissance, explains the character of the painting described human in his *On Painting*:

Painting possesses a truly divine power in that not only does it make the absent present (as they say of friendship), but it also represents the dead to the living many centuries later, so that they are recognized by spectators with pleasure and deep admiration for the artist. Plutarch tells us that Cassandrus, one of the

Alexander's commanders, trembled all over at the sight of a portrait of the deceased Alexander, in which he recognized the majesty of his king. He also tells us how Agesilaus the Lacedaemonian, realizing that he was very ugly, refused to allow his likeness to be known to posterity, and so would not be painted or modelled by anyone. Though painting, the faces of the dead go on living for a very long time. We should also consider it a very great gift to men that painting has represented the gods they worship, for painting has contributed considerably to the piety which bind us to the gods, and to filling our minds with sound religious beliefs. (Alberti 1991, 60)

A painting, Alberti says, could be regarded as a portrait. As it was written in 1435, the prime time of the Renaissance and the revival period of human power, the important subject of the painting became the human figure. Alberti also indicates that keeping the figure of mortal human semi-eternally takes one step toward the God-like immortality.

II. Portrait and Life

After the concept of a portrait was established, portraits have considered having some relation with the life of the model. During the early period when the idea of the portrait of the individual appeared, the picture originally imitated the life-like figure of the deceased. Thus, there must have been the idea that a portrait reflects the life of the deceased.

When the portrait was introduced as a motif of Gothic literature, the inclination toward the reflection of life was enforced, and it became more than mere likeness of a person. A portrait should be the model's double. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the portrait of the protagonist completed by Basil Hallward represents the model himself more than the original. His picture also starts to grow old on behalf of the model. Dorian starts to be convinced that he would be able to enjoy his life instead of his picture getting old.

And when winter came upon it [picture], he would still be standing where spring trembles on the verge of summer. When the blood crept from its face, and left behind a pallid mask of chalk with leaden eyes, he would keep the glamour of boyhood. Not one blossom of his loveliness would ever fade. Not one pulse of his life would ever weaken. Like the gods of the Greeks, he would be strong, and fleet, and joyous. What did it matter what happened to the coloured image on the canvas? He would be safe. That was everything. (106)

The description above counterworks Alberti's *On Painting*. Alberti explains the relationship between the mortal human and the portrait which retains the appearance of the model semi-eternally. Contrary, In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the portrait grows old and the human model, Dorian stays young and attractive.

In Poe's "The Oval Portrait", the picture is vivid and is described as "an absolute *life-likeness* of expression"(291). The relation between the model and the picture is opposite to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. As the painter depicts his wife on the canvas, she is debilitated.

And he was a passionate, and wild, and moody man, who became lost in reveries; so that he *would* not see that the light which fell so ghastly in that lone turret withered the health and the spirits of his bride, who pined visibly to all but him. (291-2)

The painter steep himself in drawing so much that he does not realise that his wife obviously weakens. The fact could almost be a metaphor; the art embodied by the artist surpasses the mortality of human.

Though a portrait is a mere object, consisting of a canvas and paint, it connects to the model's life or true nature and is regarded as indistinguishable from the spirit of the model. The inseparability or even the sameness between the portrait and the model in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is indicated with subtle description in the text. Lord Henry and Basil Hallward exchange the conversation as follows:

'You really must not say things like that before Dorian, Harry.'

'Before which Dorian? The one who is pouring out tea for us, or the one in the picture?'

'Before either.' (29)

Here, both Basil Hallward and Lord Henry treat the portrait of Dorian and him on the same level. The conversation indicates that not only Dorian has a pure mind but also the picture of him and it is possibly effected by malicious thought. When Basil Hallward listens to the words of Dorian saying that he would go to the theatre with Lord Henry, he sadly states, 'I shall stay with the real Dorian.' (29), which suggest that the portrait of Dorian expresses the true nature of him.

A similar description is seen in Poe's "The Oval Portrait". The colour of the cheeks of his wife is directly transmitted to the canvas.

And he *would* not see that the tints which he spread upon the canvas were drawn from the cheeks of her who sat beside him. (292)

As the wife on canvas is becoming animated, the model is getting debilitated. The story inside of "The Oval Portrait" suggests that the likeness on canvas and the model is one and they hold the life in common. Therefore, when the canvas nears completion, it takes the life of the model and the length of her life gets shorter. When blush to one upon the mouth was given and one tint upon the eye was placed, the painter screamed, "This is

indeed Life itself!" But at the same time, his wife is dead. The portrait that takes away her life remains in the castle as the picture retains the life of the deceased.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the life is owned jointly between the portrait on canvas and the model. Since Dorian is annoyed and suffering from the existence of his portrait which reflects the ugliness of his soul, he decides to "destroy" it.

He looked round, and saw the knife that had stabbed Basil Hallward. He had cleaned it many times, till there was no stain left upon it. It was bright, and glistened. As it had killed the painter, so it would kill the painter's work, and all that that meant. It would kill the past, and when that was dead he would be free. It would kill this monstrous soul-life, and, without its hideous warnings, he would be at peace. He seized the thing, and stabbed the picture with it. (223)

Here, Dorian tries to stab his portrait with the same knife that he killed Basil Hallward. Since Basil functions as Dorian's conscience, the portrait of Dorian drawn by him also reminds the conscience and tortures him. Thus, Dorian feels that he has to destroy it and "kills" the picture. Killing the picture is not the expression of personification. The story presupposes that the portrait has a life same as human and Dorian believes it.

However, since the picture of Dorian is the mirror of him and owns the life jointly, stabbing it means the death of himself.

When they [Francis, the coachman and one of the footmen] entered, they found hanging upon the wall a splendid portrait of their master as they had last seen him, in all the wonder of his exquisite youth and beauty. Lying on the floor was a dead man, in evening dress, with a knife in his heart. He was withered, wrinkled, and loathsome of visage. It was not till they had examined the rings that they recognized who it was. (224)

When Dorian thrusts his painting, a scream and a sound of something collapsing is heard in the house. The knife plunged into the chest of him and Dorian kills himself in the end. This happens because the life has been shared between him and his portrait, and the latter was rather "true" Dorian. When the true Dorian subsided, the picture of him returns to the original portrait as a painting which retains semi-eternal beauty.

In both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and "The Oval Portrait", a portrait not only reflects the exact figure of the model, but also represents the true personality or the life of the model. Therefore, the portrait can threaten the original and can take the life of the model.

In the next section, I would like to examine the image of the mirror, which is used as a symbol that the model and the painting are completely identical. I also would like to consider the subject of Doppelgänger threatening the protagonists.

III. Portrait and Mirror: Doppelgänger

A portrait is presumed to be a likeness of the model but not completely the same. Richard Brilliant points out in his *Portraiture* that “Even the notion of likeness assumes some degree of difference between the portrait image and the person, otherwise they would be identical and no question of likeness would arise.” (Brilliant 1991, 25) As Brilliant mentions, an actual portrait cannot be an absolute sameness like the reflection of a mirror. However, when a portrait appears in Gothic literature it should be identical with its complete likeness to the model. Therefore, it has the double image with a mirror.

A mirror has occupied an important role of optics studied by Kepler, Descartes, and Newton during the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, a mirror was given a new character and substantiality in the imagination of Gothic literature. It does not merely reflect the appearance of a person as an inorganic substance but it returns the image of someone’s mind. The background of the mirror starts to have magical power and the mirror itself leads to the image of Doppelgänger.

The image of a mirror as a reflection of self or the alter ego became popular in the nineteenth century. *Spiegelmensch [Mirror Man]* (1820) by Franz Wefel is a story about a man who establishes the relation like the one of Dr. Faust and Mephistopheles with his double from a mirror. *Dvojníc [The Double]* (1846) by Dostoevskii is another story about a double. The protagonist, who is a lower class officer, wishes to have a double and then it becomes true. His double has every ability he does not have, ingratiates himself with his boss, and begins to jeopardize his life. The protagonist, in the end, is sent to a mental asylum. Poe’s “William Wilson” (1839) has a similar motif, though the one who could remain in this world is the protagonist in the end. In the early twentieth century, Jack London wrote *The Shadow and the Flesh* (1906) which is the story of two identical men, Paul and Lloyd who constantly compete with each other and invent a medicine that wipes the appearance off by the opposite concept. The motif, which the identical double like a mirror appears and menaces with the original, could be a good subject to represent alter ego.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian is told that he is just like his portrait.⁵ The beauty initially described in the portrait of Dorian suggests “ego ideal”. In his *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity*, Johan Fornäs explicates that the narcissism in relation to ego ideal is indispensable process of forming self:

The narcissistic desire is necessary for the constitution of the I, but has to be reduced if one is not to get stuck in a vicious circle, like Narcissus was. The means to break the circle is the development of the ego ideal, which may form the positive parts of the superego, complemented by the negative, prohibitory ones. Instead of desiring what one is (or has been), one should search for the which one wants to be. (Fornäs 1995, 261)

The picture of Dorian first mirrors ego ideal but his egoistic narcissism could not retain his figure as such. The regression of the portrait is inversely proportional to the original

figure of ego ideal. Dorian thinks, "This portrait would be to him the most magical mirrors. As it had revealed to him his own body, so it would reveal to him his own soul." (106). The portrait of Dorian starts to become the ironical mirror, reflecting inside and to disclose darkness of him.

Rosemary Jackson describes the inseparability of Dorian and his mirror image, his portrait, as follows:

The painted portrait in Wilde's *Picture of Dorian Gray* functions similarly, as an iconographical establishment of difference, illustrating self as other, and suggesting the inseparability of these devices and mirror images from fantastic themes of duplicity and multiplicity of selves. (Jackson 1988, 45)

Shortly after Dorian wished his picture grew old instead of him, it begins to show his internal change or suppressed darkness of his mind. It initially expresses in the mouth his cruel reaction against Sybil Vane who could not act well for her love of him. (90) Dorian fiercely accused her of her a poor performance, tells her he does not love her anymore, and then leaves her. Like Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Dorian is aware of the relationship between him and his portrait. When he sees the change of the expression of his picture, he feels guilty. Nevertheless, as he is told about the news of her suicide from Lord Henry, and talks to him, he believes the death of Sybil is mere play.

Influenced by the ironic and vagabond life of Lord Henry, Dorian starts to live frivolous lifestyle. Such a shift in the protagonist is mirrored in his portrait. The ugliness of his mind, which does not appear on his face, turns up invisible. The dramatic transfiguration of the picture makes the painter astonished.

An exclamation of horror broke from the painter's lips as he saw in the dim light the hideous face on the canvas grinning at him. There was something in its expression that filled him with disgust and loathing. Good heavens! It was Dorian Gray's own face that he was looking at! The horror, whatever it was, had not yet entirely spoiled that marvelous beauty. There was still some gold in the thinning hair and some scarlet on the sensual mouth. The sudden eyes had kept something of the loveliness of their blue, the noble curves had not yet completely passed away from chiselled nostrils and from plastic throat. Yes, it was Dorian himself. But who had done it? (155-6)

The absolute beauty of the portrait when the painter completed it is damaged. The grotesque feature of Dorian in the picture is the mirror of his mind. It even threatens him since Dorian is afraid that someone will find it and his secret will be disclosed.

The protagonist begins to erase the person and thing which appeals to his conscience and disturbs his mind. First, he murders the painter of the picture, Basil Hallward. After he kills the painter, the picture of Dorian becomes more indecent and a "loathsome red dew that gleamed, wet and glistening" (174) appears on his hand. Its

grotesque figure makes him back with a shudder. Finally, Dorian believes that he can start a new life if he destroys his portrait. The picture, “mirror of his soul” (222), reaches to incorrigible status with its ignominious looks. It was disfigured with his sin that cannot be changed by his self-satisfactory hypocrisy that he did for Hetty Merton.

He went in quietly, locking the door behind him, as was his custom, and dragged the purple hanging from the portrait. A cry of pain and indignation broke from him. He could see no change, save that in the eyes there was a look of cunning, and in the mouth the curved wrinkle of the hypocrite. The thing was still loathsome – more loathsome, if possible, than before – and the scarlet dew that spotted the hand seemed brighter, and more like blood newly spilt. (221)

This bloodcurdling portrait is the doppelganger embodying Dorian’s mind and behavior. Since his picture is not merely the likeness of his looks but mirrors and visualizes his spirit, Dorian is frightened at it and decides to pierce it.

A mirror in Gothic literature always reflects the truth that is not visible to human eyes. The stepmother of Snow-white is told the truth by a mirror. In Stoker’s *Dracula*, a mirror does not reflect the Count Dracula’s appearance and indicates his abnormality. Like a mirror, a “portrait” in Gothic literature is not only a likeness as an object of art, but also a reflection of true nature or alter ego of a man. The portrait in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* works as a mirror which represents the inside of the protagonist that cannot be seen on his face.

IV. In-between Reality and Illusion

The illusion of portrait should be derived in Gothic atmosphere which bewilder us whether the event occurs in the story should be recognised as fantasy. Both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and “The Oval Portrait” set up the typical background of Gothic literature. The room where the portrait is placed in or drawn is a lonesome, gloomy area of the house or castle. The portrait of Dorian was in his room when it is given to him. But since he realised that it begins to show the terrible deterioration of his mind, he is afraid that it will be seen by someone and hides it in the old dark schoolroom. In “The Oval Portrait”, the story unfolded in an old castle, one of the conventional Gothic backgrounds. There is a description of the castle in the beginning of the story: “The chateau [...] was one of those piles of commingled gloom and grandeur which have so long frowned among the Apennines”, (290) and the room where it is painted is described as a “dark high turret-chamber where the light dripped upon the pale canvas only from overhead.” (291).

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the birth environment of the protagonist is hideous and fearful:

So that was the story of Dorian Gray's parentage. Crudely as it had been told to him, it had yet stirred him by its suggestion of a strange, almost modern romance. A beautiful woman risking everything for a mad person. A few wild weeks of happiness cut short by a hideous, treacherous crime. Month of voiceless agony, and then a child born in pain. The mother snatched away by death, the boy left to solitude and the tyranny of an old and loveless man. (35)

The birth of Dorian is associated with tragedy and the smell of blood. His father is killed in a duel which the grandfather of Dorian planned, and his mother died within a year of his death. This background of the protagonist is an indispensable setting for Gothic literature in order to make the reader expect that something terrible will happen.

With this Gothic entourage, a portrait develops its illusion. Portrait is not a merely beautiful object in Gothic literature, it has special powers over man. What Tzvetan Todorov explains about one of the important characteristics of fantastic literature – the fusion of boundary between matter and mind – is suggestive in order to consider the effect of the motif of portrait;

This law [that the bonds of matter and mind were loosened], which we find at the source of all the distortions contributed by the fantastic within our system of themes, has some immediate consequences. Thus, we can here generalize the phenomenon of metamorphoses and say that a character will readily be multiplied. We all experience ourselves *as if* we were several persons – here the impression will be incarnated on the level of *physical* reality. (Todorov 1973, 116)

A portrait itself includes the aspect which marks off the border between matter and mind in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and “The Oval Portrait”. The matter, portrait, expresses the mind or life of the model. “Multiplied” self can be applied to the relation between a portrait and the subject; a portrait in gothic literature is literally the duplication of the model.

Originally, a portrait is different from the other genres of painting because of its strong relation to the human.⁶ Moreover, it is considered as an object which not only shows the appearance of a particular person, but also reflects his/her mentality. The fantasy of this motif resides in such ambiguity: in between reality and illusion. Therefore, it even surpasses the category of the beautiful which Wilde assumes.

Wilde's “The Decay of Lying” mentions the definition of beauty as follows:

The only beautiful things, as somebody once said, are the things that do not concern us. As long as a thing is useful or necessary to us, or affects us in any way, either for pain or for pleasure, or appeals strongly to our sympathies, or is a vital part of the environment in which we live, it is outside the proper sphere of art. The art's subject-matter we should be more or less indifferent. (Wilde 1996, 56-7)

“Somebody” here, means the analysis of beautiful by Kant, Book? “Analytic of the Beautiful §2 The Liking That Determines a Judgement of Taste Is Devoid of Interest” in his Critique of Judgement. Generally, the judgement of beauty is not related to the idea of true or false, good or evil, or gain and loss. Nevertheless, a portrait is in an ambiguous status since it strongly relates to the real model. Because it reflects a man, the portrait would be able to threaten him/her, like a human being.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the painting of the protagonist grows old instead of him, and his vice appears in the painting instead of his face. The protagonist is horrified by the grotesque reflection of him in his portrait. In “The Oval Portrait”, as the painting progresses, the model grows weak and dies when it is accomplished. The portrait gives “pain”, “danger”, and “terror” to the model. In addition, such characteristics of the portrait are peculiarities found in the Gothic literature: “strong elements of the supernatural” (Cuddon 1982, 382). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it would be the wicked behaviour of Dorian and its expression appears in the picture. In “The Oval Portrait”, it would be the painter concentrating to paint so much that he does not care about his dying wife. The element of beautiful uncanny illusion of the portrait gives the noticeable flavour of gothic literature.

The illusion of Gothic art is referred in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*:

There are few of us who have not sometimes weakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamoured of death, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality, this art being, one might fancy, especially the art of those whose mind have been troubled with the malady of reverie. (131)

The description shows the author’s view toward Gothic art which links the sense of “enamoured of death” and the “horror and misshapen joy”. The most peculiar characteristic of Gothic art takes up its position in between the pleasure of beauty and the terror resides in illusion. This contradictory element of gothic art is a core of illusion created by portraits in *Dorian Gray* and “The Oval Portrait”.

Epilogue

The origin of Gothic literature must go back to ancient times. Supernatural events appear in local legends or mythologies and they have been told beautifully, magically, and sometimes fearfully. We have to consider, however, whether they were regarded as “supernatural” unrelated to ordinary life, because they might depend on the social and historical context. For the people in ancient times, those tales might not be considered to be Gothic literature.

Set in an ordinary life with an aesthetical atmosphere, Gothic literature deals with mysterious events deviated from the everyday experience. It has been recognised as one of the literary genres in the latter half of eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century where the idea of modern science is developed and applied in daily life. As the idea of modern science spread to the public, people lose their awe of nature and consider the supernatural event as otherworldly different from their ordinary life. Illusion should be sealed as “psychotic”.

It is curious to note here that such a collapse of the limits between matter and mind was considered, especially in the nineteenth century, as the first characteristic of madness. Psychiatrists generally posited that the “normal Man” possessed several contexts of reference and attached each fact to only one among them. The psychotic, on the contrary, was incapable of distinguishing these different contexts and confused the perceived with the imaginary: (Todorov 1973, 115)

Gothic literature removes the limits between matter and mind and treating ambiguous motif between reality and illusion. It claims the restoration of ambiguity. The period of Gothic literature also overlaps with the age of Romanticism whose idea strongly relates to Gothicism because it repels the idea of modern science and seeks for the world of beauty and fantasy after men conquer nature. At that moment, contents expressed in Gothic literature were regarded as one of the particular fields of literature.

Poe’s “The Oval Portrait” and Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* were created in such a literary stream. Both works beautifully describe the fantasy and terror reflected in the art though they were in the social context of the nineteenth century. Using the idea of modern science, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* also indicates the inexplicable incident, the way the mentality and vices of the protagonists transmits to the picture.

As he often remembered afterwards and always with no small wonder, he found himself at first gazing at the portrait with a feeling of almost scientific interest. That such a change should have taken place was incredible to him. And yet it was a fact. Was there some subtle affinity between the chemical atoms, that shaped themselves into form and colour on the canvas, and the soul that was within him? Could it be that what that soul thought, they realized? – that what it dreamed, they made true? Or was there some other, more terrible reason? He shuddered, and felt afraid, and, going back to the couch, lay there, gazing at the picture in sickened horror. (95)

Introducing the scientific terms and showing the objectivity in some degree, the text shows a strange event occurring in the story. The elements presenting some scientific idea are typical for gothic literature and the pseudo-science and magical motif of a portrait which mirrors the life of the protagonist co-exist in the story. The work draws

the darkness of the human mind contrasting the gaudy life of the protagonist with the story of man as if he sells his soul to Mephistopheles.

In his biographical study, *Oscar Wilde*, Richard Ellman points out that “For Wilde aestheticism was not a creed but a problem. Exploring its ramifications provided him with his subject, and he responded to it with a mixture of serious espousal and mockery” (Ellmann 1987, 292). Poe has a similar idea towards art. He says in “The Philosophy of Composition” that “When, indeed, men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect” (Poe 1984, 16). The aesthetic, for both Wilde and Poe, is not a value to believe but the problem whose effects should be considered. Both *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and “The Oval Portrait” describe the object of beauty and creating the aesthetic atmosphere, but cause the sense of illusion and fear to the character and the reader as well. The two stories represent an essence of Gothic literature in a portrait, a fusion of the reality and illusion.

Notes

- 1 *Demosthenes*, Roman Copy, Original BC. c. 280, Campagna, Italy, Marble, 192cm, Copenhagen, Museum of Ni-Carlesburg.)
- 2 Fourth Style, AD, c. 60-79, *The house of Telentius*, Pompeii, Italy, Wall painting, 58×52cm, National Museum of Archaeology, Naples.
- 3 Jan van Eyck, *The Virgin with Chancellor Rolin*. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
- 4 The division of genre of painting is mainly established by André Félibien, an art historian and critic in the seventeenth century, except genre painting which is recognised in nineteenth century.
- 5 When Dorian asks Basil Hallward that “Am I really like that?” He responds, “Yes; you are just like that.” (29)
- 6 Religious paintings are also related to human since they describe some appearance of man. The objects of the religious paintings, however, are the universal figure such as Christ or Virgin Mary, that they are the object of worship.

Works Cited

- Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting*. trans. Cecil Grayson, London: Penguin Books, 1991.
- Boardman, John (Ed). *The Oxford History of Classical Art*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993.
- Brilliant, Richard, *Portrait*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1991.
- Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958.
- Campbell, Lorne “Portraiture”. *The Dictionary of Art*. New York: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1996.
- Dorigo, Wladimiro. *Late Roman Painting: A Study of Pictorial Record 30 BC – AD 500*. trans. James Cleugh and John Warrington, London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1971.
- Ellmann, Richard. *Oscar Wilde*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987.
- Fornäs, Johan. *Cultural Theory and Late Modernity*. London: Sage Publications, 1995.
- Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*. London: Routledge, 1988.

- Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. Trans. Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Comp., 1987.
- Libre de Paris (Ed.). *Les grands Maîtres de la Peinture*. Paris: Hachetter, 1989.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. *Edgar Allan Poe Essay and Reviews*. New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. "The Oval Portrait". *The Complete Tale and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Pope-Hennessy, John. *The Portrait in the Renaissance*. London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1966.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: a Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. trans. Recharad Howard, Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve Univ., 1973.
- Wilde, Oscar. *Plays, Prose Writings and Poems*. London: Everyman, 1996.
- Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981.