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# Three Removes from Truth: The Motif of Representation in Literature

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THREE REMOVES FROM TRUTH:  
THE MOTIF OF REPRESENTATION IN LITERATURE

By

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Departmental Honors Scholarship Project

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in

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## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the motif of representation in a variety of texts to better understand the power that these representations have as a social force. The use of representation in literature has changed throughout history, and the paper analyzes the role of representation in six different fictional texts and in several different critical theories. It gives further consideration to the changing nature of photography in a postmodern world where a true original is never created due to the proliferation of cell phone cameras, digital photograph sharing, and photography-specific social networking websites. In an increasingly visually literate world, photography is a common lens through which individuals choose to see and experience the world around them, and the proliferation and ease of photography is shaping the way society uses and understands representations. Ultimately, the paper investigates portraiture and photography from literary and historical lenses and proves, if not the value of representations in themselves, the importance of representations for society.

*Keywords: representation, photography, visual rhetoric, technological reproducibility*

## INTRODUCTION: CECI N'EST PAS UNE PHOTOGRAPHIER



Fig. 1. Magritte, René. *The Treachery of Images*. 1928-29. Oil on canvas. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

This is not a pipe—it is a painting of a pipe. Surrealist artist René Magritte's 1928 painting, *The Treachery of Images*, (see fig. 1) introduces the issue at the heart of representation: that which is represented is not real. In a world increasingly infatuated with and dependent on representations, whether a photograph, a painting, a Facebook profile, or a description of any other sort, the issue of how one presents, represents, and re-presents oneself is a central issue when considering the truth of one's identity—and the truth of the identity of others.

Plato addresses this issue when he introduces the concept of mimesis in *Republic*. For Plato, art is merely a representation of nature instead of a natural creation; furthermore, it is a representation that should not be trusted. In Book X, Plato, speaking through Socrates, uses the example of a bed to explain to the character of Glaucon that a bed is a representation of the Ideal bed created by the progenitor, God. God created a single real bed—the only real bed—and every bed that a craftsman or joiner makes is simply an imperfect representation of that bed.

A bed, therefore, is removed once from its true, absolute, and ideal form as it exists in the mind of God, the intelligible realm of knowledge and forms. The bed is removed once more from reality when the painter paints the bed. Just as Magritte's pipe is not a pipe—it is a painting of a pipe—the painter's bed is not a bed but is a representation of a bed. The painter is a representer, “someone who deals with things which are, in fact, two generations away from reality” (*Republic* 66). Playwrights and writers are also representers; a written description of a bed is no more a bed than a painting of a bed.

Plato, however, cautions that the representer will naturally find himself concerned with appearance alone; his work of representation is divorced from truth because the truth of a particular form is not necessary in order for one to represent it accurately. One could paint a picture of a bed without having any knowledge of how a bed is made or used by paying attention only to the appearance of the bed: “An image-maker, a representer, understands only appearance, while reality is beyond him” (*Republic* 70). For the representer, the appearance of the object is more important than an understanding of the object. Even the craftsman, however, fails to understand the object as well as the one who uses the object. It is only the user, according to Plato, who can have an intimate knowledge of the object—of how well it works in actual practice. A craftsman who makes a bed based on theories of weight distribution and a knowledge of joints must rely on the sleeper to know whether the bed behaves as it ought.

The issue that Plato has with representers is that they, too often, fail to represent objects accurately and fail to repent of their ignorance. In such cases, the representer steps away from the truth and begins increasingly to represent falsehood: “[D]espite the [representer's] ignorance of the good and bad aspects of things, he'll go on representing them. But what he'll be representing, apparently, is whatever appeals to a large, if ignorant, audience” (*Republic* 71). The audience is,



therefore, of primary importance in shaping not only what is represented, but also how something is represented.

Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" is also instrumental to one's understanding of Plato's philosophy of representation. Prisoners are trapped in the cave, and they can perceive only the shadows of puppets cast by a fire that is hidden from their sight. They can perceive only a representation of a representation, but, to them, "the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images" ("The Allegory of the Cave" 74). If a painter were to paint what he saw, he would be creating naught but a representation of a representation of a representation, conveying a truth that is far removed from truth itself.

Thus, the first remove from truth occurs when a being or object is created to represent an ideal Form. The second remove from truth takes place when an artist reproduces that being, whether through painting, drawing, or photographing the being. A further complication in the matter of representation is the ability with which technology has furnished a representer to reproduce his or her representation. The technological reproducibility of images, a concept attributed to literary critic Walter Benjamin, adds a third remove from the truth of the ideal form. The image that the representer—the painter, writer, or photographer—creates can be reproduced and disseminated with very little consideration of the truth of the representation.

As time progresses, different philosophers, theorists, and critics investigate the many different uses of representation. Whereas Plato valued representations according to their proximity to truth, later philosophers, theorists, and critics value other aspects of representation, such as its ability to convey beauty and create an experience for the viewer. Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" can serve as a starting point for understanding the relationship between representation and truth because it call into question the accuracy of representation and perception, but other

theories must be studied before one can analyze the relationship between representation and beauty or the role of representation in creating authentic experiences. Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1980) and Susan Sontag's *On Photography* (1977) provide two such theoretical approaches to photography, the former discussing how the self is affected by photography and the latter suggesting that society has come to embrace idealized images and representations over reality. The philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche (1873) regarding the tendency of humans to understand time-honored illusions as true further addresses the question of the relationship between representation and truth. An important literary critic, Walter Benjamin (1936), discusses authenticity, aura, and the original in a time of the technological reproduction of art. Furthermore, Fredric Jameson (1982) provides a postmodern critique of nostalgic art, discussing how humorous parodies of popular images can lose their humor and become meaningless. These critics provide an additional framework for understanding the ways in which society understands and uses—or abuses—representation.

Various authors have observed, whether consciously or subconsciously, the often-troubled relationship between society and its expectations of how representations should function, and the motif of representation first emerges in the form of paintings and drawings. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde addresses non-photographic representation with the titular picture of Dorian Gray. Dorian's picture proves to be a more accurate representation of his soul than he is, so Dorian's appearance and the reality of his inner self are brought into conflict. "The Real Thing" (1892) by Henry James likewise deals with non-photographic representation. In the short story, the narrator attempts to draw Major and Mrs. Monarch, a gentleman and gentlewoman who have fallen on hard times, as illustrations for novels, but the narrator only succeeds in representing them exactly as they are instead of how the characters are.

In this case, the fake things, his models who are pretending to be noble, triumph over the real things.

Portraits and drawings, however, are not the only forms of representation that exist in literature. Photographic representation in one of its earliest forms, daguerreotyping, is used in *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) by Nathaniel Hawthorne both to show the disparity between the inner character and outer appearance of Judge Pyncheon and to document the event of his eventual death. *Jude the Obscure* (1895) by Thomas Hardy addresses the need for authentic images and the danger of idealizing others through the failed relationship between the title character, Jude, and his true love, Sue. In *All the King's Men* (1946) by Robert Penn Warren, staged photographs are used to reinforce a certain image of Willie Talos, and *White Noise* (1985) by Don DeLillo uses the image of the Most Photographed Barn in America to address the growing reality of a consumer consciousness. A critical examination of these texts shows that societies in different times and places use representation for a variety of ends including truth-telling, portraying beauty, and creating and capturing experiences. As the technology used to create representations changes, society's relationship with representation changes not only in form but also in function.

## 1: TWO PERSPECTIVES ON PHOTOGRAPHIC THEORY

It is important to remember that photography, while it is one specific form of representation, developed from earlier forms of representation that include drawing and painting. These early forms of representation begin to yoke representation and truth together, as did philosophers like Plato, but later critics like Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag challenge and stretch this relationship. Throughout Barthes's and Sontag's works, a post-truth view of photographic representation is considered, but their analyses of early photographic forms of representation and their considerations of pre-photographic forms of representation are invaluable in a discussion of the motif of representation.

Although there are critics who analyze photography from a strictly visual perspective, analyzing the composition, lighting, color, and other visual elements of photographs, it makes the most sense to consider the views of two literary critics who examine the photograph, but who use an approach that is more abstract and theoretical than strict visual theorists so that these theories can be applied to other types of representation. These two critics, Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes, are contemporaneous; Sontag published her work *On Photography*, a collection of essays published individually from 1973 to 1977, while Barthes's *Camera Lucida* was written in 1980 and translated into English in 1981. The works of Sontag and Barthes interact with each other, both implicitly and explicitly.

Barthes's work deals in abstractions and takes a more personal approach to photography than does Sontag's, which is better grounded in the concrete than Barthes's. Barthes provides a good foundation for the overall importance of the photograph as a transformative experience for the viewer, and Sontag offers a more detailed discussion of the effects of photography on society at large.

### 1.1: PHOTOGRAPHY AS ANIMATION: THE STUDIUM AND THE PUNCTUM

Roland Barthes primarily discusses the process of portrait-photography from the perspectives of a subject and of a viewer. This is important to the study of representation in literature because portraits, like photographs, depend on a triad—the artist, the artist’s inspiration, and the viewer—to make meaning of the work. Barthes, not an artist himself, does not discuss the relationship of the artist to the artwork, but his analysis of the subject of portrait-photographs and the viewer of portrait-photographs can be generalized to include the subjects and viewers of non-photographic representations.

Barthes introduces a complex dilemma when considering the portrait-photograph: a portrait-photograph of Barthes himself “is the advent of [himself] as other” (12), which means that, according to social construct theory, the portrait-photograph is a way by which the individual—Barthes, in this case—can come to consciousness. The painted portrait, too, can allow one to look upon the image of self as other and therefore come to consciousness. A problem that Barthes identifies with the portrait-photograph’s representation of the self is that it is, according to Barthes’s own experience at the very least, inaccurate. Barthes discusses the variety of selves and identities that converge in the portrait-photograph: “the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art” (13). For Barthes, this is troubling: the portrait-photograph should be the one form of representation that perfectly captures the essence of self because it is an objective visual duplicate of reality. Instead, he worries that the portrait-photograph only captures him imitating himself, leaving him to “suffer from a sensation of inauthenticity” (Barthes 13).

Perhaps the only reason that the portrait-photograph allows the self to view the self as the other is because the self that the portrait-photograph captures is not the self at all.

When considering Barthes's views about the inauthenticity of portrait-photographs in the context of Walter Benjamin's warning about the destruction of the aura in an age of technological reproducibility, Barthes's beliefs are particularly challenging. Benjamin purports that "replicating the work many times over . . . substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence" (1054). This unique existence is the aura of the original, the authenticity an image derives as a result of its singular physical and temporal identity. If even the portrait-photograph cannot accurately represent the nature of the self, each reproduction destroys not the aura of the original self but the aura of the inauthentic other. In one sense, this could seem encouraging: if all that was being destroyed was an inaccurate representation, there is less at stake when art is technologically reproduced.

At the same time, one must heed Friedrich Nietzsche's warning about forgetting that certain illusions are only that: illusions. Nietzsche purports that truth is "a mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms, in short a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration" (Nietzsche 768). When one thinks that the inauthentic portrait-photograph is true, the technological reproduction of the inauthentic portrait-photograph succeeds only in removing one further and further from the truth. Even Barthes remarks on the unintentional truth of calling a portrait a "likeness": "All I look *like* is other photographs of myself, and this to infinity: no one is ever anything but the copy of a copy, real or mental" (102). Technological reproduction, it would seem, is doomed to fail to convey truth not only because it lacks the aura of the original but also because the original portrait-photograph is itself an imperfect copy of a copy. The subject, whether human or

inanimate, is a copy of Plato's ideal Form, and the first representation, whether a painting or a photograph, is a representation of a representation. When images are reproduced, the portrait or portrait-photograph is removed one step further from the truth; technological reproductions are, therefore, reproductions of representations of representations of the ideal Form.

Barthes, however, is not only concerned with the subject of the portrait-photograph; he is also concerned about the impact of the portrait-photograph on the viewer. An interesting component of Barthes's theory of how photography affects the viewer is that of adventure. When speaking of the allure that certain photographs hold, Barthes rejects the idea that photographs primarily fascinate or interest the viewer; instead, photographs instill a sense of adventure in the viewer. The photograph achieves this by animating the viewer and by letting the viewer animate it (Barthes 20). Barthes contends that without this animation, the photograph does not truly exist. This two-way engagement is reminiscent of Barthes's more popular ideas regarding a work becoming a text; both the reader and the text must be engaged in the process. The death of the author must be considered with regard to postmodern texts—and, by extension, the representations within those texts—because it rejects the question of truth and embraces the experience of the reader or viewer.

Barthes contends that there are two possible elements of the photograph that allow it to animate and be animated by the viewer: the *studium* (Latin: study) and the *punctum* (Latin: point). The *studium* is an “application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment . . . but without special acuity” (Barthes 26). It is, in other words, the element of the photograph—and, more broadly, of representation—that makes it visually intriguing or enjoyable to certain viewers; it can animate the viewer superficially and temporarily.

The punctum, on the other hand, introduces questions of morality and incorporates a degree of poignancy. The punctum “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces [the viewer]” (Barthes 26). The more violent connotation with which Barthes imbues the punctum reflects the differences in the effects produced by the studium and the punctum; the presence of the studium pleases or displeases the viewer, but the presence of the punctum pierces the studium and ultimately creates in the viewer of the representation a sense of meaning and animation deeper than the more superficial meaning created by the studium.

Barthes makes an interesting assertion concerning the punctum: the punctum is best understood after the viewer has turned away from the photograph. Indeed, the eye’s concern is the studium, but the mind’s concern is the punctum. To use Freudian terms, the studium is manifest, but the punctum may be latent. Even if the punctum is seemingly obvious because a certain aspect of the photograph immediately arrests the viewer, the punctum may be something else entirely and “be revealed only after the fact, when the photograph is no longer in front of [the viewer] . . . . [One] may know better a photograph [one] remember[s] than a photograph [one is] looking at, as if direct vision oriented its language wrongly, engaging it in an effort of description which will always miss its point of effect, the *punctum*” (Barthes 53). In the context of studying representation in literature, where the roles of the reader of the story and the viewer of the portrait or photograph are not congruent, it is important to consider how the viewer of the image within the narrative engages with it—whether in the physical realm of agreeableness or in the mental, and sometimes spiritual, realm of poignancy—because it is through the eyes of the viewer in the narrative that the reader of the text sees the representation.

Another element of photography that is relevant in the present context is the relationship between photography and nostalgia. Photography, Barthes asserts, is a unique form of



representation because the referent, the subject of the photograph, must have existed at some point in time (76). Even if a portrait reveals only a copy of a copy, it also shows “not a memory, an imagination, a reconstruction . . . such as art lavishes upon us, but reality in a past state: at once the past and the real” (Barthes 82). Fredric Jameson likewise argues that popular images represent the past, but Jameson focuses his attention on the fact that the past cannot be reobtained. Similarly, the feeling of nostalgia that one seeks when watching films or reading stories that reuse older plots is a somewhat Freudian desire to relive one’s childhood, so Jameson argues that nostalgia film—and, by extension, nostalgia art—reveals the individual’s inability to “focus [one’s] own present, as though [one has] become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of [one’s] own current experience” (1853). One’s inability to accurately imitate the present—that is, the inability of representation to capture and convey perfect truth—creates a desire to return to the past. These efforts to return to the past through art and film are, however, futile: “we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach” (Jameson 1853). Jameson warns that the stereotypes, idiosyncrasies, and eccentricities of popular, reproduced images not only fail to represent the present, but also fail to represent the past meaningfully. Thus, the third remove from truth, a reproduction of a representation of creation, cannot truthfully illustrate either the present or the past.

Still, Barthes asserts that the past is important for the individual; he finds solace in a photograph of his mother at a young age, and this particular book serves as a testament to her memory through his analysis of the importance that an image of his mother as a little girl holds for him. Through photographs, he returns to the past and mourns again and again, reliving his mother’s death as he finds himself trapped in the place between what will be—her eventual

death—and what has been—her life (Barthes 96). Looking at a photograph generates an emotion other than love that Barthes does not disregard: pity (116). While some images do create an insatiable desire to return to an inauthentic past, Barthes stands firm in his assertion that the punctum, whether it generates nostalgia or sorrow, is vital to the viewer's true understanding of the photograph, no matter how inaccurate that photograph may be.

More broadly, Barthes's conclusions about portrait-photography also apply to representations that are painted or drawn. While the portrait or drawing provides less certainty than photography with regard to the truth of existence, the portraits that precede the advent of photography generally aim to provide an accurate representation of the subject, often for posterity. Barthes presents the art of representation as something that can be trusted to tell the truth—but only to a certain extent. Instead, the portrait-photograph, and, by extension, representation, should not only draw the attention of the viewer, but also encourage in the viewer a sense of adventure.

## 1.2: PHOTOGRAPHY AS DIFFÉRANCE: FROM TRUTH TO BEAUTY

While Barthes looks at the effect of photography on the viewer in terms of animation, the studium, and the punctum, Susan Sontag, in her book *On Photography*, considers the nature of the photograph itself. She argues that the photograph emphasizes that which is beautiful over that which is true, writing that the “camera’s ability to transform reality into something beautiful derives from its relative weakness as a means of conveying truth” (Sontag 112). For Sontag, the issue of photography—or, at least, the issue the world has made of photography—is not with how accurate the representation is but with how beautiful the image is. This is strikingly different from the opinions of Plato and Benjamin, who bemoan the loss of authenticity in a representation. Barthes agrees with Sontag to some degree; he argues that photography can “lie as to the meaning of the thing . . . [but] never as to its existence” (Barthes 87). For Barthes, the truth of existence is enough, but Sontag heavily critiques the photograph’s failure to convey truth of meaning—and even its failure to convey the accuracy of existence.

Although Sontag identifies the current focus of photography as beauty, that was not always the case: “The history of photography could be recapitulated as the struggle between two different imperatives: beautification, which comes from the fine arts, and truth-telling” (Sontag 86). The seeming inability to satisfy both beauty and truth reveals that this world cannot reconcile the idea that something can be both beautiful and true.

Part of Sontag’s analysis of the photograph, therefore, is that of the relationship between beauty and representation. Though her analysis of the photograph does not explicitly focus on portrait-photography, she notes that “so successful has been the camera’s role in beautifying the world that photographs, rather than the world, have become the standard of the beautiful” (Sontag 85). According to Sontag’s theory, the world seems not to care if all it sees are shadows

on the wall of a cave as long as the shadows are photogenic. In the same way, people favor photogenic, idealized images of themselves over images that reflect how they typically look: “Many people are anxious when they’re about to be photographed . . . because they fear the camera’s disapproval. People want the idealized image: a photograph of themselves looking their best” (Sontag 85). The desire for an idealized image creates an unfair standard for portrait-photography because people “feel rebuked when the camera doesn’t return an image of themselves as *more attractive* than they really are” (Sontag 85, emphasis added). In terms of the world, the beautiful is that which is photographed, but in terms of portrait-photography, the beautiful is that which is more beautiful than reality.

Sontag discusses the transition from truth-focused photography to beauty-focused photography by exploring the way in which a plurality of photographers has affected the art. Whereas early photography existed to create a perfect copy of the image, later photography has developed into a way for photographers to express themselves, each taking a different photograph even if they are photographing the same subject. As a result, photographers embrace the multiplicity of meanings their photographs can produce, and “the supposition that cameras furnish an impersonal, objective image yield[s] to the fact that photographs are evidence not only of what’s there but of what an individual sees, not just a record but an evaluation of the world” (Sontag 88). The photograph is a way for the photographer to create a visual poetry of images, a poem that, rather than being comprised by words and stanzas and rhyme scheme, makes do with subjects and spatial composition and symmetry.

If photographs have moved away from truth-telling, perhaps the aura of a photograph is more important than its authenticity. It was not until the technological reproduction of photographs gained popularity that “the cult of the future . . . alternates with the wish to return to

a more artisanal, purer past—when images still had a handmade quality, an aura” (Sontag 124). Despite the accuracy and clarity of digital images, Sontag suggests that Polaroid photographs still have a certain appeal to the pathos of an individual; they evoke a kind of nostalgia that cannot be found by looking at a picture reproduced from a negative or a monitor on a digital camera. Polaroids possess an aura because they “revive the principle of the daguerreotype camera: each print is a unique object” (Sontag 125). Polaroid photographs can only be created once, but photographs produced from negatives can be reproduced without compromising the quality of each reproduction. Furthermore, with digital photography, no physical, stable image exists, improving the quality of reproduction but removing the aura that exists at the creation of a single, unique object. In this way, photographs, which originally lack an aura due to their high level of reproducibility, can attain an aura as time passes—provided, of course, that they are prints and not just digital images.

As a result of technological reproducibility, it would seem that society is moving toward a future where the methodology and the aura, whether beautiful or not, are of great importance to the photograph; the memories and nostalgia evoked by photographs move to the forefront when truth and beauty fall away. One can see this in Barthes’s response to the picture of his mother he cherished so dearly: “I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the ‘ordinary’” (73). In a postmodern world where truth and beauty are subjective, perhaps aura and nostalgia are more important for viewers who long to have some sort of control, whether “an imaginary possession of a past that is unreal [or]...of space in which they are insecure” (Sontag 19). This longing to possess the world through images is only possible if, and perhaps because, the present era, as philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach puts it, “prefers the image to the thing, the

copy to the original, the representation to the reality, appearance to being” (qtd. in Sontag 153). The privileged position of representation calls into question the importance of truth—and, by extension, how far one is removed from that truth. If illusion is privileged over truth, there must be another criterion for the evaluation of the relative importance of photography.

The implications of Feuerbach’s assertion are such that a photograph of an event is more important than the event itself. Sontag herself interprets the phenomenon of the privileging of representation differently, arguing that “photography does not simply reproduce the real, it recycles it . . . things and events are put to new uses, assigned new meanings, which go beyond the distinctions between the beautiful and the ugly, the true and the false, the useful and the useless, good taste and bad taste” (174). While photographs often act as substitutions for reality, they can also act as a new way for one to understand reality. At face value, it seems that Sontag’s assertion is modernist in nature; photography is simply a way of making reality new by recycling it. Photography goes beyond this, however; it ultimately acts to defer meaning by rejecting both the privileged and the unprivileged binary oppositions and embraces something akin to Barthes’s punctum: the “interesting” (Sontag 175). In a beautifully Derridean way, “cameras are the antidote and the disease, a means of appropriating reality and a means of making it obsolete” (Sontag 179). Cameras—and the representations they produce—defer a final judgment about the goodness of their nature.

Sontag’s analysis of photography can, like Barthes’s, be expanded to include the broader art of representation. Painted representations, too, struggle with the relationship between truth and beauty; some early instances of representation in literature, such as Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, address the struggle between appearance and reality. Painted representations carry with them a certain aura as well, and this aura evokes a desire not only for

past events but also for past technologies and simpler times. Although representations are not as convincing a substitute for reality as photographs, paintings and drawings still recycle reality—perhaps more so than photographs since every painting or drawing necessarily makes the subject new. While painted representations are not in danger of making reality obsolete, they still act as both a poison and a cure, sometimes revealing a too-true—but perhaps, as Derrida would suggest, meaningless or inconclusive—representation of reality.

## 2: THE PORTRAIT IN LITERATURE

When considering the history of the motif of representations in literature, it is important to begin with drawn or painted portraits because they precede the advent of the photograph. Portraits afford the writer the ability to create an image that seems important by default. Barthes, referring to photographs, writes that “photography, in order to surprise, photographs the notable; but soon, by a familiar reversal, it decrees notable whatever it photographs” (34). Since it is true that most portraits were reserved for the wealthy individuals who could commission them, portraits follow this same developmental pattern as photographs. The portrait initially served to capture the essence of nobility or of the moneyed class, but today, artists create representations that instill in the viewer—and, by extension, the reader—a sense of nobility and wonder, whether such a sense existed before or not. Even though a portrait can imbue its subject with importance, a portrait lacks the conviction that its subject existed in precisely that form at some time in the past. Portraits do not provide evidence of existence; at best, they provide the evidence that a subject seems to exist.

The representations that appear in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Henry James’s “The Real Thing” introduce the conflict between idealized beauty and truth of character. In Wilde’s novel, the painted representation of Dorian Gray reveals more of his character than does his physical body, and representation, for this reason, is praised over Dorian’s deceptive appearance, decreeing that the picture is more notable than the man. In James’s short story, on the other hand, the Monarchs are, in fact, nobility, but it is their very nobility that prevents them from being represented. They are too true to themselves, which hinders their ability to represent characters in other times and places. While Wilde’s novel praises the representation as a means



by which truth can be revealed, James's story introduces the idea that representation must not be too real or too true to reality if it is to generate interest and stimulate the imagination.

## 2.1: THE SHADOW OF A PUPPET: THE DEATH OF THE IDEAL

Representations have a tendency to depict the idealized self—or, at the very least, to try to do so, per Sontag—but there is often a disparity between the idealized appearance and the idealized moral self. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by Oscar Wilde, a portrait of Dorian Gray, a beautiful youth, enables Dorian's appearance to stay the same, frozen in time, while the portrait changes, ages, and reflects Dorian's increasing moral depravity. The difference between the appearance of Dorian and the reality of his soul, as illustrated by himself and his picture, respectively, mocks the societal desire for the idealized appearance and emphasizes the significance of the true, inner self.

Dorian exists in three distinct states: the innocent youth, the blameless sinner, and the repentant murderer. In his time of innocence and his time of repentance, his outer appearance and his inner appearance correspond. Throughout most of the novel, however, Dorian exists in a state of contradiction; he sins without ceasing, but he still appears perfectly blameless. In one encounter with James Vane, the vengeful brother of Dorian's previous love interest who committed suicide after Dorian broke her heart, Dorian relies on the disparity between his outward appearance and his inward appearance, arguing that he could not have been Sybil's love because he still appeared young, much too young to have engaged in a relationship with Sybil: "the face of the man [James] had sought to kill had all the bloom of boyhood, all the unstained purity of youth. He seemed little more than a lad of twenty summers, hardly older, if older indeed at all, than his sister had been when they had parted so many years ago. It was obvious that this was not the man who had destroyed her life" (Wilde 161). Dorian uses the fact that he cannot age or change as an excuse to do as he pleases, pursuing reckless pleasure over inner

edification. The picture protects and enables him, and he uses the picture to his full advantage during this time of sin and debauchery.

Before this time of sin, however, Dorian appears to be innocent in nature. Dorian's appearance is beautiful and inviting, betraying no hint of his eventual moral decline and demise. Upon meeting Dorian, Lord Henry Wotton, a friend of Basil Hallward, the painter who paints Dorian's picture, remarks that Dorian "was certainly wonderfully handsome, with his finely-curved scarlet lips, his frank blue eyes, his crisp gold hair. There was something in his face that made one trust him at once. All the candour of youth was there, as well as all youth's passionate purity. One felt that he had kept himself unspotted from the world" (Wilde 17). At this point, Lord Henry's remarks about Dorian are true; Dorian is innocent, if unenlightened.

It is clear from the beginning of the novel that Dorian's life will not remain as innocent as it has been. Basil engages in foreshadowing when he comments that Dorian's present gain, his good looks and youth, will cause Dorian to "suffer for what the gods have given [him], suffer terribly" (Wilde 7). Dorian does indeed suffer, for, while he retains his good looks throughout the whole novel, excepting the last page, his innocence becomes an illusion, and he is burdened with the fear that his picture could be discovered and destroy his illusory innocence. Basil later comments, unknowingly ironically, that Dorian seems to capture the "harmony of soul and body" (Wilde 13) that Dorian's picture later throws into discord. Author Michael Davis writes of the relationship between Dorian's mind and body in his article "Mind and Matter in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*," in which Davis suggests that "the atoms of the painting, like the human mind, take on an ambiguous relationship to the material world" (548), and it is this division of the painting and mind from Dorian's body that allow the painting to reveal truth even when the material world deceives those who see Dorian.

The beginning of Dorian's enlightenment is not, however, necessarily the point of his ruination. Lord Henry influences Dorian—and he is an immoral influence, as Lord Henry himself asserts. Dorian is “dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences [are] at work within him. Yet they seemed to him to have come really from himself” (Wilde 18). Even though Dorian believes that these new influences are his own, the words of Lord Henry certainly act as a catalyst or impetus for Dorian's enlightenment. At this point, Dorian has still committed no immoral acts, and Basil remarks that Lord Henry's words have created on Dorian's face “the most wonderful expression” (Wilde 20), an expression that Basil replicates in his portrait. Lord Henry agrees, saying that Dorian's success in sitting for Basil is “entirely due to [Lord Henry]” (24). The influence that Lord Henry holds over Dorian's demeanor is clear, but Lord Henry's immoral influence is not yet at work in Dorian's life.

A much more poignant moment of enlightenment occurs when Dorian sees the painting face-to-face. Barthes understands the portrait-photograph as the “advent of [himself] as other” (12), and this same concept applies to Dorian's relationship with his portrait. When Dorian approaches the painting, “a look of joy [comes] into his eyes, as if he . . . recognize[s] himself for the first time” (24). He recognizes his beauty, but he also recognizes his mortality, for he knows that he “shall grow old, and horrible, and dreadful. But this picture will always remain young. It will never be older than this particular day of June” (25). Dorian, in truly seeing a representation of himself, understands himself to be the other and comes to a form of consciousness, one in which he can be recognized as a person, according to Hegel's social construct theory (Hegel 543). Hegel suggests that the self needs to recognize that which is other than the self in order to attain consciousness, and Dorian's portrait acts as the other. Although Dorian does not comprehend it, at this moment of recognition, he engages in a “life-and-death struggle” with his

other self, his picture, in order to “attain . . . to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness” (Hegel 543). Dorian is given the gift of consciousness—the ability to recognize his own beauty—when he encounters his portrait, but that same gift is, as Basil predicts, his downfall because it involves him in a lifelong struggle for selfhood that is independent of his portrait, a struggle that Dorian wins, but only in death.

Later in the novel, however, Dorian’s face retains its same appearance of youth, sense of trustworthiness, and essence of purity. Dorian, via the influence of Lord Henry, believes that “the search for beauty [is] the real secret of life” (Wilde 43). Lord Henry’s influence is further exerted over Dorian in the form of a book that he sends to Dorian. The book contains messages of hedonism and decadence, and “[f]or years, Dorian Gray could not free himself from the influence of this book. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he never sought to free himself from it” (Wilde 108). Dorian became increasingly willing to engage in evil in order to satisfy his desires. Critic Minodora Simion, in her article “A New Hedonism in Oscar Wilde’s Novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,” writes that “vice and evil become means of experiencing intense sensual and aesthetic pleasure for Dorian” (57); thus, the morality of Dorian’s means do not matter to him as long as his pleasurable ends are attained. Just as Dorian was chained by his knowledge that the portrait changed to reflect his growing immorality, he was chained by the influence of deplorable ideas and people, but he does not attempt to escape the influence of the picture or of Lord Henry. Even though impure, immoral ideas entered Dorian’s mind, “he had always the look of one who had kept himself unspotted from the world” (Wilde 108). Dorian was a picture of purity, the same picture of purity that Basil painted on that June day some years before.

Those around Dorian attempt to reconcile his innocent appearance with the rumors of his moral depravity, but his appearance triumphs over the rumors and persuades them of his blameless purity: “Even those who had heard the most evil things against him, and from time to time strange rumours about his mode of life crept through London and became the chatter of the clubs, could not believe anything to his dishonour when they saw him” (Wilde 108). Society privileges Dorian’s appearance over his inner moral depravity. Others seem to forget that Dorian’s appearance is, as Nietzsche puts it, an illusion—albeit a very convincing one—and do not seek the deeper truth of Dorian’s inner character.

Basil, who has known Dorian for years, also falls prey to the deception of Dorian’s appearance, saying, “I don’t believe those rumours at all. At least, I can’t believe them when I see you. Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man’s face. It cannot be concealed” (Wilde 127). Basil confirms that the innocence that used to be painted across Dorian’s face is the same innocence that still abides there. Basil keeps in his mind the idealized form of Dorian that he once knew, the one for whom he felt some “curious artistic idolatry” (Wilde 13). For Basil, the picture of Dorian Gray replaces the person of Dorian Gray. Dorian himself remarks that Basil “like[s] [his] art better than [his] friends” (Wilde 25), and Lord Henry agrees, knowing that Basil privileges the idealized appearance of Dorian over the reality of his inner being: “Some day you will look at your friend, and he will seem to you to be a little out of drawing, or you won’t like his tone of colour, or something” (Wilde 14). This echoes Feuerbach’s claims that the modern era privileges the representation over reality (Sontag 153); Basil certainly illustrates Feuerbach’s assertion about the inevitable, but perhaps unintentional, delusion of the present age.

Indeed, Basil idealizes Dorian. Lord Harry remarks on this relationship between Basil’s art and the presence of Dorian: “his painting had quite gone off. It seemed to me to have lost

something. It had lost an ideal. When you and he ceased to be great friends, he ceased to be a great artist” (Wilde 180). Significantly, Basil’s idealization of Dorian led to the fulfillment of Basil’s prediction at the beginning of the novel: that he would suffer because of his art, and that Dorian would suffer because of his beauty. Furthermore, when Basil is confronted with the mutation of his idealized portrait, Basil is horrified. Dorian asks ironically, “Can’t you see your ideal in it?” (Wilde 132) when he knows that Basil cannot. Even though Basil can still see his signature on the painting, he calls the portrait a “foul parody, some infamous, ignoble satire” (Wilde 131). The parody of Dorian’s portrait, however, still holds meaning because parody, according to Jameson, intends to mock (Jameson 1849). The mockery of Basil’s original painting still holds meaning for Dorian, eventually convicting him to repent of his moral corruption.

The portrait reveals the truth—more truth than Dorian himself ever could. When Basil realizes that Dorian’s face is an illusion of purity, he is confronted by the true face of Dorian’s soul (132). Basil has lost his ideal—he has woken up outside of Plato’s cave and realizes that the Dorian he thought he knew and idealized is instead nothing more than a shadow of a puppet. In Plato’s cave, the prisoners see only the shadows of puppets cast by a fire and believe them to be true, but Basil’s painting frees Basil from belief in the illusion of Dorian Gray’s perfection.

Dorian’s portrait is the central element of the story, but more central to the larger story of the motif of representation and photography is the idea that representation did once convey truth. Dorian’s portrait exists as a counterbalance to his appearance, and while his appearance deceives, his portrait conveys truth. Even though Basil privileges the representation over reality, the fate of Dorian suggests that truth should be valued over beauty. While Wilde uses the book only as a means to suggest that “all excess, as well as all renunciation, brings its own punishment” (qtd. in Bristow xxii), one of these excesses is the excess of beauty, and an excess

of the pursuit of beauty certainly compromises Dorian's—and Basil's—ability to see and understand the truth. Dorian's portrait is removed twice from truth—it is a representation of Dorian, who is himself a representation of the ideal Form—but in other ways, the portrait is closer to the truth than is reality.



## 2.2: THE INEFFICACY OF THE IDEAL: THE DECONSTRUCTION OF REALITY AND REPRESENTATION

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the reader is warned against believing an idealized image; in “The Real Thing,” by Henry James, the idealized image is presented as true—or, at least, once true—but ultimately useless. The narrator, a painter, uses sitters as illustrations for books and advertisements, and he is one day met by sitters who have fallen from the good graces of nobility. They were the “real” thing; they once were the nobles he is trying to capture in his pictures. The narrator cannot use them for his illustrations, however, because he cannot make them into the characters he intends for them to represent. The truth of their nobility, therefore, does not lend them to representation. In this case, the real is too real for its own good, and the sitters fail because they are too true to be represented.

The sitters, the Major and Mrs. Monarch, were once beautiful and noble, but after falling on hard times, they convey not a sense of beauty and brilliance, but of faded glory. The pair look distinguished when they first arrive at the narrator’s studio, but the narrator quickly notes that Mrs. Monarch has the “effect of a moist sponge passed over a ‘sunk’ piece of painting, as well as of a vague allusion to vanished beauty” (James 1533). There is an unavoidable sense that the Monarchs have lost some of the beauty and nobility they once possessed, and this inconvenient truth is illustrated when the narrator draws them; he can only draw them as they are. His attempts to portray Mrs. Monarch inevitably result in drawings that “looked like a photograph or a copy of a photograph . . . . She was the real thing, but always the same thing” (James 1541). Though still a lady, Mrs. Monarch was only herself and could be nothing more than herself.

Where the truth in other situations is preferable, the narrator bemoans Mrs. Monarch’s inability to be drawn. He notes that “the very habit [motionlessness] that made her good for that

purpose [being photographed] unfitted her for [being drawn]" (James 1541). Photography, which, as both Barthes and Sontag note, provides evidence of existence, was the correct art form for representing Mrs. Monarch. The narrator's drawings failed as illustrations because his reproduction of her was too accurate for a drawing. Charles Johanningsmeier, professor of English and author of "How Real American Readers Originally Experienced James's *The Real Thing*," suggests that "true realistic art cannot simply copy reality-it must transform reality with the power of the artist's sensibility" (78). This reflects Sontag's idea that art recycles reality; by simply producing a too-realistic drawing of reality, the narrator fails to create art. Sontag further notes that photography freed art to use abstraction, and the abstractions that make art unique are impossible when only the literal truth, the real thing, can be conveyed (94).

Indeed, the main issue for the Monarchs is that they find themselves as the real thing in a world that has decided to privilege representation over truth. As Feuerbach asserts, society has begun to privilege the representation over reality. This is true in the case of the narrator: "But somehow with all their perfections I didn't easily believe in them . . . . Combined with this was another perversity—an innate preference for the represented subject over the real one: the defect of the real one was so apt to be a lack of representation" (James 1537). The fault of the Monarchs is that they have no faults; they are too perfect in nobility and carriage to be anything but themselves, but in a world where they have fallen from nobility, they must learn to be something which they are not. Ian Bell, professor of English and an expert on Henry James, suggests that "the aura of authenticity conferred by the adjectival 'real' compounds these qualities towards, in the end, absolute immutability" (228). It is only through rejecting this immutability that the Monarchs can learn to embrace new selves, or new representations of selves, in order to survive in a world that favors representation over reality.

On the other hand, the narrator's prized models, Miss Churm and Oronte, neither of whom have any claims to nobility, can act any part put before them. The narrator can make them into the ideal which he sees in his mind, but he can do nothing with the images of Major and Mrs. Monarch. In contrast with Mrs. Monarch, who can only be "always the same thing" (1541), Miss Churm "could represent everything" (James 1539), and, even though the Major was an actual English gentleman, the narrator chooses to use Oronte, a man searching for money in England who happened upon the narrator's studio by chance, as his model for an English gentleman.

When the Monarchs realize that they are unsuited to sitting for the narrator's drawings, they take on the roles of servants, completing their fall from nobility by performing their new identities. Even though they try to delay the inevitable by acting as nobility, their failure in this endeavor reveals their new identities: that of servants. The Monarchs, in this moment, finally understand "the perverse and cruel law in virtue of which the real thing could be so much less precious than the unreal . . . . If [the narrator's] servants were [his] models, then [his] models might be [his] servants" (1549). This role reversal illustrates the deconstruction of reality and representation. Truth is no longer privileged over illusion, and reality is no longer privileged over representation, rendering the difference between appearance and being meaningless.

In this story, once again, representation is preferred over reality, but the reversal at the end of the story does not re-elevate the Monarchs to a position of authority simply as a result of their having been noble. The narrator's drawings of the Monarchs cannot be reproduced in a fictional work because the drawings convey truth instead of stimulating the imagination of the characters who read those books. Though the Monarchs' images would be removed from the truth three times—once in creation, once in representation, and once in reproduction—the

images would convey truth in a time that preferred representation over reality. While the reversal at the end of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* corrects the disparity between appearance and being, the reversal at the end of “The Real Thing” simply solidifies the social preference for representation over reality, regardless of beauty or truth.

### 3: THE PHOTOGRAPH IN LITERATURE

From the invention of the daguerreotype, the ability to produce and reproduce a portrait identical to the original subject has captured the imaginations of almost all artists, including writers. When considering the motif of the photograph in literature, however, it can be difficult to understand how to analyze visual elements of the photograph, such as the studium and the punctum, when one cannot see the image in question. In short, the reader must depend on the narrator to provide the elements necessary for a proper evaluation of the effect of the photograph on the characters in the novel.

Once again, one must consider whether the representation—in this case, the photograph—relies on beauty or truth, or if it subverts the two altogether and makes its own meaning for itself in the recycling of reality or in the nostalgia it conveys. Another element that is introduced to the study of the photograph is that of technological reproducibility, an issue that grows and is eventually satirized in the texts under consideration. From the simple representation of the daguerreotype in Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* to the idealization of reproduced photographs in Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* and Robert Penn Warren's *All the Kings Men* to the oversaturation of reproduced images in DeLillo's *White Noise*, the photograph challenges the relative importance of the ideal, of truth, and of beauty. While the photograph entertains the question of truth-telling less than the portrait does, questions of truth and beauty in representation remain, leading to a much larger question in the postmodern era: does the representation have meaning at all?

### 3.1: THE BURDEN OF PROOF: REPRESENTATION AS TRUTH

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The House of the Seven Gables* provides an interesting counterpoint to Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. While Dorian is cursed by a painted portrait that knows too well his own character, the daguerreotypes of Hawthorne's characters reveal their true characters. Although Barthes and Sontag argue that technological reproductions such as photographs necessarily communicate only truth of existence and not the truth of meaning, Holgrave, Hawthorne's daguerreotypist, manages to wrest from his work the same truth of inner being that Basil Hallward does in his painting of Dorian. In Hawthorne's novel, the technological representation created by the daguerreotype does not hinder the truth but validates it.

The main conflict of Hawthorne's novel involves the struggle for the ownership of the House of the Seven Gables. Hepzibah, an older woman who lives in and has claim to the house, takes in her cousin Phoebe and, later, Hepzibah's brother Clifford, after he has been released from jail. Their struggle is against Judge Pyncheon, a man who appears kind and friendly, but who suffers from the same depravity of spirit as does Dorian. The importance of ancestry throughout the novel—Phoebe's identity as a Pyncheon, Holgrave's position as a Maule, against whom the Pyncheons have struggled for years over land—reverberates in the person of Judge Pyncheon and his role as a representation of his ancestor, Colonel Pyncheon. Hepzibah notes the similarity between the two, asserting that “never did a man show stronger proof of the lineage attributed to him, than Judge Pyncheon, at this crisis, by his unmistakable resemblance to the picture [of Colonel Pyncheon] in the inner room” (Hawthorne 232).

The similarities between Judge Pyncheon and Colonel Pyncheon exist not only in body but also in spirit. The narrator notes that Colonel Pyncheon “had been greedy of wealth; the Judge, too, with all the show of liberal expenditure, was said to be as close-fisted as if his gripe

were of iron. The ancestor had clothed himself in a grim assumption of kindness . . . . His descendant . . . had etherealized this rude benevolence into that broad benignity of smile” (Hawthorne 122). Judge Pyncheon is a representation of Colonel Pyncheon in life and in death, dying in the same chair beneath the same portrait of the Colonel.

The representation of Judge Pyncheon reveals more truth than does the Judge’s actual appearance. While the Judge appears honorable to the general populace of the town, he hides a secret that he, in his youth, framed Clifford for a murder that Clifford did not commit (Hawthorne 310). Alan Trachtenberg, professor of English and an expert in the field of American Studies, asserts that the citizens of the town are “eager to trust the facades projected in images of men holding public trust” (469), so they trusted in the face of Judge Pyncheon, believing his appearance because there was nothing else for them to believe. Early in the novel, however, Holgrave shows a miniature of the Judge to Phoebe, and this miniature “actually brings out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon, even could he detect it” (Hawthorne 91). Phoebe incorrectly identifies the Colonel as subject of the miniature, recognizing the Colonel from his portrait in the house. Trachtenberg further notes that “photographers offered their goods as a social good, a guide to virtue . . . . For was not character readily discernible in the face? And did not the daguerreotype provide the republic with its most fool-proof means of discerning character?” (469). The question that emerges, then, is how to reconcile the difference in Judge Pyncheon’s face and in the representation of his face created by Holgrave’s miniature.

When Phoebe incorrectly identifies the subject of the daguerreotype, she unintentionally reaffirms the similarities between the Judge and the Colonel. Holgrave explains the actual subject to her, saying that “the original [the Judge] wears, to the world’s eye . . . an exceedingly

pleasant countenance . . . . The sun . . . tells quite another story, and will not be coaxed out of it, after half-a-dozen patient attempts on [Holgrave's] part" (Hawthorne 92). Holgrave's persistence betrays the accuracy of the daguerreotype; though it is not the image that Holgrave expects, it is, undeniably, the truth. Barthes and Sontag argue that photographs have strayed far away from conveying any sort of truth of meaning, but Holgrave's daguerreotypes, unfailingly, reveal the truth of Judge Pyncheon's character.

After Judge Pyncheon's death, Holgrave makes another miniature of the Judge, showing it to Phoebe to communicate the reality of the Judge's death. Miniatures are used once again to promote truth and validity instead of beauty. Holgrave uses the miniatures to document the death of Judge Pyncheon, calling the image "a point of evidence that may be useful to Clifford—and also as a memorial valuable to [himself]" (Hawthorne 303). Through representation, Holgrave documents the truth of the Judge's death and reveals this truth to Phoebe.

In Hawthorne's and Wilde's novels, the representers, Holgrave and Basil respectively, attempt to capture beauty of appearance but unintentionally capture truth of being. The spirits of Judge Pyncheon and Dorian, invisible to the naked eye, are morally depraved, and their sins shine through in miniatures and portraits alike. Holgrave's daguerreotypes, however, provide a case for the Judge's true character because they repeatedly offered the same results. Despite all of Holgrave's miniatures of the Judge, each one showed with certainty the reality of the Judge's inner being and his own role as a representation of the Colonel. While representations in literature do not always convey the truth of appearance or existence, they sometimes convey the more important truth of reality.



### 3.2: AUTHENTICITY IN REPRODUCTION: THE ROLE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN CREATING AUTHENTIC LOVE

In *The House of the Seven Gables*, daguerreotypes are used to communicate the reality of present events, but photographs also allow individuals to bring the past into the present, to remember, by looking at a static image, how life used to be. Photographs, however, can also encourage individuals to misremember and idealize the past. In Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Jude struggles to understand the relationship between his idealized version of the present and the truth of reality. His lofty dreams are consistently crushed under the harsh foot of reality, whether in the form of a wife who leaves him, colleges that reject him, or a lover who refuses to wed him. With regard to his relationship with his lover Sue, however, his idealization of Sue's various portraits, mere representations of Sue herself, leads him to find unshakeable beauty in the original. Jude idealizes necessarily imperfect reproductions of Sue, and, even though Jude superimposes this inauthentic ideal over Sue, Jude and Sue create authenticity in love, making their separation all the more powerful.

Jude's admiration of Sue's portrait creates an unhealthy ideal that Sue cannot possibly embody. His first introduction to Sue is not to Sue herself; rather, he learns of her existence first through a photograph: "One day . . . [he] had observed between the brass candlesticks on [his aunt's] mantelpiece the photograph of a pretty girlish face, in a broad hat with radiating folds under the brim like the rays of a halo" (Hardy 54). Jude sees her as an angel, a being that rightfully belongs on the mantel, the center of the home. He first notices the portrait of Sue after his idealized hopes of a future with his wife Arabella have been crushed. Arabella leaves for Australia, leaving behind a portrait of Jude that he had given her as a gift on their wedding day. Arabella's thoughtless action destroys whatever love Jude had felt for Arabella: "The utter death

of every tender sentiment in his wife, as brought home to him by this mute and undersigned evidence of her sale of his portrait and gift, was the conclusive little stroke required to demolish all sentiment in him” (Hardy 51). When Jude purges the memory of Arabella from his heart, he gives Sue the opportunity to step in as his beloved, and she does, however unintentionally. In fact, when Jude’s aunt finally confers the photograph on him, he puts it on the mantelpiece of his own room, placing this idealized, angelic Sue literally at the center of his house and figuratively at the center of his heart.

Jude’s idealization of Sue is perpetuated by the fact that he continues to admire her likeness without getting to know Sue as a person. He catches glimpses of Sue from afar, but he never engages in conversation with her; instead, he “[keeps] watch over her . . . . The consciousness of her living presence stimulate[s] him. But she remain[s] more or less an ideal character, about whose form he [begins] to weave curious and fantastic day-dreams” (Hardy 63). Jude, far from worshiping Sue as she is, worships an ideal form of her that he creates. Even when Jude recognizes that his perception of Sue is likely inaccurate, he is unable to free himself from his misconceptions. He ruminates that “[p]erhaps to know her would be to cure himself of this unexpected and unauthorized passion . . . [but] that, though he desire[s] to know her, he [does] not desire to be cured” (Hardy 70). Jude, in the context of Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” is one who sees the light of the sun and intentionally returns to the cave. He continues studying the shadows—Sue’s portrait—which represents appearance rather than truth (*Republic* 67). Jude intentionally perpetuates his idealization of Sue, knowing that the truth about Sue could shatter this ideal.

Sue herself does not try to cure Jude of his passion; instead, she encourages him in his love. Although Sue pleads innocence, claiming that she “didn’t see what [Jude] felt at all”

(Hardy 116), she permits his love, writing that if he wants to love her, he may, and she'll "never say again that [he] musn't!" (Hardy 114). Sue's letters to Jude paint a second portrait of her, a picture of her personality that she can revise and edit before she seals it in an envelope and sends it off. Jude realizes that Sue is "often not so nice in [her] real presence as [she is] in [her] letters" (Hardy 121). Despite her inconstancy, Jude continues to love Sue for who he believes her to be. He continues to see her as the haloed, angelic figure that he saw when he first noticed her portrait. Even in person, when she is ill and helpless, he "[sees] in her almost a divinity" (Hardy 106). Michael Steig notes that Jude's actions reveal "the tendency of Victorian men to idealize women and feel far beneath them" (263); Jude's idealization of Sue coexists with his self-degradation, and he puts up with her inconstancy in part because of his own insecurities. Jude, therefore, keeps himself from being cured of his passion for Sue by focusing on the divine qualities of her portrait, her written sentiments, and her sickly form, choosing to look past her changeable heart.

Sue reinforces this ideal by giving an additional portrait to Jude, one that he accepts gladly. Sue's portrait, however, is not like the carefully taken and framed photograph that Jude gave to Arabella to declare his love for and commitment to her. Instead, it is a copied photograph that she nearly forgets to give to him (Hardy 101). She also gives a duplicate of the photograph to Phillotson, and she "would have given [it] to any man" (Hardy 119). Like Jude, Phillotson reveres Sue's image, almost kissing it, which Jude actually does (Hardy 60). In his discussion of technologically reproduced photographs, Walter Benjamin asserts that the duplication of any photograph distances it from the true aura and meaning of the original photograph. In this case, the photograph of Sue, which is already an idealized and incomplete representation of Sue herself, loses authenticity of meaning through reproduction. Indeed, multiple replications of the

original liquidate any unique value or authenticity of the reproduction that Sue gives to Jude. Even though such a reproduction allows Jude to carry Sue with him when she is physically absent, the mass creation and distribution of her portrait cheapens the copy she gives to Jude, and “*one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place” (Benjamin 1053). Sue does not fully commit to Jude in the here and now, as seen by her hesitation to wed him, but she is more than willing to give him a reproduction of her likeness that he is more than willing to idealize.

In another example of her casual commitment to Jude, Sue does not cherish only Jude’s photograph. When he catches sight of her “looking at a photograph . . . [and] press[ing] it against her bosom” (Hardy 153), Jude admits to himself that Sue possesses other photographs, but he assures himself that she was looking at his. This serves to further prove Jude’s selective vision; he interprets Sue’s actions with the understanding that her love for him is constant even though he knows her to be changeable. In actuality, Sue cherishes the photographs and memories of Mr. Phillotson and her undergraduate friend, putting their pictures on display in her room at the training school. Ultimately, she returns to Phillotson despite her love for Jude, a return that is foreshadowed by the prominence of Phillotson’s photograph in her life, just as Jude’s continued love for her is predicted by the position of prominence in which Jude puts her photograph.

Despite Sue’s return to Phillotson and her physical sacrifices to prove her love for him, Jude continues to love Sue. Jude clings tightly to the idea that he and Sue are “man and wife, if ever two people were in this world” (Hardy 265). Even though their marriage was not ratified by the church or state, Jude believes that their marriage was a real marriage, one not cheapened by adhering to traditions that have been replicated so often that they have lost their meaning. Significantly, Arabella recognizes Jude and Sue’s union as authentic—more authentic than her

union with Jude and also more authentic than Sue's reunion with Phillotson, which was motivated by the guilt Sue feels for leaving him for Jude in the first place. Arabella suggests that Sue also continues to love Jude: "[Sue's] never found peace since she left [Jude's] arms, and never will again till she's as he is now!" (Hardy 310). At Jude's death, Sue and Jude are separated irrevocably, but the authenticity of their love for each other persists and cannot be replicated by their intimate relationships with Phillotson and Arabella respectively.

Jude's idealization of Sue, therefore, should not necessarily be condemned as an act of blind love but should perhaps be praised as an act of true love. Although Jude's near idolatry of Sue's photograph—a reproduced representation of the original person—creates an impossible ideal for her, he continues to see her through the eyes of love despite her inconstancy and failings. His love for Sue and her love for him grow into a love that is truly authentic and does not need to be ratified by any spiritual or political authority. Authenticity, it would seem, can emerge from representation, no matter how many times it has been removed from the truth.

### 3.3: FINDING MEANING IN MOTION: THE JUXTAPOSITION OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY

Even though there is a danger of idealizing the past, as *Jude the Obscure* reveals, the passage of time is inevitable, and individuals often take photographs so that they can remember the past as it was. The past cannot be fully captured in a photograph, however, and time does not stop simply because a single moment of time has been isolated and framed within the confines of a photograph. Outside of the frame, time continues to pass, and the colors that were so bright and vivid in a photograph become faded, reminding one that one's memories of the past are ideals that cannot be reobtained. Whereas Hardy's novel focuses on Jude's failed attempts to attain an ideal, Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* warns against the idealization of the past. The novel details Willie Talos's political campaign for governor from the perspective of Jack Burden, who interweaves past and present narratives, creating a sense that the past is invaluable to the present but ultimately unattainable. Fading colors are juxtaposed against static images of the past, revealing the inevitable passage of time and the insufficiency of photographs to capture the most important aspect of modern life: motion.

Throughout Warren's novel, fading colors show the inevitable passage of time and speak to humanity's inability to halt time. Several items in the novel are described as once-white, faded, or weathered, and these descriptors indicate that the past is not isolated from the present. Instead, these once-bright objects have passed through time and are still being used in the present. For example, the curtains in Old Man Talos's house are "one-time white but now yellowish lace curtains" (Warren 36). The curtains have yellowed because of the "slow swell of Time which had fed into [the] room" (Warren 37). Time's passage is slow, constant, and

inevitable, and neither the room nor the persons who have lived in that room could escape from the passing of time.

On the other hand, photographs act as a memorial to the past, a way for humanity to cling to the past in a time of inevitable change. Photographs are intended to capture life as it is but ultimately unearth the differences between the ideal past and the real present. The picture of Willie that hangs in the drug store serves to popularize Willie and to serve as a representation of him when he is not present. Even so, the photograph is inaccurate and “don’t do [Willie] no credit” (Warren 10), proving that it is an imperfect representation of him. Despite this imperfect representation, the citizenry still recognizes Willie when he comes to visit, but the real person is privileged over the representation, unlike Feuerbach’s assertion.

Another photograph, Lucy and Willie’s wedding picture, emphasizes the difference between the past and the present and reinforces the concept that change is inevitable. Jack suggests that Lucy “could think about all that had happened since she was a girl teaching her first year...and had married a red-faced and red-necked farm boy . . . (you can look at the wedding picture which has been in the papers along with a thousand other pictures of Willie) . . . . She would have had a lot to think about . . . for there had been a lot of changes” (Warren 6). Jack mentions the wedding photograph as a point of comparison with the present. The wedding picture is only a reproduction of a single moment of reality, but it is an effective visual tool for Lucy to identify the differences between the day of her wedding to a “red-necked farm boy” (6) and the years of Willie’s political campaigns.

Photographs do not only affect how one understands the relationship between the past and the present, but they also affect how future generations will think about the present. The staged photographs at Old Man Talos’s house reveal both the inaccuracy of photography as a

means of capturing the present and the frequency with which photographs are used to portray reality to posterity. The photograph of Willie outside of Old Man Talos's house is staged to create an inaccurate image of a man with man's best friend for campaigning purposes. The photographer wants Buck, the dog, in the shot even though the dog refuses to move. Jack's vague job description apparently includes "lift[ing] up fifteen-year-old, hundred-and-thirty-five-pound hairy, white dogs on summer afternoons and paint[ing] an expression of unutterable bliss upon their faithful features as they gaze deep, deep into the Boss's eyes" (Warren 39). Jonathan Cullick, a professor of English who has written extensively about Robert Penn Warren, asserts that there is a difference between the image Willie hopes to convey and the reality of his character, and that this scene "amusingly emphasizes the division between [Willie's] character and the representations of his character that he would impose into history" (61). Jack and the photographer, therefore, create a scene that is untrue in order to elicit an emotional response from those who see the photograph. This photograph, therefore, captures a staged, inaccurate version of the present that contrasts with the reality of the present.

This inaccuracy is significant because it shapes the way future generations will understand and interpret the past. The photographs taken at Old Man Talos's house are "documents for posterity" (Warren 42), but the imperfections of the photographs ensure that reality is not immortalized. Instead, an imperfect representation of reality is immortalized and popularized as reality. Cullick further suggests that "there is no representation without interpretation—there is no recollection without revision" (59). This echoes Sontag's sentiment that photography recycles reality; no matter how accurate a representation may be, interpretation and revision are still necessary in order to make meaning of a representation. Sometimes, however, clever marketing removes one's ability to correctly interpret a representation. Just as



the newspaper readers saw a static, carefully staged portrait of Willie and Lucy's wedding, the future viewers of these photographs will see only an imperfect representation of Willie, Buck, and Willie's childhood home but will be able to assume only that the photograph with which they have been presented is a true representation of reality.

Both the fading colors and the imperfect photographs reinforce Jack's assertion that change is inevitable and necessary for life. Jack contends that "Life is Motion" (Warren 214); the fading colors show the constant passage of time, and the photographs serve as a point of comparison between the past and the present, illuminating the differences between the two and revealing how much has changed. In addition, Jack warns against the blind acceptance of purported truth by continuing that "Life is Motion toward Knowledge" (214). This modern journey of finding meaning is a process, and it is impossible for an unchanging image to perfectly represent the complexities of the present to posterity. Joseph Millichap, an expert on Robert Penn Warren and in photography, notes that "on the one hand, [photographs] represent fixed moments in time, stopped in the motion of history. On the other hand, they are part of the flux of history . . . they both reflect and distort reality at once" (151). This is similar to Sontag's discussion of photography as both a poison and a cure, "appropriating reality and a means of making it obsolete" (179). The photographs of Willie create a new reality that should ultimately prevent the viewers of the photographs from believing that such a staged reality would ever be authentic. Rather, the photographs should serve as useful tools for illuminating the differences between the past and the present so that the continuing journey of finding knowledge takes into account the impossibility of returning to the past.

Faded colors cannot be restored and photographs cannot be restaged and relived, but this does not mean that they are unimportant. Both illustrate the inevitable passage of time and the

impossibility of returning to a past that remains unreachable. Restaged photographs further serve as a reminder that photographs do not necessarily convey truth. In such cases, a photographer uses an ideal in his mind to create an inauthentic scene that is subsequently photographically represented and technologically reproduced, thus removing the photograph three times from truth. Where previous texts question the relationship between an idealized appearance and reality, Warren's novel questions the relationship between an idealized past and the present. The "tick" and "tock" of time cannot be stopped; thus, the events of the present continue to ripple outward, influencing how future generations perceive the past. Future generations, however, must realize that photographs are only static images, imperfect representations of a reality that is, itself, constantly changing. They must perceive the faded colors and the aging subjects of photographs and recognize the disparity between the past and the present as they press ever onward in their search for knowledge, meaning, and truth.

### 3.4: THE PROLIFERATION OF REPRESENTATION

In the age of digital photography, it is ever easier to take pictures and ever harder to remember that pictures represent a static past that moves further away with every passing second. Digital photographs do not become discolored or worn, and, even if they are eventually printed, a weathered, sun-faded, or otherwise damaged photograph can simply be printed again. It would seem that the present age is an age of the proliferation of photography, where everyone has photographs of everything. In Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, a satirical narrative detailing a suburban family's response to an airborne toxic event, the effects of a postmodern, consumeristic culture are at the forefront. The family members, like the others around them, consume photographs, images, and representations without pause but ultimately find themselves devoid of the truth of beauty, truth, or meaning that photographic representation once promised to convey.

Jack Gladney, the father, step-father, and Hitler Studies scholar, is caught between nostalgia for the past and the consumerism of the present, and this struggle manifests itself in his relationship to photographs. One night, he and his wife, Babette, flip through old family photo albums for hours, reflecting nostalgically on an idealized past that they cannot, per Jameson, ever reobtain. They look through pictures of "children wincing in the sun, women in sun hats, men shading their eyes from the glare as if the past possessed some quality of light we no longer experience, a Sunday dazzle that caused people in their churchgoing clothes to tighten their faces and stand at an angle to the future, somewhat averted it seemed . . . skeptical of something in the nature of the box camera" (DeLillo 30). One can interpret the "quality of light [they] no longer experience" (DeLillo 30) as the metaphorical sun of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"—the sun that once conveyed truth and meaning is no longer. The people in the photographs look skeptically at

the camera, as if they know that a proliferation of photographs will negatively affect their ability to perceive and understand truth.

On the other hand, Jack also experiences life in a culture that is inundated with images. The Most Photographed Barn in America, a tourist site not far from his house, is a bit of a conundrum: people take pictures of it because it is the most photographed barn in America, but it is the most photographed barn in America because people continue to take pictures of it. Unlike Walter Benjamin, who believes that every technological reproduction of an original reduces its aura, Murray, Jack's colleague, believes that "every photograph reinforces the aura . . . . An accumulation of nameless energies" (DeLillo 12). It is important that tourists take photographs of the barn so that it can retain its identity.

In this sense, the photograph establishes identity, but the lens that the tourists place between the barn and the eye inhibits their ability to see the barn as it is. Murray suggests that "once you've seen the signs about the barn, it becomes impossible to see the barn" (DeLillo 12). This reflects Sontag's beliefs that taking pictures at tourist traps is a way for a tourist to claim power and seize control of an unpredictable and unfamiliar situation: "A way of certifying experience, taking photographs is also a way of refusing it—by limiting experience to a search for the photogenic, by converting experience into an image, a souvenir. Travel becomes a strategy for accumulating photographs . . . . Most tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter" (Sontag 9-10). The drive to accumulate photographs is one that reflects the broader culture of consumerism; places and experiences, immaterial things that cannot be bought or collected, can be relegated to a photograph that can be collected. Furthermore, Sontag suggests that tourist photography is also a "friendly imitation of work" (10) that satisfies the American work ethic that is, of course, driven

by consumerism. Although previous texts consider a single representer, whether a painter or a photographer, and his or her work, DeLillo introduces thousands of nameless photographers who each bring an unknown meaning to his or her own work. The reader of DeLillo's novel cannot know the effects of the photographs on the photographers; instead, one can only observe that the photographers choose to participate in the creation of photographs that perpetuate the identity of the barn as the Most Photographed Barn in America.

At the same time, Murray seems to suggest that there is something worthwhile in engaging in the ritual of taking pictures of the Most Photographed Barn in America. He says that being at the barn "is a kind of spiritual surrender. We've agreed to be part of a collective perception. This literally colors our vision. A religious experience in a way, like all tourism" (DeLillo 12). For Murray, the act of participating in a collective consciousness, a collective vision, is more important than the photograph that the tourists take with them when they leave.

In the field of visual literacy, this collective perception or coloring of vision can be interpreted as a rhetorical gaze: "the acts of 'looking' that occur both within and around (or at) an image: who is looking, how they are looking, why they are looking, where they are looking, and who/what is being looked at" (Hesford and Brueggemann 11). Traveling gaze, one iteration of rhetorical gaze, involves two major components: identification and difference; the tourist both identifies with others and comes to notice the difference that persist between the self and the other. In photographing the barn, the tourists can come to know their similarities with each other—they are all participating in this single act that perpetuates the identification of the barn as the Most Photographed Barn in America—and their differences—whether they use a tripod, a telephoto lens, or a filter kit (DeLillo 12). By participating in this cultural phenomenon, an act

that Sontag believes is a grab for power and dominance, perhaps the individuals do learn to see the face of the other—and, by extension, the faces of themselves.

Thus, while DeLillo appears to be satirizing the prevalence and proliferation of photography in the world today, he also reveals something beautiful about participating in a collective consciousness—an aura different than Benjamin's definition of the aura of the original, but an aura, nonetheless. By experiencing that which others have experienced and will experience, one can come to better know the other and the self. The removes from truth seem to fall away when each person creates an image that is unique to him or her because he or she took it; truth seems to be less valuable than a memento from a particular experience. Even though the photographs themselves are incapable of returning the tourists to the past, the process of taking that picture shows an involvement in a larger, albeit consumer, consciousness.

## 4: CONCLUSION: PHOTOGRAPHY AS EXPERIENCE

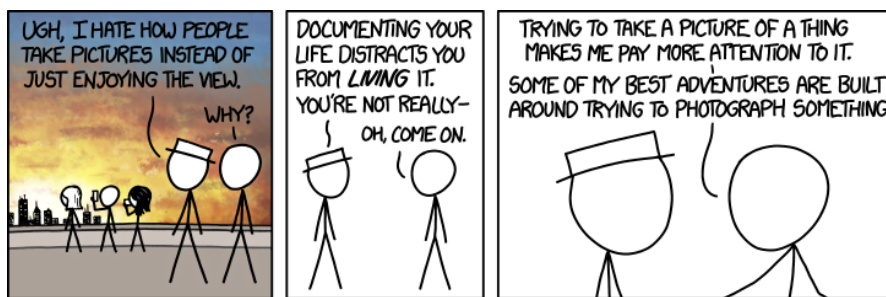


Fig. 2. Munroe, Randall. “Photos.” Webcomic. *xkcd*. *xkcd*, 8 Jan. 2014. Web. 6 Apr. 2016.

From Plato to Magritte to DeLillo, the role of representation has been ever-changing. Plato’s fears that representation would remove one further and further from the truth seem to be warranted, but this should be feared only if the truth is the ultimate end. Through its use in literature, representations have served the purpose of portraying the truth of external realities, but they have also inspired the imagination, revealed internal realities, and encouraged participation in community experiences. As Figure 2 shows, photography is not only a way to document the past, but can also be a way to experience the present and provide even an amateur photographer with a new way of looking at and living in the world. Representation may have its faults when conveying the truth, but the truth is not the only end of representation—nor is the end only beauty, only authenticity, only originality, or only experience.

To illustrate the variety of ways in which people experience the world, the image of Don DeLillo’s *Most Photographed Barn in America* can be contrasted with the scenes in which his characters experience the sunset. The novel is bookended by the *Most Photographed Barn in America*, a tourist trap that exists because of tourists’ willingness to engage in a consumer consciousness, and Jack and his family waiting, along with strangers and neighbors, to watch the sun set. They are awed by the sunset, but there is a deeper question of meaning that also arises: “we don’t know whether we are watching in wonder or dread, we don’t know what we are

watching or what it means, we don't know whether it is permanent, a level of experience to which we will gradually adjust, into which our uncertainty will eventually be absorbed, or just some atmospheric weirdness, soon to pass" (DeLillo 324-5). Sontag suggests that photography acts as both a poison and a cure, but, in this scene, the world affects Jack in the same way, causing him to look at the world differently. Everyone experiences the sunset differently, and "there are people walking dogs, there are kids on bikes, [and there is] a man with a camera and long lens, waiting for his moment" (DeLillo 325). For a moment, by whatever means—including photography—they enter into a shared consciousness that comes from really, truly looking at the world. Perhaps photography teaches a certain way of looking at the world that begins with the lens of the camera and finishes in the lens of the eye.

At its inception, photography was concerned with truth-telling. It verified the existence of people, places, and things. It showed the world as it was, and not as painters desired it to be. Even so, the history of representation, and, specifically, the history of the motif of representation in literature, shows a past that is troubled and a future that is uncertain. While photography was lauded for its ability to tell the truth, photography soon turned to capturing that which was beautiful, then to determining what was beautiful, and finally to rejecting both the true and the beautiful in favor of something more ambiguous.

DeLillo's meditation on photography, one that both satirizes and praises photography, mirrors Sontag's assertion that one cannot truly know the goodness of a photograph. If photography does indeed recycle reality as she asserts, perhaps photography is simply a new way of looking at the world, a new gaze through which multitudes of people can interpret their surroundings. Perhaps photography is neither good nor bad, neither true nor illusive, or perhaps it is both. Perhaps photography, in some sense, defers interpretation, and perhaps each



photograph means something different to each person who takes it, even if the image represented in the photograph is the same. Perhaps we pay more attention to things when we photograph them, and perhaps it is the adventure that matters—not necessarily the adventure or animation of looking at the photograph, as Barthes asserts, but in the act of taking a photograph. Perhaps photography is an imitation of work, but perhaps it is necessary work—work to understand the self, the other, and the context in which the two make meaning of the world. Perhaps we have removed ourselves from the concern of removes from truth, a fourth remove from truth that allows us to represent new meanings through the act of representation.

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