

The Platonism of Walter Pater

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Abstract

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After graduating from the *Literae Humaniores* course, which after the mid-nineteenth century came to revolve around Plato's *Republic*, Walter Pater's (1839-1894) professional duties spanning thirty years at Oxford were those of a philosophy teacher and lecturer of Plato. This thesis examines Pater's deep engagement with Platonism in his work, from his earliest known piece, "Diaphaneitè" (1864), to his final book, *Plato and Platonism* (1893), treating both his criticism and fiction, including his studies on myth.

Plato is an ideal philosopher, critic, and artist to Pater, exemplifying a literary craftsman who blends genres with the highest authority. Platonism is a point of contact with several of Pater's contemporaries, such as Arnold and Wilde, from which we can take new measure of their critical relationships regarding aestheticism and Decadence. Pater's idea of aesthetic education takes Platonism for its model, which heightens one's awareness of reality in the recognition of form and matter.

Platonism also provides a framework for critical encounters with figures across history, such as Wordsworth, Michelangelo and Pico della Mirandola in *The Renaissance* (1873), Marcus Aurelius and Apuleius in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), and Montaigne and Giordano Bruno in *Gaston de Latour* (1896). In the manner Platonism holds that soul or mind is the essence of a person, Pater's criticism, evident even in his fiction, seeks the mind of the author, so that his writing enacts Platonic love.

Through close reading, we highlight his many references to Plato, identify Platonic subjects and themes, and explore etymological nuances in the very selection of his words, which often reveals a Platonic tendency of refinement towards immateriality, from seen to unseen beauty. As a teacher and an author Pater helped shape Oxonian Platonism, and through his writing we examine how Platonism informs his philosophy of aesthetics, history, myth, epistemology, ethics, language, and style.

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Introduction

Influence

When Walter Pater (1839-1894) was asked by a friend what his “favourite intimate passages” were, foremost was the maxim of Plato: “Honour the soul; for each man’s soul changes, according to the nature of his deeds, for better or worse” (Sharp 810). Many of the motivations in Pater’s work are found in this imperative. As in much of Plato’s writing, what at first sight is ethical includes education and aesthetics. The Platonic imperative makes a great claim for the power of influence, the power of art upon one, for example, as both an observer and a creator, so that one’s consideration of influence becomes as scrupulous as religion, a sort of religion of consciousness of one’s surroundings. The maxim also commands a respect for self and self-knowledge, towards which Plato’s Socrates urges his interlocutors, which education helps cultivate. The statement blends the concrete with the metaphysical, and is hopeful, patently arguing for people to inform their own malleable characters. Plato’s aesthetics includes ethics because he finds people so susceptible to their environment: “men’s souls are,” writes Pater in his last book, “according to Plato’s view, the creatures of what men see and hear” (*Plato* 271). Exposing ourselves to, or removing ourselves from, certain influences are acts of great consequence to Pater.

What we mean by Pater’s Platonism will unfold throughout our study, but can be immediately described in the manner Pater describes Platonism, as a tendency or habit of thinking. Pater’s Platonism reveals itself through aspirations towards truth, largely through beauty. His works show and declare the desire for *cosmos*, or unity, and harmony. He concerns himself with the continuity of ages, through the possibility of metempsychosis and the reminiscence of knowledge, which holds that persons can access past ideas within their own minds. Platonism holds that mind, as part of our

soul, is the most real thing in the world, and therefore the thing most worth knowing. Not only does Pater turn inward to plumb the depth of his own mind, but in his criticism, while interpreting the words of another, he ultimately seeks the mind of the author. And the Platonic search is motivated by enthusiasm and love, as explained in the *Phaedrus*. Platonism for Pater is largely the manner in which the dialogues were interpreted at Oxford: it idealizes Plato as literary craftsman, and it extends, as his career progresses, to include the narrative interests of some of Plato's later Christian interpreters.

Cultural Background

Despite Pater's Platonic ambitions for universality, that is, to be unbound by ephemeral concerns (indeed evident in these ambitions), he is partly a product of historical conditions, and therefore our study is grounded in Victorian Oxford. Pater went up to Oxford as a student of the Queen's College in 1858, when Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893) was succeeding in making Plato, especially *The Republic*, the key text for success on *Literae Humaniores*. Jowett, a great University reformer and translator of Plato, taught Pater personally and is said to have remarked while Pater was a student that he had a "mind that will attain eminence" (Wright I 196). The Examination Statute of 1850 moved language work to be examined after second year (Moderations), placing greater importance on history and especially philosophy on final examinations (Shuter 79), so that, although Pater only gained a second-class degree, due perhaps to his truant, eclectic reading, his fellowship at Brasenose in 1864 is said to be owed to his strength in philosophy. Indeed his first lectures were in the history of philosophy. Of the thirty-eight lectures he gave to the University from 1872 to 1892 all but one were on philosophy, the large majority being on Plato's *Republic*, while most others were on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. Plato and Aristotle

complemented each other on the *Greats* course, as many of the guide books of that era repeat: success required knowing both texts extremely well, especially where they are tangential; so it can be said that Pater bore the crux of Oxford's most valuable teaching. Pater is often associated with the University of Oxford, and although his influence reaches well beyond, it is worthwhile to explore how his many years and duties at Oxford influence his writing. This study reveals some of the important consequences of his studying and teaching Plato, conversing, contemplating, and answering questions on Platonism for over three decades. Our title, "The Platonism of Walter Pater," signals influence in two directions. Representing a genitive in the grammar of classical languages, "of" simultaneously refers to the Platonism that he learned, and metaphorically took within him, as "of" signals possession; then "of" refers to the Platonism that he generated, the Platonism foremost in his work which he in turn begot in others. The Platonism he learned and taught seems to be the brightest intellectual light refracted through his writing.

Another significant factor of Pater's place and time is that the traditional matrix of learning had barely broken apart into different areas of specialization. Before lectures were combined in the University a college don was expected to teach everything that would prepare his students for examination, as Mark Pattison explains in his *Memoirs* (1885) (214-15). Pater was part of the first generation where teaching labour was divided, so greater emphasis could be given to ideas rather than language and translation; but a sense of the don's eclectic ability to teach history, literature, philosophy, classics, and religion, in one, still remained. As Pattison writes of "Philosophy at Oxford" in 1876, "Philosophy has no substantive existence of its own. It is an appendage of our classical training. 'Classics' have always been the strength

of Oxford education. They are still” (90). It might be regarded as an advantage, rather than a weakness, to have philosophy approached by the literary-minded.

Pater is not alone as a figure who lectured in philosophy, although his greatest strengths might be said to lie outside of philosophy. Benjamin Jowett is not judged to be a philosopher by today’s standards either. He knows Ancient Greek very well, and yet as a holder of a clerical post he cannot freely interpret the Bible, the book of greatest importance to him. In Jowett’s controversial article in *Essays and Reviews* (1860), “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” he continually argues that Scripture ought to be interpreted in the same manner that we interpret Plato. If the restrictions on interpreting the Bible were relaxed, he argues, we could find agreement, as we agree on Plato (426). He reveals a great amount of faith in the critic’s ability to understand the written word. His argument caused a scandal, but he was left to interpret Plato; and the publication of his *Dialogues* (1871) was actually largely met with agreement and its volumes were widely read, well into the twentieth century.

Platonism in any age—beginning with Aristotle, the Church Fathers, through the Middle Age to rebirths of classical literature, the many Neoplatonisms—is an act of literary interpretation, into cultural translation. The dialogues are not analytical expositions in the manner of Aristotle, or even of Bishop Butler’s *Analogy of Religion* (1736), which they came to replace on the *Greats* required reading list. *The Analogy* came off the compulsory reading list around 1860 (Newsome 76), more than coincidentally when Plato’s *Republic* had gained dominance. The replacement with a text that demands and encourages translation fit the needs of an educational culture in which literary criticism was entering new terrain, especially more religious terrain, as evident in such work as Ernest Renan’s (1823-1892) religious criticism throughout the 1850s, which culminates in *Vie de Jésus* (1863). Although he never desired to be so

controversial, Pater was influenced by these figures, and also by Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), who argues in *Literature and Dogma* (1873) that literary critics have real authority in the highest matters of the word. Perhaps more than anything, because of its catholic inclusion of life's important themes, from art to the after-life, Platonism not only ushers in, but fosters a critical spirit. Pater significantly refers to Plato's writing as "dialogues of search." Philosophy within classics was defined liberally as a temper to remain open to critical discovery.

Much of the Plato that Pater learned and taught is a result of these conditions. Billie Inman has closely studied many of Pater's intellectual influences and declares that "Pater probably had no quarrel with Jowett's basic approach to Plato, expressed in his preface to Volume I" (1871) (30). She does believe, however, that they differ over their interpretation of the *Symposium*, specifically the treatment of boy-love (31). They share common influences such as Edward Zeller (1814-1908) and Lewis Campbell (1830-1908), and, rather negatively, George Grote (1794-1871). Looking back in his biography on what Jowett's academic purpose amounted to around 1850, Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell write: "Jowett felt the responsibility of reorganizing the Final Examination in Classics, especially in the direction of encouraging the study of Plato, the History of Philosophy, and the illustration of Ancient Philosophy by Modern" (I 215). This direction continues to be followed by Pater's *Plato and Platonism* (1893).

Plato was particularly timely because he could be used to argue against the rising materialism of the age. He also encouraged intuition in criticism, the recognition of experiences that cannot be fully explained by science, with a healthy amount of empirical scepticism, which limits what can be known by our senses, and an appreciation of style in the consideration of content. Bringing Platonism to the

syllabus expanded internal life and encouraged the growth of a sort of individual Theism, where the Divine might be reached internally through conscience, rather than by Deistic means, which seeks to prove the existence of God through external nature, and thus detaches man from a Creator. Newman states in his *Grammar of Assent* (1870) that he disliked Butler's *Analogy of Religion* for this very reason of trying too much to prove the existence of God negatively from nature (246). The analogical structure of the individual soul and society in *The Republic* can accommodate the statement that the Kingdom of God is within, expanding man's inner life. Matthew Arnold articulates this view in *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-68) when he writes, "Religion says: *The kingdom, of God is within you;* and culture, in like manner, places human perfection in an *internal* condition, in the growth and predominance of our humanity proper, as distinguished from our animality" (11). The power thought to be inherent in at least certain individuals was demanding greater freedom in the University. And with divine nature to be located within man, searching for and describing His nature outside of oneself, and scrutinizing dogma, could be neglected, for the sake of matters closer at hand. Platonism offers a platform upon which to stand, clear of the impediments of Christian doctrine, and yet broad enough to reach most of life's important aspects that can be explained by Christianity. It is also one of the rare philosophies that offers an explanation of beauty, even in the works of man, an explanation of the real nature of language, the cause of a person's emotional life, of love, desire, and how love may be channelled so that one may achieve a kind of personal perfection. The same humanistic principles which Pater ascribes to Pico della Mirandola's Platonism in *The Renaissance* (1873), as embodied in his "The Dignity of Man," are evident in Pater.

Yet despite the deep importance of Plato at Oxford, as an answer to a liberal need, there is little evidence that he was used overtly as an ideological tool. The results of interpretation and translation of Plato, although different in degrees as filtered through different minds, reveal that they were carried out under critical sincerity, if not without educational prejudice, especially the influence of Christianity. Undeniably, however, Platonism offered a new and fertile method for looking at things, paradoxically new in the sense that the students and teachers of the *Greats* course shared Platonism with so many great minds and cultures of the past, thus providing a welcome sense of continuity.

Pater Criticism

In general, much criticism on Pater has been useful to our study. The painstaking research of Billie Inman's books about Pater's library records which trace many of the references in his writing are beneficial to anyone interested in ideas that influence him.¹ Laurel Brake is another major figure in Pater studies, who, besides her book *Walter Pater* (1994), and work on Pater within journal culture, has helped edit two influential collections: with Ian Small, *Pater in the 1990s* (1991), and with Lesley Higgins and Carolyn Williams, *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire* (2002). Both collections show the dynamism of Pater studies, including various perspectives from gender theory to reception theory, to historiography and mythography. More recently a similar collection of articles appeared in the journal *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, which devoted an issue to "Studies in Walter Pater" (2008), edited by Bénédicte Coste. An encouraging consensus in these collections in general, and reiterated by John Coates's recent collection of essays, *Pater as Controversialist*

¹ *Walter Pater's Reading: a bibliography of his library borrowings and literary references, 1858-1873* (1981) and *Walter Pater and his reading, 1874-1877: with a bibliography of his library borrowings, 1878-1894* (1990).

(2011), is that Pater is no mere painter in words, but a remarkably polyvalent intellect engaged with many important issues of his day.

Gerald Monsman's criticism exerts a strong influence, his books such as *Pater's Portraits: Mythic Pattern in the Fiction of Walter Pater* (1967) and *Walter Pater's Art of Autobiography* (1980) reveal patterns in Pater's writing, and lend confidence to a study which also sees consistent themes in his work. David J. DeLaura's *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England: Newman, Arnold, and Pater* (1969) frames an intellectual lineage with which we find sympathy. William Shuter has been important to this study, for articles that situate Pater within the *Greats* course and consider him through his role as Classics don.² In Kate Hext's "Recent Scholarship on Walter Pater" (2008), she declared that, although Stefano Evangelista had lately examined the influence of classics on Pater's work, especially in *Greek Studies*, more work needs to be done on the subject (415-16), and our study helps fulfil this need. Furthermore, Shuter's *Rereading Walter Pater* (1997) effectively shows Pater's concern with continuity in his work, as he revises earlier work to correspond to later, and returns to certain themes.

R. M. Seiler has contributed valuable source books, with *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage* (1980), containing many contemporary reviews on Pater's work, and *Walter Pater: A Life Remembered* (1987), which gathers together a large assortment of biographical descriptions of Pater and his work. Samuel Wright's *A Bibliography of the Writings of Walter H. Pater* (1975), has also been helpful for the details of the dates and placements of Pater's publications.

² "Pater as Don." *Prose Studies* 11.1 (May) 41-60, and "Pater, Wilde, Douglas and the Impact of the 'Greats.'" *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)* 46.3 (2003): 250-78.

There has been important cultural criticism that explores the effect of Platonism in England around the middle of the nineteenth century, examining the phenomenon of Benjamin Jowett's transformation of the *Literae Humaniores* course at Oxford, also known as *Greats* or classics. Jowett's enthusiasm for Plato, including him on the reading list until he eventually dominated the course, and his introductions to and translations of Plato's dialogues, appearing first in 1871, made a gigantic impact on the intellectual landscape of Victorian England, and beyond. His incorporation of Hellenism in the nineteenth century has been discussed in two major studies, Richard Jenkyns's *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (1980) and Frank M. Turner's *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (1981), which place Pater's Platonism within broad contexts that are illuminating. Due to the large scope of these studies, however, they rather crudely sketch Pater's understanding of Platonism: Turner exaggerates the influence of George Grote's scepticism and J. S. Mill's Utilitarianism on Pater (410), while Jenkyns believes Pater's interpretations of Plato are actually perverse (253). A fairer treatment of Pater's Platonism in context of nineteenth-century England comes more recently in a very fertile work by Patricia Cruzalegui Sotelo, *The Platonic Experience: in Nineteenth Century England* (1998), translated from Catalan into English in 2006. Her close but expansive study of Jowett's Platonism allows her to see the ways in which Pater shared much of Jowett's appreciation of the philosopher, both seeing Plato as a poet and artist, for example, and both mitigating Plato's metaphysics to a tendency in their aversion towards rigid dogma, while yet maintaining religious aspects. Although she correctly traces some of the influence of Grote upon Pater, like Turner, she exaggerates Pater's kind of scepticism, calling it even "nihilistic" (635). Although Pater is frequently questioning what he examines, he does not relinquish hope in knowledge. Cruzalegui judges Pater

to be more sceptical than Grote and yet more contemplative than Jowett (654). In general, she sees Pater's reading of Plato as deeply relativistic, aestheticist, and homosexual, grouping him alongside J. A. Symonds (1840-1893) and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) in these regards. This last reading is most current.

In recent criticism, Victorian Platonism is usually viewed through the perspective of gender criticism. Pater's Platonism is explored in Linda Dowling's influential *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (1994), where Tractarianism is seen as leaving an enduring impression, especially in lingering monastic principles (40), which led into the pederastic method of the tutorial system said to be encouraged by Plato. Dowling relates how the teaching of Plato helped bring about awareness of homosexuality, and caused confusion among students. More recently Stefano Evangelista, in "Platonic Dons, Adolescent Bodies: Benjamin Jowett, John Addington Symonds, Walter Pater" (2007), has observed a similar effect through Platonism. Both have suggested an indefinable anguish that may have resulted in a sexual awakening through Plato's dialogues in someone like Symonds, who in dealing with male-male desire was compelled to write "A Problem in Greek Ethics" in the 1870s, perhaps due to Jowett's naïve complicity in promoting what was then anti-social and illegal behaviour. Lesley Higgins draws lines more decisively, in "Jowett and Pater: Trafficking in Platonic Wares" (1993), arguing that they opposed each other as "chief proponents of an intense intellectual and ideological struggle for control over the Platonic canon" (44), the one advocating heterosexuality with certain dialogues, the other homosexuality with different dialogues. But truly Jowett and Pater share the same canon, mostly built around *The Republic*, while using other dialogues as complementary. Although Jowett met with some awkward passages in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, and perhaps twisted some explanations, he did not try

to suppress the dialogues which treat of love—the *Phaedrus* was traditionally a popular dialogue at Oxford, and was recommended to students in *Greats*' guidebooks from the 1860s (Burrows 138).

The strong influence of Platonism at Oxford, and Jowett's translation of Plato into English literally and culturally, coincides with a period of great sociological transformation. Only within Jowett's and Pater's careers were dons allowed to keep their fellowships when they married. And though Platonism is a valuable means to approach the nature of homosexuality, it might also be cynically viewed as a method for ensuring that a man's sexual desire for another be not consummated. Although Platonism places an emphasis on physical beauty, it counsels one to transcend bodily love for the sake of intellectual and spiritual love.

As A. C. Benson (1862-1925) carefully suggests in the only authorized biography of Pater in 1906, "his circumstances and environment were favourable to celibacy; and thus he passed through life in a certain mystery, though the secret is told for those who can read it in his writings" (188). Of the story that Edmund Gosse tells him that Jowett held some incriminating love-letters he threatened to produce if Pater were to run for a University post, Benson writes in his diary: "Probably some indiscreet devotion, Pateresquely expressed—for that Pater was ever anything but frigidly Platonic in his affections I decline to believe" (qtd. in Seiler's *Life* 254). Regarding this case Billie Inman has offered some biographical evidence suggesting Pater's sexual practice in her article, "Estrangement and Connection: Walter Pater, Benjamin Jowett, and William M. Hardinge" (1991), arguing that Pater was romantically involved with the undergraduate Hardinge in 1874. However, there are several discussions that glorify chastity in his writings, in *Marius the Epicurean* and *Plato and Platonism*, for examples, promoting sexual abstinence for the sake of

spiritual elevation. These references to sexual abstinence do not contradict Pater's occasional appreciation of male beauty in his writing: indeed it follows the characteristic of Socrates in the Platonic dialogues.

From early on some critics have associated Pater's philosophy primarily with Platonism. John Bailey's "A Modern Platonist" (1911) argues that Pater's reputation as an Epicurean and a hedonist has finally been dismissed, and focuses on the ascetic tendencies witnessed in *Marius* and *Plato*. Poet and critic Lionel Johnson (1867-1902), graduate of New College in 1890, recognizes the Platonic method in Pater's criticism, declaring that it is, "like the ideas of Plato, ever tending towards a personality" (qtd. in Seiler 203).

M. Lauster and Robert Vilain have shown how Pater influenced German speaking culture through his Platonism, from the mid-1890s in Vienna.³ German language writers Hugo von Hoffmannsthal (1874-1929), Rudolf Kassner (1873-1959), and Rudolf Borchardt (1877-1945) through Pater saw a strong link between Englishness and Platonism, treating the critical essay as an extension of the Platonic dialogue and at times even writing dialogues, with characters based on Pater in Oxford settings (Lauster 122-24, 140). For these foreign writers Pater's defining trait was Platonism.

Biographically Pater is often described as following a Platonic way of life, by those who knew him. His closest friend at Brasenose in his later years, F. W. Bussell, who himself wrote *The School of Plato* (1896), declares in Pater's memorial service that, "His whole life seemed to me to be the gradual consecration of an exquisite sense of beauty to the highest ends; an almost literally exact advance through the stages of admiration in the Symposium, till at last he reached the sure haven, the One

³ Robert Vilain. "The Reception of Walter Pater in Germany and Austria." *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*. Ed. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, and Carolyn Williams. (2002): 63-72.

Source of all that is fair and good” (qtd. in Seiler 180). In the final “Valedictory” chapter of *Renaissance Fancies and Studies* (1895), Vernon Lee (1856-1935), close friend of Pater and his sisters, who sometimes stayed at their home during the summer months, wrote of a comparable “spiritual evolution of Walter Pater,” which is “significantly similar to that of his own Marius. He began as an æsthete,” writes Lee, “and ended as a moralist. By faithful and self-restraining cultivation of the sense of harmony, he appears to have risen from the perception of visible beauty to the knowledge of beauty of the spiritual kind, both being expressions of the same perfect fittingness to an ever more intense and various and congruous life” (255-56). “Such an evolution,” she continues, “which is in the highest meaning, an æsthetic phenomenon in itself, required a wonderful spiritual endowment and unflinchingly discriminating habit.” Lee relates his very style to be the “aspiration after orderliness, congruity” (257), sees “a certain exclusiveness” in his character, and declares that, “like Plato,” he was “a teacher of self-discipline and harmony” (257-58). The poet and critic Mary Duclaux, née Robinson, (1857-1944), a friend and neighbour in London during the late-eighties, early-nineties, wrote in 1925 that Pater paused in Plato’s garden and “appears to have found repose and relief there, after his long and, on the whole, vain excursion to the Catacombs” (qtd. in Seiler’s *Life* 75). The underground significantly seems to have replaced the Inferno, but Pater always rises into a spiritual, Platonic paradise. These narratives are being recounted, we might remember, by people who knew Pater in years after his publication of *The Renaissance*, and may exaggerate his earlier vagaries in comparison to his later spirituality. They may also be influenced by a close intimacy with his writings in which a similar narrative is often repeated.

Pater himself applies this narrative to the philosopher in *Plato*:

He who in the *Symposium* describes so vividly the pathway, the ladder, of love, its joyful ascent towards a more perfect beauty than we have ever yet actually seen, by way of parallel to the gradual elevation of mind towards perfect knowledge, knew all that, we may be sure—τὰ ἐρωτικά—all the ways of lovers, in the literal sense. He speaks of them retrospectively indeed, but knows well what he is talking about. Plato himself had not been always a mere Platonic lover; was rather, naturally, as he makes Socrates say of himself, ἥττων τῶν καλῶν—subject to the influence of fair persons. A certain penitential colour amid that glow of fancy and expression, hints that the final harmony of his nature had been but gradually beaten out, and invests the temperance, actually so conspicuous in his own nature, with the charms of a patiently elaborated effect of art. (*Plato* 135-36)

“A certain penitential colour amid that glow” might call to mind a burning ingot being hammered into shape by will, and yet there remains in this very self-moulding, perhaps because it derives from the self, much of his own nature. This struggle emphasizes in his character the Platonic virtue of temperance, like the figure of Charmides, whom Pater praises in works such as *Marius* and *Plato*.

Pater continually sees beauty in the ethical reserve of someone’s character, in critical subjects and fictional characters alike. The curtailment of excess of any sort in a work of art, is applied to the conduct of a person, so that even in “Winckelmann,” for example, when he is successful, his “perfection is a narrow perfection,” “a feverish nursing of one motive” (*Renaissance* 185). There is a sentiment throughout *The Renaissance* that physical relationships—any secondary obligation—will cause an artist to deviate from a true path. The unity of the Renaissance is made possible by single-mindedness. “Art,” in the “Conclusion,” offers us the most, “proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass” (239); but Pater always implies that the relationship is reciprocal, that artists must also give their best moments to art.

Although there are many references to Plato, and Platonism is often an explanatory philosophy for the subjects of *The Renaissance*, through to his

mythography in *Greek Studies* and characters in his fiction, Pater ultimately devotes his last book to Plato. The trend of some of Pater's critical subjects, and fictional characters, especially Marius, but also Gaston, was followed in Pater's eventual portrait of Plato. There are some biographical affinities in the sketch which are difficult not to compare with Pater himself. He often makes Athens appear like Oxford, to which he had returned to live from London around the publication of *Plato and Platonism* in 1893. He writes of Plato:

For the future he sought no more to pass beyond the charmed theoretic circle, "speaking wisdom," as was said of Pythagoras, only "among the perfect." He returns finally to Athens; and there, in the quiet precincts of the *Acadêmus*, which has left a somewhat dubious name to places where people come to be taught or to teach, founds, not a state, not even a brotherhood, but only the first college, with something of a common life, of communism on that small scale, with Aristotle for one of its scholars, with its chapel, its gardens, its library with the authentic text of his *Dialogues* upon the shelves: we may just discern the sort of place through the scantiest notices. His reign was after all to be in his writings. (148)

"*Dialogues*" simply refers to Jowett's editions, which Pater's library records reveal he frequently borrowed throughout his career. The references to a return to college life, which includes Aristotle, like the *Greats* course, and an allusion to Jowett's authority facilitate the acceptance commonly made that there was a rapprochement made between the two Plato lecturers, especially when Jowett warmly congratulated Pater on his *Plato* (Benson 55). But, as Pater says of Plato, "His reign was after all to be in his writings," we might also say of Pater, and therefore it is upon his writings we focus.

Philosophical Criticism

Pater's critical method is somewhat contagious. His style is so closely identified with his content that critics sometimes seem to imitate him in order to bring out his message. As his biographies, encouraged by his style of personification, rely

mostly upon his writing, because he left so little biographical information, criticism of his works often becomes infused with his own manner. Algernon Cecil, for example, remarks that, “it is hardly possible to give any true representation of his ideas without adopting his manner, so entirely consistent were the expressions and the substance of his thoughts” (250). By this tendency we recognize how successful Pater continues to be in persuading readers of the importance of style suiting content, encouraging in his very manner that they be considered together. Beyond his style, his criticism and fiction adhere to the importance of thought by privileging the impact that philosophy and ideas have upon one’s art. His artists are customarily scholars, because of the intellectual capacity he believes good art requires, and he continually reaffirms the power of ideas not only on a person’s art, but on character. The strong and enduring emphasis Pater places on how ideas inform artists’ work, encourages us to look to the ideas that specifically inform his own work.

The prevalent conviction created through his writing that Pater is an author intensely guided by philosophy has led to many studies that argue German Idealism, especially Hegelianism, is the most powerful influence upon him. In this line of criticism there are insightful readings in Wolfgang Iser’s *Walter Pater: The Aesthetic Moment* (1960), Anthony Ward’s *Walter Pater: The Idea in Nature* (1966), and William Shuter’s *Rereading Walter Pater*. Most recently, Giles Whiteley, in *Aestheticism and the Philosophy of Death: Walter Pater and Post-Hegelianism* (2010), associates Pater mainly with Hegel. But there are several reasons why Hegel comes far behind Plato as the prime philosophical influence. A discussion of Hegelian metaphysics with Pater’s writing is strikingly incongruous. Pater is unwilling to enter into the abstract details of logic and dialectic, which drastically limits full identification or even empathy with Hegel. Pater prefers to gesture towards

metaphysics, holding it as a general tendency, rather than strictly defined. In this manner Plato's dialogues follow his taste. Another point in favour of Plato against Hegel is simply that the former is an ancient Greek and classically held to be the progenitor of Western philosophy. Both Shuter and Whiteley indicate an unpublished manuscript at Harvard's Houghton Library entitled "The History of Philosophy" to show the influence of Hegel's *Geist* upon his thought. Yet we may discern much of Pater's feeling towards Hegel and his metaphysics when he groups his "pure ideas" alongside the Scholastics and Leibniz, stating dismissively: "same old thoughts in apparent novelty that successive metaphysical systems have been, in fact, little more than so many recombinations of the pieces, which Plato had long ago placed, once for all, upon the board" (folder 3 bMS Eng 1150 8-9). Pater's desire to return to the source of things, and his fascination with origins, leave other philosophies in Plato's shadow. In *Plato* Pater actually inserts Hegel under the Idealist wing of Platonism, as but a later carrier of his thought. Pater's opinion of history also falls in favour of Plato. Critics, such as Iser, have recognized a "retrospective" quality in his work, which does not view evolution as progression (77). And yet Pater is not without a philosophy of history, as our first chapter examines.

In *Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism* (1989), Carolyn Williams defines aestheticism and historicism as the two major tendencies in Pater's work. Yet, although Pater shows knowledge of Hegel's historic method, Platonism allows Pater to escape being determined by specific historical conditions. An attribute often applied to Plato on the *Greats* course was that he was "the spectator of all time and existence" (*Plato* 265),⁴ adopted from Plato's description of the ideal philosopher

⁴ Jowett quotes this same attribute, "spectator of all time and existence," in his introduction to the *Symposium* (I 485), and Wilde was fascinated with the depth of Plato's vision as "the spectator of all time and existence," quoting it several times throughout his work, first in an early essay, "Historical

in *The Republic* (486a). Pater uses this ideal figure of overarching omniscience for his narrators in his fiction also, where he moves freely into the future and backwards in the past unfettered by particular historical conditions. The stance over history, as though outside of history, yet keenly aware of historical conditions, is one of Pater's greatest authorial characteristics. Platonism also explains Pater's aestheticism, the other remarkable characteristic Williams sees in him: for what partakes of beauty or other idealistic traits undergoes ontological enrichment, so that beautiful objects are Platonically more real.

We would not deny that Hegel was a strong influence on Pater, but this is largely through Hegel's method of teaching Plato. Hegel shows reverence for Plato in his posthumously published *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, and Jowett adopted much of his discussion in explaining Plato's development, as did other German scholars of Plato such as Eduard Zeller whose *Philosophie der Griechen* (1844-52) influenced Oxonian Platonism and was translated into English in parts as *Socrates and the Socratic Schools* (1868) and *Plato and the Older Academy* (1876). Maintaining this tradition, Pater directly translates Hegel's description of the death of Socrates in *Plato and Platonism* (91-92). Pater adopts the general notion that the Presocratics and Socrates lead up to Plato; but Pater stops there, whereas Hegel's *Geist* continues, as though Plato serves for a time but then is philosophically redundant. Teleology ceases with Plato for Pater, as even those who follow Plato face back towards him and serve to explain him (*Plato* 193). Pater is interested in Plato's "individual genius," where "the conditions common to all the products of this or that particular age—of the 'environment'—leaves off" (124). Personality, so important to Pater in shaping ideas and art, will not allow him to view Plato as merely an

Criticism," perhaps written for a prize at Oxford in 1879 (Guy xx); he repeats the phrase in "The English Renaissance of Art" (1882) and in the revised "The Portrait of Mr W. H."

instrument for Philosophy. Pater was also influenced by Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, published posthumously in 1835. Although he would learn from Hegel dynamic ways to speak about art objects and how ideas may influence artists, he would have met with much that was unpalatable to him. Art is rather a thing of the past to Hegel and no longer satisfies our supreme need of reason. Music is unsatisfactory for not being articulate, and likewise myth, to Hegel, is an inarticulate concern of the child-like past. Pater's criticism makes space for the ineffable that we find in myth and music, and furthermore has greater sympathy with a philosophy that extols beauty and love.

Paul Barolsky has noticed how "Pater's Renaissance is permeated by an abiding concern with this Platonic 'tendency' of vision toward 'pure form'" (142), while also recognizing in him a scholar who first traced the extensive role of Neoplatonism in the Italian Renaissance (17). Along with Barolsky's *Walter Pater's Renaissance* (1987), I build upon the discussions of Platonism in Pater's work by Linda Dowling, Richard Dellamora, Lesley Higgins, Stefano Evangelista, and Patricia Cruzalegui, paying closer attention to his aspiration of ascension, the effort to attain knowledge beyond the physical world. From Pater's first known writing, "Diaphaneitè" (1864), to the article he was writing when he died, "Pascal," there are references to the writing of Plato. Most critics who discuss Pater's Platonism focus mainly upon "Winckelmann" or *Plato and Platonism*, while we follow along Pater's whole career. We examine even his myth studies, whose Platonism is overlooked, and his fiction, where there are but a few analyses of Platonism. Cruzalegui discusses Platonism in *Marius* and Dellamora recognizes it in "Emerald Uthwart," for examples, but with limited focus. The attention given particularly to male beauty in Pater's writing is undoubtedly an aspect that Platonism can help explain; but there are

many other aspects of Platonism in his work left unexplored, some of which this study attempts. Viewing Platonism in Pater's fiction has revealed some of his techniques as a novelist, generally how he designs a narrative, but also how he forms characters; and it allows us to compare his fiction with his criticism. The pervading presence of Plato in both his criticism and fiction shows how deeply the philosophy affected his worldview. Besides the fact that Pater shows little concern for politics, unlike other British Idealists, his fiction distinguishes him from most other figures associated with Oxonian Platonism, such as Jowett, Campbell, T.H. Green (1836-1882), R.L. Nettleship (1846-1892), and Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923), and draws him nearer in comparison to Wilde.

Our Method

In this original study of Platonism throughout Pater's work we cover the entire span of his career, treating both his criticism and fiction, short and long, by moving through the great majority of his works chronologically, sometimes looking forwards, especially to his last book, *Plato and Platonism* (1893), in order to reveal anticipations or elucidate concepts, and backwards, to notice continuity in his early work, particularly "Diaphaneité." We have far from exhausted the Platonism within his works, however. In looking at Pater's philosophy it is tempting to take a broad perspective of his career in whole and divide themes shared by separate works, such as music, light, matter and form, for example; but we would lose too much of the sense of Pater as a writer of particular books, and of passages written within specific contexts. Therefore, each chapter focuses mainly on one work—though not exclusively, and we often return to works—in order to explore how Platonic elements are working in their original context.

Beyond providing a mental framework through which Pater views the world, and a critical method, Platonism informs many of Pater's themes and subjects, and is a constant point of authority. William E. Buckler has stated generally that Plato is a critical reference point for Pater, "from first to last" (347). Through close reading we have discovered that Platonism is not merely present in references and broader themes, but apparent in his very style.

We begin by looking at the effect of Platonism on *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), on both what Pater sees in the Renaissance and the way in which Pater portrays it, for his manner enhances his meaning, especially the idea of history. The book's seeming blend of genres encourages us to compare it to George Eliot's *Romola* (1862-63) and A. C. Swinburne's *William Blake* (1868). Several of Pater's artists are influenced by Platonism, and we can soon discern a narrative pattern repeating itself after a typical ascension we find in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. Yet Pater's subjects are solitary and shadowy, and surrounded in mysterious charm. He creates a sense of mystery by his style and vocabulary, in which we can also trace Platonic aspiration towards "the unseen."

Our study moves from *The Renaissance* into Pater's subsequent essay on Wordsworth in 1874, where themes in the "Conclusion" reoccur. The joys of the aesthetic life are confirmed to be those of contemplation. Thus we ask in what ways Pater engages with Plato's discussion of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*. By writing on Wordsworth, Pater also places his critical focus back in England, where an affiliation with Matthew Arnold can be recognized. Not only do Pater and Arnold share Plato, but they share Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which was as a long-time fixture on the *Literae Humaniores*. Figures emerge of an ideal philosopher from Plato and Aristotle which influence ideas of the artist, especially in Pater's discussion of

Wordsworth. In the end, differences in Platonism reveal themselves in Pater's and Arnold's essays on the English poet.

In our third chapter we examine Pater's understanding of myth, in his collection of essays *Greek Studies* (1895). Although the work was published posthumously, the majority of the essays were published separately within a five year period, beginning in 1876 with "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone" and "A Study of Dionysus." Plato is a major influence on the evaluation of myth in this period, and the influence is quite marked in Pater, especially evident in the struggle between "myth" and "logos"—the old stories, associated with folk religion, against progressive reason—, a distinction falling more in favour of reason, with the rise of teleological-minded history and analytical methods of research. For Pater this struggle is evident in his explanation of Greek myth and statuary, in which he explores stories and religion, and, through the artist's role in society and history, the way in which they are interpreted and created. These essays mark an important middle and transitional period in his career, because afterwards he would begin to turn much more attention to fiction.

Marius the Epicurean (1885) is probably Pater's most elaborate work. The great amount of time, energy, and fastidiousness that Pater exerted in revisions creates very conscientious prose.⁵ He recounts an ideal aesthetic education within the milieu of Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180). Although the breaking light that eventually shines within Marius is purported to be Christianity, it is blended with Platonism, towards which he has a sort of conversion as a child at a temple of Aesculapius. Along with many other critical encounters with Platonism, in such authors as Apuleius and Lucian, even in Aurelius himself, Platonism is fundamentally explored

⁵ In *Pater on Style* (1958), Edmund Chandler declares of *Marius* that "the number of variations between the texts of the first three editions was 6,085" (26-27), and most of these were in punctuation.

through his education (*paideía*), which guides him through the recognition of form and matter. As the novel's subtitle, "His Sensations and Ideas," suggests, influence upon him which begins in the physical world comes to be increasingly explored through his intellectual experience, as he more and more identifies with the unseen. Only after the publication of *Marius* did Pater return the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* in 1888, having removed it from the second edition, believing he had now "dealt more fully . . . with the thoughts suggested by it."⁶ The apparatus of this chapter on the philosophy of *Marius* therefore facilitates a discussion of some of the ideas at work in the "Conclusion."

Although *Gaston de Latour*, whose original chapters were published in 1888, was never finished, the novel is a fertile source of many important themes in Pater's later work. Of the same genre as *Marius*, *Gaston* is set in France during the religious wars, leading up to, and following, the St Bartholomew's Day massacre in 1572. While the narrative revolves around a single character in search of spiritual transcendence, there are many more set-backs than in *Marius*, and the narrator issues a much colder, sometimes nearly indifferent tone. The novel is important for Gaston's critical encounters, namely with Montaigne (1533-1592) and Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), who are interpreted largely through their Platonism. *Gaston* seems to reveal an inevitable momentum towards *Plato and Platonism*, as Pater shows a growing preference in his fiction paradoxically for purer criticism: although the character's encounters with historical figures imitate Pater's critical pursuit for knowledge of the person, Gaston himself seems lost in the text. His own Romantic narrative lacks vivaciousness, while incorporating as a model a Neoplatonic blend of the Homeric hero with the Biblical Books of Wisdom. In Monsman's edition of the novel (1995),

⁶ All ellipses are my own unless placed in square brackets.

which includes chapters previously in incomplete manuscript, we witness Pater engage with ideas of aestheticism, particularly with Oscar Wilde, imagining some of what Plato would have to say about ideas then associated with Wilde.

Our final chapter treats briefly the key works that build up to Pater's last book, *Plato and Platonism*, namely, "Style" (1888)—for which it appears he broke-off from publishing chapters of *Gaston*—, "Mérimée" (1890), "Raphael" (1892), and "Emerald Uthwart" (1892). Many themes and ideas throughout Pater's career are revisited in *Plato and Platonism*, as his thoughts upon the subject pervade his writing, and this is especially true of these later works. Besides explaining the philosopher and his philosophy, *Plato* argues for the conservation of critical authority, especially amidst the threat of Decadence. The Platonic idea of music, or *mousiké*, and its role aesthetically, ethically, and in terms of knowledge, illuminates the importance Pater places on Platonism as a guide. The suggestion of an author's contact with another, in critical sympathy or affinity, reveals the way in which much of Pater's writing may be viewed as a performance of Platonic love.

In referencing Pater's work we use Macmillan's Library Edition (1910) of his works unless otherwise stated. Sometimes it is preferable to quote directly from the article in its original publication when it differs from its later book form. When quoting from *Gaston de Latour* we rely upon Gerald Monsman's edition (1995), because of its critical apparatus and its inclusion of previously unpublished chapters. My method of citation is based upon the 6th edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.

As criticism that explores the influence of German Idealism repeatedly exhibits, there is an undying aspiration of idealism in Pater's work that wants critical

explanation.⁷ Platonism can explain both his love of beauty and his idealism. Pater portrays a longing for the metaphysical, even if he does not want to explain what he there finds. He longs to be metaphysical in the simple Aristotelian sense, as beyond the physical, involved in something higher. Pater must have read Plato's *Phaedrus* during an impressionable period in his life, because the soul's "power of wing" described there fixed for him an artistic ideal that he holds from the early 1860s onwards. It is this hope of ascension, through one's intellect, which really carries Pater's Platonism. "The Platonism of Walter Pater" explains this reoccurring Platonic tendency in Pater's work, within the integrity of his corpus, in intellectual harmony with his philosophy of history, aesthetics, myth, education, criticism, language, and ethics.

⁷ Some further examples of works that recognize Pater's idealism (but see it as deriving from German influence) are: Ruth C. Child's *The Aesthetic of Walter Pater* (1940), F. C. McGrath's *The Sensible Spirit: Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (1986), and, more recently, Kit Andrews's "Walter Pater as Oxford Hegelian" (2011).

Chapter One

The Platonic Narrative as History in *The Renaissance*

The Historic Method

In order to understand Pater's critical method in *The Renaissance*, one must be reminded that its original title was *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873).⁸ History is the central word, the idea within which he builds his volume, his own view of history. His perspective, as the word "Studies" suggests, is that of an observer, not an expert, but a student compelled to investigate through his own curiosity and love for beauty. Although the word "study" before "history" alleviates one's promise to achieve the highest conventional standard of a discipline, the way Leonardo will sketch a face or hands for practice, for example, essaying techniques here and there, leaving aspects incomplete, while shading other aspects to perfect finish, Pater's early reviewers denied the accuracy of the title, such as Mrs Mark Pattison (1840-1904), also known as Emilia Dilke, an important critic who would herself write *The Renaissance of Art in France* (1879). Characteristically, he changed the title for the second edition to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1877), to avoid further criticism and confusion. "Studies" remains in the title, reminding us that these are literally essays, attempts to capture something without historical dependence upon reaching a *telos* or completion. Rather than a complete picture Pater's essays narrow in on aspects of these artists' lives, and exclude much background. Some artistic examples of this mode are Montaigne's *Essais* (1580), some sketches of Michelangelo's and da Vinci's, and Plato's dialogues, which sometimes do not reach their goal. Being aware of his temper to attain some essential element in the work, of

⁸ The Macmillan's Library Edition of *The Renaissance* from which we cite is the 4th edition (1893).

trying without concern for fulfilling the entire picture, is essential for grasping Pater's motivation in this work.

As so often is the case in Pater's career, acknowledged specially by William Shuter (113), Pater's final word on a subject that appears continuously in his oeuvre may be found in *Plato and Platonism*, and historical criticism is no exception. There he discusses three methods. The first is the dogmatic method, which measures human thought, even in periods very distant from our own, according to a modern philosophy: this often results in finding past ages in error. The second is the eclectic or syncretic method, "which aims at a selection from contending schools of the various grains of truth dispersed among them. It is the method which has prevailed in periods of large reading but with little inceptive force of their own, like that of the Alexandrian Neo-Platonism in the third century, or the Neo-Platonism of Florence in the fifteenth" (*Plato* 9). Here, at the end of his career, he says its problem is that it tends "to misrepresent the true character of the doctrine it wishes to explain" for the sake of harmonization. And finally, popular in Pater's own time, is the historic method, under the influence of Hegel, which seeks to set the subject within its natural conditions of time and place. Understanding the "conditions" is the key to this method, for our subject is interpreted as a natural outgrowth of them. "As the strangely twisted pine tree," Pater explains in *Plato*, "would be a freak of nature on an English lawn, is seen, if we replace it, in thought, amid the contending forces of the Alpine torrent that actually shaped its growth, to have been the creature of necessity, of the logic of certain facts" (10).

F. C. MacGrath, among others, believes that Hegel's historical method is a major influence upon Pater's work (120); but although Pater is certainly aware of the current trends in critical methods when he writes *The Renaissance*, he does not fully

practise this historic method. He is not overly concerned with “the logic of certain facts.” The Hegelian method is altogether too impersonal, something critics such as Jules Lubbock have noted (169). Pater does not concede that what is essential in a person is determined by society. Platonism, which extols the individual mind as the greatest element in a person’s soul, persuades him to look towards persons as sources of knowledge. Mind for Pater is the organizing principle of knowledge, and synthesizes fluctuating data, and thus the genius of Botticelli interests him, because “it plays fast and loose with those data, rejecting some and isolating others, and always combining them anew” (53-54). His studies pursue the mind of the artist, rather than the conditions which formed it.

Although Pater learned much from nineteenth-century historians such as Michelet and Quinet, especially about the Italian Renaissance, Pater cares not for the political action and the drama of ideological conflict (Bullen 279). The extreme opposite view of his would be what Karl Marx turned Hegel’s dialectic into, the conflict of material as the shaping principle upon people’s lives. Unlike J. A. Symonds in his *Renaissance in Italy* (1875-1886), Pater does not praise Italian Republicanism, nor mention key figures of the Risorgimento such as Vittorio Emanuele, Mazzini, Garibaldi, or Cavour (Fraser 256). Because external conditions do not matter so much to Pater, he became vulnerable to the criticism of Mrs Pattison that rather than following the “true scientific method, through the life of a time of which it was an outcome,” he detaches his subject “wholly from its surroundings, to suspend it isolated before him, as if it were indeed a kind of air-plant independent of ordinary sources of nourishment” (qtd. in Seiler 72). We may see how entrenched the historical method was by the 1870s in Oxford for her simply to base her criticism on his not complying with it.

Rather than portraying the ideological struggles of a society, Pater reveals to us the smooth syntheses of Renaissance scholars, in imitation of the Platonic method. Christine Bolus-Reichert discusses this method of Pater in *The Age of Eclecticism* (2009), seeing it as a general tendency of the nineteenth-century, without tracing it to Pater's historical method of Platonism, as relayed in his final book on the subject, that is, the eclectic or syncretic method. To him the Renaissance is "a many-sided yet united movement" (2). Unity describes his entire theory of the Renaissance actually, for his view of it is special by extending its period from twelfth-century France to eighteenth-century Germany, in "Winckelmann." As Billie Inman has suggested, he seems to have originally planned to extend the Renaissance into nineteenth-century England with an essay on Wordsworth (265), bringing the movement nearer to himself. This Platonic temper to combine and unite is epitomized by the critical manner of fifteenth-century Florence, which Pater calls the real core of the movement. By imitating the Platonic method of synthesis he seeks also to make his history a work of art.

Hegel's historical method, which strongly influenced Benjamin Jowett and Oxonian Platonism, clearly affected Pater's thought on historiography. Carolyn Williams's *Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism* and Peter Allan Dale's *The Victorian Critic and the Idea of History* (1977) have elaborated upon what they believe to be a strong tendency towards historicism in Pater's writing. Yet both critics are forced to balance Pater's historicism with his aestheticism, a rather atemporal consciousness that treats its subject as eternal or not dependent on particular conditions, but "out of time." Williams borrows the phrase "Aesthetic Historicism," which Erich Auerbach used of Vico (2), and quite significantly considering that Pater seems to hold the notion that history contains cyclical patterns.

It is mainly Pater's interest in myth, historically so difficult to place, that forces us to doubt his ascribing to any conventional historicism. As Williams writes discussing myth: "Pater's characteristic generalization of 'the spirit of man' represents a transhistorical, essentialist, aesthetic figure . . . and it reflects the tendency toward synthesis and totality which forms one pole of his aesthetic historicism. . . . In the *Greek Studies*, by far the greater emphasis is placed on stability, continuity, and repetition" (250). The essays of *The Renaissance* unfold as studies in mythology based on narrative rather than on bare revelation of fact. Dale, too, acknowledges that Pater's aestheticism has often made it difficult to recognize his historicism (8).

The difficulty in labelling Pater's historical method is partly due to his being conversant with the scholarly methods of the day, especially as they were practised within Oxford. At the very least Pater's use of terms makes it seem as though he is in tension concerning his method. But we shall see that, even in a historically minded volume like *The Renaissance*, Pater rather concerns himself less with historical conditions than with individual persons. In *The Myth of the Renaissance in Nineteenth-Century Writing* (1994), J. B. Bullen declares that Pater's historiography is concerned with the vision of the individual, rather than with external history (274). History in a larger sense of cultural and societal milieux is overlooked in favour of personal development. Personal narratives in diverse ages come to resemble one another in the volume, despite different milieux, diminishing the importance of societal conditions.

In Hegel's introduction to "Modern Philosophy," in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he declares that ancient philosophers were individuals who set themselves apart, comparable to "monks who renounced all temporal goods" (III 167); but in modern times "philosophers are not monks" and have their roles in the world, "are

involved in present conditions, in the world and its work and progress.” Inward ideas, therefore, will conform to the external world’s conditions and modes of life (III 168). Contrary to Hegel, Pater still looks rather to figures in isolation, whose ideas are not those of a society in which they are networked, but rather held by a select cadre or by his subject alone. His artists live cloistered lives, indeed, like monks, so their ideas are not those of the crowd. Noticing that Pater concerns himself with individual portraits, Williams sees these figures as representatives of their age; but really they are grouped with souls across history, so that Michelangelo has more in common with Blake and Winckelmann than with his immediate neighbours.

Pater makes his reader aware of the age, in his “Preface” especially:

But it is in Italy, in the fifteenth century, that the interest of the Renaissance mainly lies,—in that solemn fifteenth century which can hardly be studied too much, not merely for its positive results in the things of the intellect and the imagination, its concrete works of art, its special and prominent personalities, with their profound æsthetic charm, but for its general spirit and character, for the ethical qualities of which it is a consummate type. (xiii)

There is little here in the method of historic criticism and nothing by way of explaining what the local factors are which allowed the movement to swell then and there. His actual practice in the essays is to give his attention to “the things of the intellect and the imagination, its concrete works of art, its special and prominent personalities.” Another phrase which undercuts the historic method, is his calling fifteenth-century Florence the “consummate type,” indicating that the Renaissance reached its peak then; and thereafter what comes of the movement is a decadence, or, in the “writings of Joachim du Bellay,” “in France an aftermath” (xii). And by describing a past age as the “consummate type” he denies the ages are continually advancing, for ages that came after the Renaissance seem to him diminished in importance. “Type” is a Platonic word in that it conveys a blueprint or model of

something which exists, as discussed, for example, in the *Symposium* (210-211), as the essence towards which the soul seeks for knowledge. As much as he declares himself to be interested in the type of an age, Pater is more interested in certain souls that fit a type.

Pater seems able to distinguish easily among historical methods as the end of the century approaches, but his writing career began while these methods were still being defined. The controversial *Essays and Reviews* was published in 1860. Prominent Oxonians contributed to this collection, such as Benjamin Jowett, Frederick Temple (1821-1902), and Mark Pattison, practising new ways of interpreting the Bible, influenced by German criticism and scientific methods, putting forth some of the ideas of advanced liberals in the Church of England. New approaches to history were changing the style of criticism in religion, philosophy, and art, seeking a single method to approach them all. Critics like Ernest Renan had urged readers that it was possible to sweep away dogma and still write about religion in *Vie de Jésus* (1863). Renan writes in the preface to his first book, *Averroès⁹ et l'averroïsme* (1852): “*Le trait caractéristique du XIXe siècle est d’avoir substitué la méthode historique à la méthode dogmatique, dans toutes études relatives à l’esprit humain*”¹⁰ (15). The critic will no longer dogmatically judge different ages and cultures in accordance with his own, but will only examine the diverse ways in which these societies have dealt with aesthetic, philosophic, and theological problems. This was a welcome approach to those such as Mark Pattison who had lived through the dogmatic strain of the Oxford Movement. In a way, Pater may be seen as a child of this new liberal environment at Oxford: he would win the first non-clerical fellowship

⁹ Averroes (1126-1198) was an Andalusian philosopher who played a major role in popularizing Aristotle throughout Mediaeval Europe.

¹⁰ “The characteristic trait of the nineteenth century is to have substituted the historic method for the dogmatic method, in all studies relative to the human spirit.”

at Brasenose. The University Tests Act of 1871, which loosened the binds of the Church on University members, would pass before the publication of his first book.

Renan's desire to evade dogma while maintaining the spirit of religion clearly influenced Pater. Although he argues that religious doctrine should not interfere with criticism, religion, in Renan's case, was a beautiful sentiment. Pater holds the same dislike for dogma as seen in his early essay "Coleridge's Writings" (1866), which repudiates the dogma of absolutism in metaphysics, and his distaste is seen again in his "Preface" to *The Renaissance*.

In Renan's *Averroès et l'averroïsme* Pater read that the Renaissance in Venice and Padua, and in the North of Italy more generally, was marked by a return of Aristotle, while Florence welcomed Plato; so that these represented the two poles of philosophy as of art. Florence and Tuscany represented the ideal in art, while Venice, Padua, Bologna, and Lombardy represented analysis and rationalism (293). "Florence indeed," writes Pater, "as M. Renan has pointed out, had always had an affinity for the mystic and dreamy philosophy of Plato, while the colder and more practical philosophy of Aristotle had flourished in Padua, and other cities of the north" (*Renaissance* 36). Beyond associating Florence especially with Platonism, Renan shows Pater that the theoretic principle in art and philosophy are one. The beautiful art of Florence was due to the poetic philosophy of Plato.

Creative History

In "Romola and the Origin of the Paterian View of Life" (1966), David DeLaura has argued that George Eliot's *Romola* (1862-63) heavily influences Pater's *The Renaissance*, and although this may be true in small aspects, giving him a greater awareness perhaps of the influence of Savonarola on Florentine artisans, their historical approaches are quite different. Conceptually, Eliot uses the equivalent of a

wide-angle lens for her narrative, trying to capture the epoch in its various forces upon characters. She concerns her reader with the many dimensions of life throughout the city. For example, she begins in her Proem set high above looking down:

Even if, instead of following the dim daybreak, our imagination pauses on a certain historical spot and awaits the fuller morning, we may see a world-famous city, which has hardly changed its outline since the days of Columbus, seeming to stand as an almost unviolated symbol, amidst the flux of human things, to remind us that we still resemble the men of the past more than we differ from them, as the great mechanical principles on which those domes and towers were raised must make a likeness in human building that will be broader and deeper than all possible change. (3)

Although Eliot sees continuity in the behaviour of people, she pursues a more epic narrative that creates a single story out of many characters shaped by a single time and place. *Romola* treats laws of human nature as a whole, whereas Pater only selects certain exceptional souls. Besides his “Preface,” Pater almost never takes so wide a view, he is interested in one character at a time. Pater sees continuity in a certain type of soul that aspires toward beauty, showing little interest in society at large. *Romola* is continually affected by family and society, cramped here and there by gender and position, while Pater’s subjects seem to work according to their own will. The historical details of Eliot’s novel are often thought to be cumbersome and overwhelming so that they even hinder its fictional form (Fraser 208-209). Outsiders affect Pater’s subjects in a limited manner, as in the case of Leonardo, where contact with others consists in surpassing his teacher, and attracting handsome youths to teach: “men with just enough genius to be capable of initiation into his secret, for the sake of which they were ready to efface their own individuality” (*Renaissance* 117). Outside of their own minds very little can touch these artists. Pater, for example, finds few life-shaping forces in Botticelli’s life:

Only two things happened to him, two things which he shared with other artists:—he was invited to Rome to paint in the Sistine Chapel,

and he fell in later life under the influence of Savonarola, passing apparently almost out of men's sight in a sort of religious melancholy, which lasted till his death in 1515, according to the received date. (51)

Even the two things that happened to him contribute only to his being an artist, and do not set him apart from a certain kind of artist. The personal influence of Savonarola (1452-1498), a Florentine Dominican friar and influential preacher, only turns him further away from men (51), while in Eliot's novel it gives Romola greater need to attend to her fellow citizens.

The narrative of Botticelli can be seen as the basic life structure of Pater's artists: a call towards senses in early life, represented by Rome, and then a spiritual retreat, indicated by Savonarola. Pater is intrigued by men in isolation with their work. As Donald Hill reveals in his edition of *The Renaissance* (1980), Charles Clément in *Michel-Angelo, Léonard de Vinci, Raphael* (1861) relates a conversation between Raphael and Michelangelo in the courtyard of the Vatican: when Michelangelo remarks to the younger what a large gathering he travels with, like a general, Raphael responds, "And you, you walk alone, 'like an executioner'" (*Renaissance* 80). Pater does not report the meeting or both sides of this dialogue, only what Raphael is reputed to say of Michelangelo's walking alone. It would seem that he would rather not place two great artists together; he keeps artists to themselves, in their cloistered dramas. Similarly, Leonardo, like an invisible predator of beauty, would walk alone, following women "about the streets of Florence till the sun went down" (105), then would later execute their image in a sketch. Although he is compelled by feminine beauty it does not incite violent passion in him, merely curiosity.

The extreme setbacks in Michelangelo's life, for example, as read in his letters, the great strife with his father and brother, penury and poor health, are glossed

over by Pater for telling us “little that is worth knowing about him—a few poor quarrels about money and commissions” (82). What is worth knowing is that “his genius is in harmony with itself” (81). Not even the conditions of flesh will stop him, for Michelangelo lives beyond nature:

So he lingers on; a *revenant*, as the French say, a ghost out of another age, in a world too coarse to touch his faint sensibilities too closely; dreaming, in a worn-out society, theatrical in its life, theatrical in its art, theatrical even in its devotion, on the morning of the world’s history, on the primitive form of man, on the images under which the primitive world had conceived of spiritual forces. (90)

The false theatre of this world to Pater creates the conditions that the historical method sees as determining our lives—its set and props, wars, religions, governments—beyond which Michelangelo will live. He is shaped internally by spiritual forces from the primitive world.

Jeffrey Wallen remarks that, in antithesis to Ruskin, whose source for great art is the community, Pater is concerned with “strange souls” (1041). And it is the art of these souls which sets them apart, as Pater judges a tree by its fruit, rather than the conditions that shaped it. Pater’s artists are sheltered in the *House Beautiful*, a reference to the house of blessed souls in Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), where “the painter of the *Last Supper*, with his kindred, live in a land where controversy has no breathing-place, and refuse to be classified” (*Renaissance* 27). There “are no fixed parties, no exclusions: all breathes of that unity of culture in which ‘whatsoever things are comely’ are reconciled, for the elevation and adorning of our spirits” (27).

Pater substitutes historical progress for narratives of personal journeys of artists, in the manner of Vasari. As Paul Barolsky declares, Vasari’s *Lives* (1550), which, like Dante’s *Commedia*, follow a Biblical view of history as a personal journey or pilgrimage, made a deep impression on Pater (117). Similarly to the Christian

narrative, Pater portrays a soul in ascension to a higher form of life, but, because this higher life is indicated by greater knowledge of beauty, his narratives are Platonic: Platonic in the fashion of the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, two dialogues which had a profound effect upon Florentine Platonists, as depicted in his essay “Pico della Mirandola.” Both Christian and Platonic pilgrimages are of the soul towards spiritual perfection.

George Eliot and Pater both seek to tell a story, but their methods diverge, largely in respect to their views of history. Eliot wrote to John Blackwood in agreement with Mrs Oliphant’s negative review in Blackwood’s Magazine in November 1873, stating that *The Renaissance* seems “quite poisonous in its false principles of criticism and false conceptions of life” (qtd. in Seiler 92). A portion of her disapproval was the same complaint of her friend Mrs Pattison, who held the volume in want of contextualisation. Eliot’s vast reading in preparation for her novel allowed her to exhibit many Italian and classical phrases, insert the names of famous personages, such as Pico della Mirandola, and philosophies, such as “New Platonism,” as she calls it, and Epicureanism, present politicians around the table and peacocks upon them, in the hope that these historical conditions would make her story more genuine. Pater does not speak of politics, and there are no competing philosophies with Platonism in *The Renaissance*. But in the same manner that he is absorbed in Platonism, the Platonism of his subjects is revealed as a temperament rather than an external set of rules. “Platonism is not a formal theory or body of theories,” he writes in *Plato and Platonism*, not an external petition upon one, “but a tendency, a group of tendencies—a tendency to think or feel, and to speak, about certain things in a particular way, discernible in Plato’s dialogues as reflecting the

peculiarities, the marked peculiarities, of himself and his own mental complexion” (150). For the most part, Platonism is a character trait.

In their different genres, Eliot and Pater seem to crossover. In Eliot’s *Romola* we find an author who tries to bring current historical methods into fiction, while in Pater we have an author trying to reassert the value of biographical narrative into history. Eliot had immediate influence from German historical criticism of the Bible, for her first work was a translation of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* by David Strauss (1846). Strauss’s work was controversial for undermining the historical authority of the Gospel stories of Jesus, which he felt permitted to question because of his notion of Hegelian progress in history, and a broadening distance, whether misinterpreted or not, between traditional religious imagery (*Vorstellung*) and advancing philosophical concepts (*Begriff*) (Hodgson xxxv), in other words between myth and reason. *Romola* aims to present how the struggle of external forces—the struggle in history between reason and myth, old and new—affects characters’ struggle within. *The Renaissance* is not only a history of art, but also a work of art, and is written after the synthesis has taken place.

Aesthetic Criticism

Besides the scholarly historical method of his day, however, Pater was drawn to a more artistic or aesthetic mode of criticism. A more immediate influence on Pater’s critical approach is Algernon Charles Swinburne, whose *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (1868) especially, for dealing with a poet who held a similar longing for religion without dogma, helped shape *The Renaissance*. Along with the intention designed by the title, “A Critical Essay”—for the book is much longer than a typical essay, and therefore emphasizes a sketch—, Swinburne strives towards an appreciation of a fellow artist, taking his life and work together. “First get well hold of

the mystic,” he writes, “and you will then at once get a better view and comprehension of the painter and poet” (140). Swinburne is concerned with the intention of the artwork. His emphasis is not on exhausting detail, but on praising what about Blake he deems good. He declares a critic should be drawn to his subject by “a sincere instinct of sympathy” (6). This work is known for containing Swinburne’s cry of “art for art’s sake,” but it must be qualified by his assertion that good art will likely carry many other advantages we may call moral or spiritual, so long as they are not its intention (100). He calls Blake an “antinomian mystic,” a similar description to what Pater will write of Botticelli in relation to his illustrations of Dante’s *Inferno* (55), and of the Greek religion in general in “Winckelmann” (203). Both “antinomian” and “mystic” speak of someone who maintains the spirit of a system without adhering to its laws. The word “antinomian” may also emphasize the importance of *who* one *is*, rather than *what* they *do*, by the determining factor of grace. It suggests a movement towards St Paul from Moses, towards Matthew Arnold’s Hellenism from Hebraism. Swinburne repeatedly calls Blake a mystic, as though removing the dogma from his religion: “Faith in God and goodwill towards men came naturally to him,” he writes, “being a mystic” (142).

Pater will associate the term “mystic” with the Platonists in *The Renaissance*, who define it as “the act of *shutting the eyes*, that one may see the more, inwardly” (37). By this act we may see again how external conditions are less consequential in mystical philosophy. Swinburne’s highest praise is given for Blake’s “The Marriage of Heaven in Hell,” from which Pater borrows in his “Preface”: “‘The ages are equal,’ says William Blake, ‘but genius is always above the age’” (x). Pater seems to absorb much of Swinburne’s critical spirit in his praise of Blake.

Pater even borrows much from Swinburne's style. "He was about the hardest worker of his time," writes Swinburne:

must have done in his day some horseloads of work. One might almost pity the poor age and the poor men he came among for having such a fiery energy cast unawares into the midst of their small customs and competitions. Unluckily for them, their new prophet had not one point they could lay hold of, not one organ or channel of expression by which to make himself comprehensible to such as they were. Shelley in his time gave enough of perplexity and offence; but even he, mysterious and rebellious as he seemed to most men, was less made up of mist and fire than Blake. (3)

In comparison, "horseloads of work" is rather too strong for Pater and "unluckily" seems cacophonous, but much else would suit him. Pater would have admired the last sentence, with "mist and fire," for Pater often emulates the blend of two elements in order to explain poetically a single phenomenon, like Michelangelo's "sweetness and strength," employing the power of metaphor to create something new. Indeed in ascribing "sweetness and strength" to Michelangelo he also relates him to Blake (97), suggesting Swinburne's influence. In method Pater would also sympathize with artists who are so far beyond their contemporaries that they become enigmatical.

Platonic Criticism

One indication of the sympathy that Pater may have felt for the Florentine Platonists is that he never refers to them as Neoplatonists, unlike Eliot: the term in any variation cannot be found in the book. He seems to make no distinction among Platonists throughout the ages, until late in his career, showing a Platonic inclusiveness. The term in fact is a product of the historic method, brought into English from a translation of German around the mid-nineteenth century,¹¹ which seeks to separate ages for the purposes of studying. Platonists from the original Academy until Emperor Justinian closed it in 529—Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus,

¹¹ The earliest recorded use of the word in the OED is in 1832 when Arthur Johnson translates Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann's *der neue Platonismus* as Neoplatonism in *A Manual on the History of Philosophy*.

Iamblicus—the Church Fathers, Boethius, and St Augustine, would have believed they were practising the philosophy of Plato himself, not a different philosophy. And so it was with the later Platonists of the Renaissance, such as Marsilio Ficino, Politian, and Pico della Mirandola,

Analyzing his essay “Pico della Mirandola” tells us much about Pater’s views of Florentine Platonism compared with Pater’s own time. Like many Platonists before him, Pico absorbed all the philosophy he could: Plato and the Presocratics—Heraclitus, Pythagoras, and Zeno—Aristotle, those whom we now call the Neoplatonists, the Bible and the Church Fathers, the Cabala, the Arabian philosophers, the Schoolmen, especially St Thomas Aquinas. The belief was that truth may be found in any philosophy, and the goal was to unite them all into one system of knowledge. The Renaissance Platonists were especially faithful to Plato because they believed him to be the greatest of all philosophers, not least because he practised this same syncretic method. At the age of twenty-four, Pico audaciously took all of his hard-won learning, worked up at Bologna, Padua, Ferrara, and even Paris, organized it into 900 theses, went to the centre of the world, Rome, and offered to defend any one of them in open disputation, with the added incentive of paying any adversary’s travel expenses. Such a bold statement could not possibly go unnoticed by the Church. They found seven of his theses definitely heretical and another six too questionable. He eventually found solace in Florence again, befriending even the famous Savonarola, who sought to drape Pico in the cloth of a Dominican.

We know from his library records that Pater read Pico della Mirandola’s “Oration on the Dignity of Man,” originally written as a preface to his theses, and called by some the manifesto of humanism, and that he read his *De Ente et Uno*, “Being and the One” or “Being and Unity,” which reconciles Platonism and

Aristotelianism, and his *Heptaplus*, as Pater describes, “the Discourse on the Seven Days of Creation,” in which “he endeavours to reconcile the accounts which pagan philosophy had given of the origin of the world with the account given in the books of Moses—the *Timæus* of Plato with the book of *Genesis*” (*Renaissance* 44-45). He also directly mentions “The Dignity of Man,” and in so doing embraces Pico sympathetically, but then makes a show of distancing himself critically:

For this dignity of man . . . helped man onward to the reassertion of himself, that rehabilitation of human nature, the body, the senses, the heart, the intelligence, which the Renaissance fulfils. And yet to read a page of one of Pico’s forgotten books is like a glance into one of those ancient sepulchres, upon which the wanderer in classical lands has sometimes stumbled, with the old disused ornaments and furniture of a world wholly unlike ours still fresh in them. That whole conception of nature is so different from our own. (40-41)

We see that Pater is aware of the historical method here, he seems almost dogmatic, and by it tries to distance himself from his subject in contemporary fashion. In so doing, he shifts his interest away from Pico’s life, and approaches his work as a sort of antiquarian.

Jowett’s complete translation of Plato’s *Dialogues* came out the very same year as Pater’s essay on Pico in 1871 and he must have seen some coincidences in the profound influence Ficino’s translation had on the Western world and that of Jowett’s in his own time. Jowett’s *Dialogues* and commentary were said to make Plato “an English book” (Abbott II 6). Platonism had changed the intellectual culture of Oxford. In the same manner Pico tried to reconcile Plato with Moses, Jowett reconciles Plato with St Paul. The theologian F. D. Maurice, graduate of Exeter College, who strongly influenced Pater and whom Pater as an undergraduate in 1859 would often hear preach (Wright I 167), had earlier written in his *Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy* (1848) that nineteenth-century England could in fact learn something from fifteenth-century Florence, for its Platonism saved the society’s regard for beauty just when

Raphael and Michelangelo were awakened by Greece and revealing her in new and remarkable forms: Platonism preaches that the beautiful image is divine rather than something evil (72).

Pater sympathizes with this Renaissance because of “its generous belief that nothing which had ever interested the human mind could wholly lose its vitality” (35). Yet he admits the weakness of scholars in Pico’s age compared to his own time. In dialogue with contemporary historical criticism, he alludes to Frederick Temple’s “The Education of the World,” in *Essays and Reviews*, when he compares the ages of the earth to the ages of man, thus seeing the centuries as stages of development:

Far different was the method followed by the scholars of the fifteenth century. They lacked the very rudiments of the historic sense, which, by an imaginative act, throws itself back into a world unlike its own, and estimates every intellectual creation in its connexion with the age from which it proceeded; they had no idea of development, of the differences of ages, of the gradual education of the human race. (34)

When Pater looks at the culture as a whole, to examine the trend of Renaissance scholars, for instance, he resorts to the historic and impersonal method. But he undercuts this criticism by then changing his approach. When he considers the ages in unity, he again embraces the Florentine Platonists. “The Renaissance of the fifteenth century,” he writes, “was, in many things, great rather by what it designed than by what it achieved. Much which it aspired to do, and did but imperfectly or mistakenly, was accomplished in what is called the *éclaircissement* of the eighteenth century, or in our own generation; and what really belongs to the revival of the fifteenth century is but the leading instinct, the curiosity, the initiatory idea” (33). What an age achieves is of relatively little value to Pater in consideration of what an individual achieves. He will fully articulate in his essay on Wordsworth the year following *The Renaissance*, how the artistic life seeks itself a method or means rather than an end. So long as Pico follows this method, his aesthetic life is not wanting.

In order to show his sufficiency as a critic he practises the historic method on his subject, then, by changing his method, Pater arrives at new conclusions. Without openly disagreeing with the historic method, he shows how the knowledge it gains is less gratifying. Although he separates his subject in the style of contemporary criticism, he continually collapses the boundaries again, uniting them with his own age, and replaces condemnation for praise. There's an injustice, he seems to think, in ignoring those middle stages that come between our source of study and our present time. And his care for individual ages is reflected in his care for the individual himself.

The influence of Platonism might be regarded as an external influence, as a doctrine of learned ideas, but its knowledge is grasped by looking backwards into intellectual history, rather than gleaning the spirit of the age. It can be seen across many ages. Platonism is the key idea of Hellenism which might be accessed by opening a new organ, as he says of "Winckelmann's" learning (177).

Personal History

Who after all is Pico della Mirandola? Why does Pater devote an entire essay to him, alongside the near divine Leonardo and Michelangelo? Pater does not deify him, he in fact acknowledges his weaknesses. He may have as easily used him to colour the background of his essays on Michelangelo or Botticelli's Platonism. Pico is not a Renaissance artist, merely a philosopher. Yet the essay on Pico is one of the earlier in the collection, published fourth of an eventual nine, before even Michelangelo's. It is the second essay a reader comes upon in the volume, the threshold to the artists of the Italian Renaissance.

Pater seems to have gained much of his information from Sir, or Saint, Thomas More's biography of the scholar, based on a translation of Pico's nephew,

printed perhaps in 1510, which, Pater writes, “may still be read, in its quaint, antiquated English” (*Renaissance* 36). Like More, Pater tells how Pico portentously arrived in Florence on the very day in 1482 that Marsilio Ficino finished his famous translation of Plato’s works into Latin. And he quotes liberally from More, how he was introduced into Lorenzo’s study:

where a lamp burned continually before the bust of Plato, as other men burned lamps before their favourite saints, a young man fresh from a journey, ‘of feature and shape seemly and beauteous, of stature goodly and high, of flesh tender and soft, his visage lovely and fair, his colour white, intermingled with comely reds, his eyes grey, and quick of look, his teeth white and even, his hair yellow and abundant,’ and trimmed with more than the usual artifice of the time. (37)

Pater is faithful to More’s description until we get to his hair: More says that it is “not too picked,” from the original, “*inaffectato capillitio*,” that it was somewhat careless, and Pater reverts the description and adds some volume not previously there.

Such a slight change, conforming a subject’s style to contemporary taste, is understandable when the purpose is merely to show Pico’s attractiveness. For the narrative of both authors beauty of person is important. More’s narrative is Christian, and he depicts Pico as a rake in his youth, who used his looks, nobility, money, and charm, for the attainment of pleasure, but repented and lived an ascetic life thereafter. More focuses on Pico’s Biblical commentary and his friendship with Savonarola. Pater tells a similar narrative in the first half, but, as he changes Pico’s hair to taste, he adjusts his narrative from Christian to Platonic:

He was already almost wearied out when he came to Florence. He had loved much and been beloved by women, ‘wandering over the crooked hills of delicious pleasure’; but their reign over him was over, and long before Savonarola’s famous ‘bonfire of vanities,’ he had destroyed those love-songs in the vulgar tongue, which would have been so great a relief to us, after the scholastic prolixity of his Latin writings. It was in another spirit that he composed a Platonic commentary, the only work of his in Italian which has come down to us, on the ‘Song of Divine Love’—*secondo la mente ed opinione dei Platonici*—‘according to the mind and opinion of the Platonists,’ by his friend

Hieronimo Beniveni, in which, with an ambitious array of every sort of learning, and a profusion of imagery borrowed indifferently from the astrologers, the Cabala, and Homer, and Scripture, and Dionysius the Areopagite, he attempts to define the stages by which the soul passes from the earthly to the unseen beauty. A change indeed had passed over him, as if the chilling touch of the abstract and disembodied beauty Platonists profess to long for was already upon him. (42)

From “earthly to unseen beauty” marks the Platonic narrative, very common in Pater’s works: the reformed artist, from poetic to priestly. He ascribes the same one to Plato himself, whose love passes from flesh to spirit. As we have seen in the introduction, friends of Pater, Vernon Lee and F. W. Bussell, later ascribe the same narrative to Pater’s life, the Platonic narrative blueprint described by Socrates in the *Symposium*. If Platonism is a tendency, it is also revealed in the biographical narrative of Pater’s artists. Barolsky believes that by repeating a similar narrative, the “historical actors merge into a single protagonist in search of beauty and truth” (26), as though they constitute a type. Yet, although the paradigm of this narrative exists as a type to Pater, it is important that the characters maintain their individuality, as measured against this type. One of Pater’s skills in these essays is his ability to have figures sometimes from similar backgrounds follow similar narratives, and still remain distinct from one another, as Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Botticelli, remain as separate as their art.

In “Pico della Mirandola,” he believes the Platonic or syncretic method of criticism actually describes Pico himself: “This picturesque union of contrasts,” writes Pater, “belonging properly to the art of the close of the fifteenth century, pervades, in Pico della Mirandola, an actual person, and that is why the figure of Pico is so attractive. He will not let one go; he wins on one, in spite of one’s self, to turn again to the pages of his forgotten books, although we know already that the actual solution proposed in them will satisfy us as little as perhaps it satisfied him” (48). And yet in

his work Pater finds a method towards “higher culture,” wherein he blends powerful influences:

He reads Plato in Greek, Moses in Hebrew, and by this his work really belongs to the higher culture. Above all, we have a constant sense in reading him, that his thoughts, however little their positive value may be, are connected with springs beneath them of deep and passionate emotion; and when he explains the grades or steps by which the soul passes from the love a physical object to the love of unseen beauty, and unfolds the analogies between this process and other movements upward of human thought, there is a glow and vehemence in his words which remind one of the manner in which his own brief existence flamed itself away. (46)

In those words, “his own brief existence flamed itself away,” we can find a reiteration of the “Conclusion,” reading here like an anticipation of the ethics of aesthetics.

“Winckelmann,” which was the first published essay of *The Renaissance*, anonymously in 1867, also privileges this Platonic narrative. The literal enthusiasm of the *Phaedrus* is declared to be a force upon the German scholar, that is, to be inspired by a god (*en, theos*), and he describes “ἡ πτεροῦ δύναμις, the power of the wing,” as “an element of refinement, of ascension, with the promise of an endless destiny (202-203).” This idea of spiritual flight may also be found in the book’s epigraph: “Yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove,” from Psalm 68.¹² This flight of the soul is necessarily an individual journey because it requires moving beyond one’s physical surroundings, those influences that make one a product of his or her environment. The artistic flight towards beauty, more and more spiritually refined, does not depend on immediate historical conditions, but follows a pattern more eternal. Pater saw in Swinburne a great esteem for the beauty and fervour of Blake’s aphorism, “No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings” (*Blake* 227), revealing the individual nature of inspiration.

¹² This epigraph was added to the fourth edition of *The Renaissance*.

Pater revisits a Platonic phrase in “Winckelmann,” “lover and philosopher at once,” which can be found in Pater’s first known essay written in 1864, about a type of pure soul, “Diaphaneité,” the phrase professing the Platonic notion that our search for knowledge is empowered by love. Winckelmann is also powered by that god, pulling him upwards: “Enthusiasm,—that, in the broad Platonic sense of the *Phaedrus*, was the secret of his divinatory power over the Hellenic world. This enthusiasm, dependent as it is to a great degree on bodily temperament, has a power of re-enforcing the purer emotions of the intellect with an almost physical excitement” (190-91). Winckelmann portrays that typical Paterian artist, desiring knowledge and beauty and withdrawing inward to attain it:

Engaged in this work, he writes that he still has within him a longing desire to attain to the knowledge of beauty He had to shorten his nights, sleeping only four hours, to gain time for reading. And here Winckelmann made a step forward in culture. He multiplied his intellectual force by detaching from it all flaccid interests. (180-81)

There is a simultaneous motion into intellectual gains at the expense of other external influences. Pater’s interest in the Platonic narrative long preceded its related subjects in *The Renaissance*, and may be said perhaps to have led him to his later subjects of fifteenth-century Florence. Entire phrases of “Diaphaneité” find their way into “Winckelmann,” where the German scholar, too, is defined by his Hellenism, and is “like a relic of classical antiquity, laid open by accident to our alien, modern atmosphere” (*Renaissance* 220). Pater declares that it is for Winckelmann’s love of Plato that he desires to visit the countries of the classical tradition.

In “Winckelmann,” Pater also addresses the issue of historicism, but persuades us that, for genius, such as the Hellenic, we must look beyond an age. As the diaphanous soul is a point of light, the souls Pater tries to convey constellate a selective line outside of conventional history, with no general progress, but rather a

sustained mode of culture. “There is thus an element of change in art; criticism must never for a moment forget that ‘the artist is the child of his time,’” concedes Pater. “But besides these conditions of time and place,” he continues, “and independent of them,”

there is also an element of permanence, a standard of taste, which genius confesses. This standard is maintained in a purely intellectual tradition. It acts upon the artist, not as one of the influences of his own age, but through those artistic products of the previous generation which first excited, while they directed into a particular channel, his sense of beauty. The supreme artistic products of succeeding generations thus form a series of elevated points, taking each from each the reflexion of a strange light, the source of which is not in the atmosphere around and above them, but in a stage of society remote from ours. The standard of taste, then, was fixed in Greece, at a definite historical period. (199)

“This standard . . . maintained in a purely intellectual tradition” is one of Pater’s broader statements about history in *The Renaissance*, and it leans towards a unity of souls represented in an atemporal type.

In “Diaphaneitè” (1864) the special soul is “unworldly,” and, like a relic from the classical age, reveals something that appears alien to the modern age. Then, Pater is already defining the wholeness and purity of the person against the greater movement of the crowd. Unlike Hegel’s philosopher, this soul does not achieve “the progress of the world” (*Miscellaneous* 253). Diaphaneitè is indeed a self-actualizing, self-sustaining mode of being. The grave accent on the final syllable seems to turn the diaphanous soul back upon itself. The accent ultimately quietens the soul, and it achieves the perfect life “without any struggle at all” (249). Perfect, or complete, in itself, it has “simplicity” and “integrity,” and exists in “repose,” not going outside itself, but shining its light from within, the way a perfect artwork balances matter and form, it is replete in itself. Though alone, its accent ensures it will not elide into the vowel of a word placed next to it. “Here there is a moral sexlessness,” writes Pater, “a

kind of impotence, an ineffectual wholeness of nature, yet with a divine beauty and significance of its own” (253). A “moral sexlessness” does not seem to remove the soul’s gender, but its gender does not determine its habits, or *mores*; its “kind of impotence” makes it powerless in terms of copulation, but its power actually derives from the “ineffectual wholeness” of its “nature,” from being segregated on its own, heightening its “beauty and significance.”

Michelangelo also deeply exhibits the Platonic tendency in *The Renaissance*. Pater’s essay is entitled the “The Poetry of Michelangelo,” originally published 1871. Michelangelo’s poems are mostly love sonnets in the Florentine Platonist tradition, modelled on the soul’s flight into immaterial beauty in the narrative of the *Phaedrus*. Pater quotes very little from Michelangelo’s poems, but any reader of them, or one at least familiar with the genre, has a strong impress of their Neoplatonic language that describes the enthusiastic desire through beauty to unite oneself with God. Desires of the flesh are scorned for more ethereal beauty. “Frost and fire,” as Pater notes, “are almost the only images” (87). Michelangelo’s obsession with fire must be one of the reasons why Pater compares him to William Blake (97). For Michelangelo, quotes Pater, the “world of natural things has almost no existence for him”: “only what is formed by the spirit of man remains behind” (74). So of physical things that interest him, it is only man’s work, art, which bears a conduit to God. Although Leonardo is said to be the interpreter of nature, Michelangelo longs to get beyond it.

In the essay on Michelangelo, again Pater isolates his subject from his conditions, draws him inward, and focuses on his mind. Pater appreciates his poetry because it brings us nearer to him, reveals “his own mind and temper” (82). Giving his biography similar treatment to Botticelli’s, he writes of his life’s details: “Except one doubtful allusion to a journey, there are almost no incidents” (87). The

biographical detail that interests Pater is his Platonic relationship with Vittoria Colonna,—he does not mention the person who came to be more commonly associated with his sonnets, Tommaso dei Cavalieri¹³—and he sketches the elderly couple vividly for us, from Francesco de Holanda’s (1517-1585) dialogue:

we catch a glimpse of them together in an empty church at Rome, one Sunday afternoon, discussing indeed the characteristics of various schools of art, but still more the writings of Saint Paul, already following the ways and tasting the sunless pleasures of weary people, whose care for external things is slackening. (84)

Plato, we are repeatedly told, is a greater influence upon him than Dante. St Paul is often associated with Plato by Matthew Arnold and Benjamin Jowett. Vittoria’s friendship orientates him towards spiritual interests, and away from “external things.”

Leonardo da Vinci is described as having a similar nature: he is shown to be a lover and philosopher by the “elementary forces of [his] genius” being his curiosity and a desire for beauty (109). He progresses in his art, trying to attain the perfect style, the way one is half powered up the ladder of the *Symposium*, though negatively, through dialectic, “For the way to perfection,” writes Pater, “is through a series of disgusts” (103). And this pursuit shapes his life, for “Leonardo’s history is the history of his art” (126). In this essay Pater exposes his affection for histories that explore the story of the person rather than those that merely aim to amass facts, which he calls antiquarianism.

His *legend*, as the French say, with the anecdotes which every one remembers, is one of the most brilliant in Vasari. Later writers merely copied it, until, in 1804, Carlo Amoretti applied to it a criticism which left hardly a date fixed, and not one of those anecdotes untouched. The various questions thus raised have since that time become, one after another, subjects of special study, and mere antiquarianism has in this direction little more to do. (99)

¹³ In *Sweetness and Strength: The Reception of Michelangelo in Late Victorian England* (1998), Lene Østermark-Johansen discusses Pater’s possible motivations for not referencing Tommaso, and for only noting J. A. Symonds’s 23 translations of the sonnets, published only months after Pater’s original article on Michelangelo, in his second edition of *The Renaissance* (209).

He laments Amoretti's scholarship as a sort of robbery, of at least innocence. He would work in the reverse manner: rather than refuting by relics, he would weave a story around them. So he praises: "from a few stray antiquarianisms, a few faces cast up sharply from the waves, Winckelmann, as his manner was, divines the temperament of the antique world, and that in which it had delight" (208-9). Good criticism will be an act of divination, an intuitive refinement towards character. By placing Leonardo's "legend" in italics he reminds us of its meaning in foreign contexts. In English there is modern scepticism about the word "legend," while in French it often means only history, traditionally the history of a saint, coming from the Latin gerundive, "what is read."

In "Leonardo da Vinci," whose eclecticism is more emphasised in its original title, "Notes on Leonardo da Vinci" (1869), we find Pater gathering anecdotes together in order to create a new legend. The union of contrasts presents more than what is there literally, requiring a similar critical approach. Thus his famous passage on *La Gioconda* is a synthesis, as Barolsky states (36), complete in the manner of Platonic scholars. Mona Lisa is captured as Leonardo himself may have imagined her, before manifestation in paint. Pater performs an intuitive refinement in her creation. Ideals of history unite on one head literally. She, "as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary" (125), carrying within her, like their famous mothers, the seeds of great daughters, the way Pater sees certain past ideas as anticipations. Like Platonic artists in the *Symposium*, mothers give birth, to themselves in a way, but to something beyond themselves. She synthesizes time even, because she is cause and result, mother and child, a powerful collection of multiple sources; she is weary, but no violence was done to her in her making. Pater claims the actual woman herself may have been an ideal of Leonardo's childhood dreams (124).

Leonardo affects her. Finally, the artist is not even dependent upon his sitter for his portraits: they depend on him. Life and imagination are topsy-turvy and Pater's description of her chases her original existence into Leonardo's mind. The direction of critical inquiry towards anticipations is redolent of an interest in John the Baptist, despite knowing he only heralds something greater, a period actually the opposite of decadence. MacGrath calls the Mona Lisa passage "a prose ode to the Hegelian zeitgeist" (126); but it describes specifically the development of a person, a person usurping the laws of history, through artistic transformation, rather than the spirit of the time.

Pater naturally has reverence for the printed word, no matter how long ago it was printed, as the human mind in any age maintains relevance; and he has little sympathy for critical methods that pull the threads out of old tapestry and falsify old stories for the sake of a modern value. There is soul in words as he says of the Latin love letters of Abelard and Heloïse. The story of *Aucassin and Nicolette*, for example, which was passed down hand to hand, is "like many other stories, books, literary and artistic conceptions of the middle age, it has come to have in this way a sort of personal history, almost as full of risk and adventure as that of its own heroes" (16-17). Stories having a life of their own seem to deserve the respect of people, and provoke the same feelings of anger and shame at their destroyers. Stories, like all art, are believed to preserve something of the person in them, of their very souls. Bullen has discussed how Pater praised Leonardo's ability "for manifesting one's soul into his portraits" ("Pater's 'Renaissance'" 271). Despite new critical methods, therefore, "a lover of strange souls may still analyse for himself the impression made on him by those works, and try to reach through it a definition of the chief elements of Leonardo's genius" (100). Pater was successful by the intuitive method. Although in

her review of the book Mrs Pattison criticized Pater for repeating the legend, long ago proven false, that Leonardo surpassed Verocchio when teacher let student paint an angel portraying the baptism of Christ (qtd. in Seiler 72), current understanding has shown that the angel is very likely by the hand of Leonardo.

With Pico della Mirandola, Michelangelo, Leonardo, aspects of Botticelli, and Winckelmann, the Platonic narrative becomes a cycle in *The Renaissance*. “Diaphaneitè” anticipates this narrative: “It is like the reminiscence of a forgotten culture that once adorned the mind; as if the mind of one φιλοσοφήσας ποτε μετ έρωτος, fallen into a new cycle, were beginning its spiritual progress over again, but with a certain power of anticipating its stages” (250). Germain d’Hangest recognizes in *The Renaissance* Platonism of the mystical variety of Alexandrian Platonists of the second and third centuries (111), who practised a great syncretism of ideas among Judaism, Greek philosophy, and Christianity.

In nostalgia for the anterior life in cyclic perpetuity Pater cites Plato’s theories of reminiscence and reincarnation, of knowledge gained before birth (112). This anticipation and reminiscence of ideas seems to exist in his work, a general characteristic of Pater noticed also by Shuter. This soul will repeat the course of those great souls that have passed before it, and Platonism can teach one already what is coming in his course: it is an anticipation that occurs in the essays of *The Renaissance*, and indeed throughout his career.

Something in anticipation of itself may form more easily into a synthesis with itself, avoiding violent dialectic, into unity, as it has run its course before. “‘Sibi unitus et simplicatus esse,’ that is the long struggle of the Imitatio Christi,” he writes in “Diaphaneitè,” to show the soul returning to itself (*Miscellaneous* 248). “The character we mean to indicate achieves this perfect life by a happy gift of nature,

without any struggle at all” (248-49). Further on he shows this flight from material: “The artist and he who has treated life in the spirit of art desires only to be shown to the world as he really is; as he comes nearer and nearer to perfection, the veil of an outer life not simply expressive of the inward becomes thinner and thinner” (249).

There is indeed strangeness about this sort of devotion and one who lives it, this culture that spends its time in “reminiscence of a forgotten culture” in order to better live the artists’ life. The ideal soul described in “Diaphaneitè,” being already in recollection of past cultures, is perfectly suited to return in “Winckelmann,” for the Renaissance is a rebirth and a reliving. The doctrine of reminiscence declares in Plato’s *Meno* that all knowledge is a recollection, as it can be shown that even a slave knows geometry if asked the right questions, allowing knowledge to be recalled (81a-86c). Socrates, in order to prove his point, urges his interlocutor like the mid-wife he claims to be, giving birth, or rebirth, to knowledge that is innate. The idea is made familiar in English hearts by Wordsworth’s “Our birth is but a sleep and forgetting,” from his Platonic *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* (1807).

Meno is a dialogue about the problem of knowing, a question that specially concerns Pater amidst the different methods of criticism. From “Diaphaneitè” the idea of reminiscence is reborn in “Winckelmann”; where it becomes “that fancy of the reminiscence of a forgotten knowledge hidden for a time in the mind itself” (*Renaissance* 194). The diaphanous soul, a medium through which Hellenic culture shines, may be recognized in various epochs, refuting the value of a history that views itself in advance of all ages come before. Looking backwards is actually necessary in order to attain the highest reaches of culture. In *The Renaissance* the question of knowledge is complicated, refining itself from, “How does one know,” to, “How does

one know what to know.” We find the suggestion that, not only have we forgotten knowledge, we have forgotten what is worth knowing in history.

Pater promises that, knowledge being already in the mind itself, each one of us has access to it in various degrees, and this is why nothing once thought by man is irrelevant. Artwork is so important to Pater, because as sensible knowledge it provides a critic access into the artist’s mind. Art can be the beautiful point at which sensible and spiritual knowledge meet. Botticelli, for instance, exhibits through his design “a more direct inlet into the Greek temper than the works of the Greeks themselves even of the finest period” (58). Artworks, it seems, may perform the maieutic task of Socrates, and help give birth to some forgotten knowledge of an artist’s mind.

Pater calls that which is worth knowing in a work of art its “virtue,” and guides the aesthetic student “to disengage this virtue from the commoner elements with which it may be found in combination” (x). Catherine Maxwell—who also recognizes in Pater “a distinct pull towards the visionary and unseen” (71), and discusses Pater’s characteristic synthesis or unification in *The Renaissance* (82)—has taken his use of the word “virtue,” meaning “essence” or “active principle,” to be derived from the language of alchemy, as the critic’s task is to distil the virtue from the work, as one would in a herb, a wine, or a gem (85). In the “Preface,” Pater speaks in these very terms; and yet the essences or virtues he finds in artworks, or rather in artists, invariably seem yet more immaterial. They remind one of just what virtue is etymologically, deriving from Latin’s *vir*, man, the very essence of a man, recognizable in the virtue of his actions, which Platonically shapes the soul, the way an artist may be recognized in his works. Pater holds, as he will later write in “Style” (1888), that the style is the man. Virtue is knowledge to the Platonist, in both senses, and the virtue in the work is the knowledge the critic shares with the artist. Thus,

discovering temper is so crucial to Pater's aesthetic. His investment in the idea that knowledge is personal,—“a fair personality in life or in a book” (ix)—rather than third-person, allows him to believe that one's mind is worth knowing.

In relation to this desire to get inside an artist's mind, Jeffrey Wallen, noticing Pater's use of the words “magnetic” and “chain,” sees a reference to Plato's *Ion* in Pater's description of the women in Leonardo sketches (1045). *Ion* is another dialogue that deals with knowledge, in this instance with the question of how one can know poetry. Socrates tries to convince his interlocutor that poets are inspired and therefore we may only know what is in their works by being in turn inspired by them, as connected by a series of rings or a chain, originating in the Muse, connected to the poet, down to the interpreter, each one possessed by the other, and the whole powered by a god (536a-b). In the passage of which Wallen is writing Pater describes Leonardo's models as clairvoyants:

through whom, as through delicate instruments, one becomes aware of the subtler forces of nature, and the modes of their actions, all that is magnetic in it, all those finer conditions wherein material things rise to that subtlety of operation which constitutes them spiritual, where only the finer nerve and the keener touch can follow: it is as if in certain revealing instances we actually saw them at their work on human flesh. Nervous, electric, faint always with some inexplicable faintness, these people seem to be subject to exceptional conditions, to feel powers at work in the common air unfelt by others, to become, as it were, the receptacle of them, and pass them on to us in a chain of secret influences. (116)

The influences that interest Pater are secret, and rather exclusive, by being “in the common air,” but “unfelt by others.” Wallen says rather that Pater radically reconceptualizes Plato's notion, because there is no beginning chain, no muse, and no endpoint, and he sees the cause of the magnetic power from art itself. Although Platonism helps Pater escape the notion that history is shaped by wider material factors, he does not replace its determining factors with art. We may seriously ask

ourselves how much Pater truly cares for artwork itself, beyond its beauty being an invaluable index to some divine-like knowledge. And yet that makes artwork nearly all-important. Pater describes the influences that are receptacles between minds, rather than the works empirically themselves. It is because he wants to be the last link on the chain of influence from the *Ion* that Pater asks in his "Preface": "What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in book, to *me*?" (viii). The relative view of art is not a new idea; Plato would not comprehend an impersonal or third-person understanding of it.

Mystery

Critics have often spoken of the mystery of *The Renaissance*, as though it involves some initiation into the unknown. "Strangeness" is often associated with it. In *De Profundis* (1897), Wilde declares the book had "such a strange influence" over his life. In *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (1995), Denis Donoghue associates Pater's word "strange" with genius (140). Pater implies remoteness in our complete understanding of these figures. One of the most significant qualities about a personal story, especially one that follows the Platonic narrative, is the embracing of unknowingness. "Such a habit," reads "Diaphaneitè," "may be described as wistfulness of mind, the feeling that there is 'so much to know,' rather as a longing after what is unattainable, than as a hope to apprehend" (250-51). "Wistfulness" is the very word which resonates with d'Hangest in its Platonic "mystique" (113), a silent and little-hopeful yearning for the unknown. Socrates of course is always confessing his ignorance: this is the one thing he does know, the source of his wisdom. The desire for knowledge is often based upon an awareness of ignorance, and Pater presents Michelangelo's ignorance as a sign of his growth. Again, in declaring that

Plato influences him more than Dante, the latter's belief in the afterlife is compared to that of a child, while Michelangelo takes after the Greek. In Michelangelo:

you have maturity, the mind of the grown man, dealing cautiously and dispassionately with serious things; and what hope he has is based on the consciousness of ignorance—ignorance of man, ignorance of the nature of the mind, its origin and capacities. Michelangelo is so ignorant of the spiritual world, of the new body and its laws, that he does not surely know whether the consecrated Host may not be the body of Christ. (95)

Ignorance contributes to the Holy. To say that ignorance is a sign of maturity is completely to oppose the contemporary view, especially that view put forward by Temple in *Essays and Reviews*. The statement counters modern criticism's tendency to equate empirical knowledge with progress. And Pater even suggests that religion gains in power through ignorance, for ignorance leads to mystery. Mystery contains a certain beauty in *The Renaissance*.

Throughout *The Renaissance* Pater invokes this mystery. He speaks of the mystic as much as Swinburne does in his essay on Blake. In Jacob Burckhardt's *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), an important source for Pater, he would have seen how mystery influenced the period. Burckhardt often mixes mystery with violence which in Pater's work is not there, violence having nothing to do with artwork and more to do with politics and the intrigue of society, from which Pater abstains. Winckelmann is murdered, but we don't see it; and there's certainly no artistry involved, only a blunder of misfortune. The danger of "his romantic, fervent friendships with young men" is foreshadowed: "One notable friendship, the fortune of which we may trace through his letters, begins with an antique, chivalrous letter in French, and ends noisily in a burst of angry fire" (193). His Platonism is said to go beyond the merely intellectual. Perhaps from Winckelmann, relates Pater, Goethe learns not to let his sensual side "overgrow him" (229).

Pater would also have read how mystery was associated with Platonism in Burckhardt. Even Savonarola, who is reputed to dislike philosophy, is said to be enthralled with the Florentine Platonists mystic union of God (Burckhardt 531). Burckhardt's history is full of narratives, everything blended with biography and therefore given life; he even vitalizes Platonism by this method. He sees in the philosophy continuity: "Echoes of mediæval mysticism here flow into one current with Platonic doctrines, and with a characteristically modern spirit. One of the most precious fruits of the knowledge of the world and of man here comes to maturity, on whose account alone the Italian Renaissance must be called the leader of modern ages" (549).¹⁴

Hilary Fraser has addressed the irony that although historicism often concerns itself with the conditions of the Italian Renaissance, Burckhardt's pioneering study places a strong emphasis on the growth of the individual (9). Pater is influenced by Burckhardt in this emphasis, but he narrows that individualism down upon expression found in artwork. To Pater's question in "Winckelmann," "Can art represent men and women in these bewildering toils so as to give the spirit at least an equivalent for the sense of freedom?" (231), he answers that perhaps only art can free us, in the "Conclusion."

Pater happens to be much more concerned with artwork as source to the artist, and he therefore has a greater interest in Platonism as a method for its dependence upon beauty. He writes of Leonardo that "His type of beauty is so exotic that it fascinates a larger number than it delights, and seems more than that of any other artist to reflect ideas and views and some scheme of the world within" (99), that there is "a certain mystery in his work, and something enigmatical beyond the usual

¹⁴ Translation by S. G. C. Middlemore.

measure of great men, that he fascinates, or perhaps half repels” (98). Of *La Gioconda* he writes that only Dürer’s *Melancholia* is comparable to it in “suggestiveness” and that “no crude symbolism disturbs the effect of its subdued and graceful mystery” (123). “Suggestiveness,” like the word “tendency,” indicates merely a direction, a penchant, without definition. Because of *Melancholia*’s occult and Platonic notions, its Pythagorean magic square, for instance, among other influences, it may be interpreted without end. Pater says further of Leonardo, he seemed “rather the sorcerer or the magician, possessed of curious secrets and a hidden knowledge, living in a world of which he alone possessed the key” (107), that “Leonardo’s nature had a kind of spell in it” (108); and that his work had “the tendency to lose itself in a refined and graceful mystery” (98). The very repetition of these adjectives, without further clarification creates a nebulous mystery around Leonardo.

A reader of *The Renaissance* may notice Pater’s curious use of repeated words: also curious in its original sense, as careful, from *cura*, whence the word “curate” derives. He frequently uses the words “mystery,” “strange,” “remote,” “graceful,” “bizarre,” “subtle,” “cloudy,” “spectral,” “exquisite,” “fleeting,” and “exotic,” as though emulating the subjects about which he writes. So peculiarly idiosyncratic are these words to Pater that his critics often employ these same terms to explain him. Yet Barolsky astutely connects Pater’s style to his philosophy: “Himself a Platonist, Pater constantly writes in pursuit of an ideal beauty” (26). This tendency may be noticed in Pater’s prose, besides his subject matter, because his adjectives lead elsewhere: they have a tendency towards perpetual movement or ascendance, as if fleeing us the way his artists escape society; or we may look at the motion as his own desire for transcendence out of a system through his art. “Strange,” for example, from *estranger*, ultimately Latin’s *extraneus*, meaning to go beyond, as, of course,

“fleeting” and “remote.” Not only do these words imply motion, but they express a search, for knowledge or otherwise: “exquisite” coming from Latin’s *ex-quaerere* to seek out, as in quest; exotic coming from the Greek “outside,” attaining something outside a boundary. The word “mystery,” as I have already quoted, “has been usually derived from a Greek word which signifies *to shut*, as if one *shut one’s lips*, brooding on what cannot be uttered; but the Platonists themselves derive it rather from the act of *shutting the eyes*, that one may see the more, inwardly” (37). He continues to say that Pico “attempts to define the stages by which the soul passes from the earthly to the unseen beauty” (37).

This tendency may answer to the observation which several critics have made that Pater’s favourite word is “refine.” It seems his mental flight travels from material objects up towards the immaterial. Refine, or “to fine down,” as Pater sometimes writes, can mean to make less material, to purify closer to its essence, and it is literally related to the end of some process or artistic finish. But although it is teleological Pater refers more to a method than a goal. Christopher Ricks declares that Pater has a greed for fineness (393), judging by his frequent use of the words “fine,” or even “finer,” though he did not often select the word “finest,” preferring the tension of the comparative. Denis Donoghue has also noticed his predilection for the comparative adjective (304). But the comparative does not express mere tension. An evaluative adjective that neither merely describes something static, nor something in its highest superlative state, the comparative is always in motion upwards, seeking its goal, ameliorating without achieving. It is relatively above, but indeterminate, ever aware there is space still to go, ignorant yet desirous to know, upwards. W. B. Yeats, who of his generation said that “we looked consciously to Pater for our philosophy”

(*Autobiographies* 302), likely had this stylistic tendency in mind when in “The Phases of the Moon” (1919) he calls Pater’s style “extravagant,” literally to wander beyond.

Conclusion

In Pater’s first volume he is concerned with charming his reader, and indeed “charm” is a word he frequently uses in *The Renaissance*. Charm is related to mystery in that it gains much of its power by being indefinite, for leading one through suggestiveness without marking off a boundary. Related to charm are the words “incantation” and “spell,” appropriate words for this book, specifically for the sense of repetition, although he changes the details of these artists’ lives. Perhaps Pater was aware that “spell” simply means “a narrative” in Old English, and thus relayed a history in individual narratives to enchant his reader.

Pater’s history presents a view of figures that move inwards to knowledge, away from the rush of life, through Platonism, a philosophy that is shared by individuals across ages, which in turn heightens the similarity of those souls to one another, rather than distancing them by exhibiting the differences of their historical conditions.

Conspicuously absent from our discussion was the negative reaction Pater received from his “Conclusion” to this work. He would pay for his charming vagueness. Removing the “Conclusion” from the second edition in 1877, he did not return it until the next edition in 1888. I have therefore saved the discussion of the “Conclusion” for chapter four, when the context, felt by Pater, is suitable for the brief passages to be better understood, after the publication of *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). But much of Pater’s writing after *The Renaissance* can be read as an apology to the “Conclusion,” and thus in our next chapter, looking at Wordsworth, the poet finds aesthetic enjoyment in contemplation.

Chapter Two

The Difference of Platonism:

Readings of Wordsworth by Pater and Arnold

Pater's essay "On Wordsworth," published in the *Fortnightly Review* in April of 1874, only a year after the publication of *The Renaissance*, may originally have been intended for inclusion in the famous volume. Billie Inman, in *Walter Pater's Reading*, is one among critics who believe that Pater had planned to follow the movement of the Renaissance right into England, and near to his present day, in order to show the current survival of its spirit (265). Pater was special for expanding the Renaissance, he had already extended it into eighteenth-century Germany with "Winckelmann," and there was no obvious reason why it should stop there. Pater repeatedly declares that an idea held by man can never really die. And evidentially, Wordsworth is discussed several times in the "Preface." "On Wordsworth"¹⁵ is a highly significant piece of criticism in Pater's career, for its timing, its subject matter, and its literary affiliation, with, namely, Matthew Arnold. William E. Buckler remarked generally that like Plato's style Pater imitated Wordsworth's style (50); and also, like Plato, Wordsworth recurrently appears throughout his oeuvre.

The essay marks several returns, homeward. One is the return to an English topic. For eight years Pater had been critically away from home, focusing his attention on subjects largely in Italy, but also in France and Germany. Perhaps a strong influence upon him was Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* (1865), where in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" Arnold called for English critics to "dwell much on foreign thought" (40), and practised his imperative by treating some little-known German and French subjects, particularly with Joubert and the brother and sister

¹⁵ Though originally titled "On Wordsworth," the essay is more commonly known simply as "Wordsworth," as it later appeared in *Appreciations* (1889), with no significant changes.

Maurice and Eugénie de Guérin. Not since Pater's first published essay on Coleridge in 1866, had he treated an English poet. Wordsworth would seem to be Pater's strongest literary anchor to England. His imaginary portrait "An English Poet," thought to be written in the late seventies focuses on an English *Künstlerroman* very redolent of the Lake Poet's life; and he also left behind a manuscript now in Harvard's Houghton Library entitled "Thistle," which includes a Wordsworthian subject and landscape, thought to be perhaps the third work in a trilogy of the same genre that would include it with *Marius* and *Gaston*, as though to show the chronological march of culture westward.

"Coleridge's Writings"

Written as a new fellow with a reputation for philosophy, "Coleridge's Writings" marks Pater's effort to remove himself from an interest in metaphysics; as he says, "Who could change the colour or curve of a rose-leaf for that οὐσία ἀχρώματος, ἀσχημάτιστος, ἀναφής—that colourless, formless, intangible being—Plato put so high?" (108).¹⁶ But he does not remove himself from philosophy, using four Greek words to show he is initiated. He discusses the poet's failure as a philosopher, his Parmenidean pursuit for the Absolute. In the essay he absolves Plato of Coleridge's flaw; rather, he saves Plato, professing the English poet may have learned from the Greek philosopher how to handle ideas better: "Plato, whom Coleridge claims as the first of his spiritual ancestors, Plato, as we remember him, a true humanist, with Petrarch and Göthe (sic) and M. Renan, holds his theories lightly, glances into a blithe and naïve inconsequence from one view to another, not anticipating the burden of meaning it will one day have for humanity" (111). When this essay is included in *Appreciations*, simply titled "Coleridge," Plato is not grouped

¹⁶ We cite from the 1866 anonymous article in the *Westminster Review*.

with Petrarch, Goethe, and Renan, but alone represents the true humanist (69). Pater criticizes Coleridge for exaggerating a single aspect of Platonism. If a philosophy is truly to blame, Pater blames the influence of Schelling's philosophy of nature. The thinkers of Germany in this essay are compared unfavourably to the literary critics of France, which reveals Pater's conscious identification with more literary writers rather than philosophical.

In the essay on Coleridge—not surprisingly given the famous literary partnership that linked the two poets—Pater is already formulating his thoughts on Wordsworth. He praises him for possessing a quietness of mind, one of Pater's highest virtues. The Absolute disquiets Coleridge, makes him too self-conscious. “What in Wordsworth is a sentiment or instinct,” writes Pater, “is in Coleridge a philosophical idea” (110). Pater describes “a world of fine gradations” (108)—coupling the adjective and noun “fine gradations” twice (116)—, where one can find scientific truth, revealing a staggered order between the intellectual and concrete world. The artist will not neglect the concrete, then, for there necessarily lies beauty. The importance of an awareness of the gradations is why the relative spirit must replace the absolute. As the word “gradation” implies, deriving from the Latin *gradi*, to step, to walk, to go, the relative steps lead upwards towards a principle. Pater wants to ensure that critics do not err by missing important steps.

Wordsworth is one who knows “the moral world is ever in contact with the physical” (106), he writes in “Coleridge's Writings.” Pater is not trying to rid the sensible world of the intellectual, but he is working zealously to correct an imbalance, perhaps mostly within his own thought, with new awareness of the inductive sciences. He is trying to be exact and precise, as is evident in his frequent use of the semi-colon, for measuring gradations requires critical acuity. Though he may desire to be more

instinctual like Wordsworth, his own writing shows the signs of self-consciousness like the faults he imputes to Coleridge. One early critic, T  odore de Wyzewa (1863-1917), remarks on the essay, that “Metaphysics and logic absorbed him completely. His essay on Coleridge is nothing more than a clinically correct college thesis, the work of a conscientious student of philosophy” (qtd. in Seiler 298). At the very least we can see here the contest between artist and critic in Pater’s mind, where the latter typically separates, while the former unifies. In Wordsworth he finds a poet who can successfully practise both skills.

In his essay “On Wordsworth” we find a more mature author than the author of “Coleridge’s Writings.” *The Renaissance* lies between the essays. “Coleridge’s Writings” was published as an unsigned review in the *Westminster Review*, while “On Wordsworth” is published under “Walter Pater” in the *Fortnightly Review*, writer of all those exquisite essays from Michelangelo to Winckelmann. Laurel Brake has discussed how the *Westminster* articles really were reviews, while the liberal *Fortnightly* allowed for free-standing articles (16), suggesting that Wordsworth was a subject in which Pater had greater interest. As an artist whose work is damaged by absolutism in philosophy, Pater leaves Coleridge entirely out of “On Wordsworth,” despite their literary relationship. He has found an artist who can unify his philosophy with his art and his art with his life—and is English. As he does customarily in *The Renaissance*, Pater then isolates his subject from others.

Matthew Arnold

One of the strongest influences on Pater’s criticism is Matthew Arnold. The critical act of separating, for instance, was very likely articulated to him by the older poet and critic. In lectures given as the Professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1861, a post Arnold held from 1857 to 1867, Arnold declares that the critic must strive “to see the

object as in itself it really is.” And he repeats this exhortation in “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” (1864), an essay which holds many seeds of Arnold’s thought, some of which influences Pater’s criticism. It is impossible to mistake Arnold’s influence in Pater’s “Preface” to *The Renaissance*, for he quotes it directly, where he first formally sets out his theory of aesthetics.¹⁷ The second paragraph begins,

“To see the object as in itself it really is,” has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly. The objects with which aesthetic criticism deals—music, poetry, artistic and accomplished forms of human life—are indeed receptacles of so many powers or forces: they possess, like the products of nature, so many virtues or qualities. What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence? (viii)

Pater’s intentions here go beyond Arnold’s rule, as many critics, such as Ian Fletcher and Wendell V. Harris, see Pater as plainly undercutting or perverting Arnold’s terms, which in Harris’s view, made it possible for Wilde to see the object precisely as it is not (743). Graham Hough, John J. Conlon, and Ruth C. Child,¹⁸ are critics who see Pater’s establishing the subjective, or relative knowledge, as he called for in his Coleridge essay, as a first, necessary step to higher knowledge. The latter interpretation seems fairer: Pater believes the maxim is said “justly.” Critics who say he is devaluing Arnold’s statement exaggerate the quickness with which Pater follows

¹⁷ Although the “Conclusion” gets much more attention, Pater did not initially intend to include it in *The Renaissance* (Evans 7-8): it was an afterthought, excised from an old essay. The “Preface” is written to convey the aesthetic responsible for the volume.

¹⁸ Hough, in *The Last Romantics* (1949), declares that Pater takes a cultured background for granted, in order to blend personal knowledge with historical (157-59); Conlon, in *Walter Pater and the French Tradition* (1982), declares that Pater believed subjective impressions could be interpreted by only a few who could refine their knowledge to the “virtue” of a work (53); and Child, in *The Aesthetic of Walter Pater* (1940), declares that although impressions are important in criticism, the critic has an objective goal to attain the “formula” or “active principle,” upon which she can find agreement with other human minds (135-36).

it with “to me.” The self is not given the agency of “I” in Pater’s statement, but rather the English objective case of “me.” By placing the critical object as the subject, and asking, “What effect does it really produce on me,” he is making the self the patient of influence, privileging the object. But to know the object we must first know ourselves, as Socrates quotes in several dialogues.¹⁹ Following the saying of Delphi, “Know thyself,” allows us to access other knowledge. In another sense, we can only know physical objects through our senses, therefore we must acknowledge relativity at work; hence we may ascend the grade of knowledge into the higher intellectual realm. But even intellectual knowledge, by Plato’s epistemology, is first person, never objective. And Plato did not conceive of this much later subject/object dualism. We shall approach Pater’s conception of knowledge by examining Plato’s perhaps most important dialogue on knowledge: the *Theaetetus*.

Plato’s *Theaetetus*

As Inman notes, Plato’s *Theaetetus* is the first of the dialogues in Pater’s library records, borrowed from The Queen’s College Library in March of 1863.²⁰ Lewis Campbell’s *The Theaetetus of Plato*, a revised text with an introductory essay, plenary notes, and appendices, was published in 1861, ten years before Jowett’s translation. Campbell graduated from Queen’s College in 1858, the year Pater arrived there, and went on to become the Professor of Greek at St Andrews from 1863-1894, returning to Balliol College as an honorary Fellow. His Platonism is generally that of Jowett’s, in fact Campbell’s *Theaetetus* might be seen to influence Jowett, although he was Jowett’s student. It was Jowett who asked Campbell to produce the edition as part of his broader Platonic project at Oxford, in which Jowett was originally only to work on *The Republic*. But by 1865 Jowett conceived of the great work of translating

¹⁹ The *Phaedrus* and *Charmides* are two important examples.

²⁰ In “The Intellectual Context of Walter Pater’s ‘Conclusion,’” Inman believes this dialogue would have indirectly confirmed Pater’s “sceptical ideas” (139). But it was also influential in other ways.

all the dialogues with introductions (Campbell viii). Campbell even helped finish Jowett's edition of *The Republic* after Jowett's death in 1894. He also co-authored the two-volume *Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett* (1897), with E. A. Abbott.

In the *Theaetetus* Socrates asks the fundamental question, What is knowledge? The importance of this question at the time, especially at Oxford, may be seen by the fact that Campbell published an edition so early and by itself. Campbell compares it to modern epistemologies of Locke and Hume in the introduction, identifying it with a kind of empiricism, yet declares Plato the better stylist. The volume's introduction to Platonism in a broader sense may bear influence on Pater, evident in his *Plato and Platonism*, especially in its historical criticism which sees Plato absorbing earlier philosophies into a single system, namely, Heraclitus at one extreme, Parmenides at the other, with Pythagoras synthesising their ideas with music. It is a good example of Oxonian Platonism taught by Jowett, and influenced by Germans from the earlier half of the century, such as Hegel, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), and, later, Eduard Zeller.

In the *Theaetetus* Socrates declares himself to be, like his mother, a midwife, but for men rather than women, of souls rather than bodies. When he asks Theaetetus plainly, "What is knowledge?" Theaetetus first answers that knowledge is sense-perception. Socrates relates this response to Protagoras' maxim, "man is the measure of all things." He speaks of the "uninitiated" who hold this view, as "the people who believe in nothing but what they can hold fast in their hands, and who will not allow that action and generation and all that is invisible can have any real existence"²¹ (155e). If perception is knowledge then a pig or a dog-faced baboon could be the measure of all things, but really he'd be no wiser than a tadpole, without aspiring to

²¹ Jowett's translation (1871).

be a man. But, it is agreed, there are great differences in the understanding of men. At this place in the argument, though long from finished, Jowett takes hold in his introduction, which will have great significance on the Victorian critic, declaring, “One man still remains wiser than another, a more accurate observer and relater of facts, a truer measure of the proportions of knowledge” (353).

Socrates declares that our senses do not bring us knowledge, but are instruments (ὄργανων), through which another power, our soul, perceives objects of sense (184d). Our souls reflect on these perceptions, and their “reflections on these and on their relations to being and use, are slowly and hardly gained, if they are ever gained, by education and long experience” (πολλῶν πραγμάτων) (186c). Experience is an important word here, seized upon by both Campbell and Jowett, for its obvious signal towards empiricism. “The modern thinker,” writes Jowett in his introduction to the dialogue, “often repeats the parallel axiom, ‘that all knowledge is experience.’ He means to say that the outward and not the inward is both the original source and the final criterion of truth, because the outward can be observed and analysed; the inward is only known by external results, and is dimly perceived by each man for himself. In what does this differ from the saying of Theaetetus? (351-52)” Indeed, Campbell wrote in the second edition, “Plato is well aware that philosophy, to be fruitful, must begin and end with experience” (lii). Knowledge requires one’s senses, but cannot rest there. Soon, after we turn away from our senses, says Socrates, “the mind is alone and engaged with being.” At this stage Socrates says the soul is engaged in dialectic:

“I mean the conversation which the soul holds with herself in considering of anything. I speak of what I scarcely know; but the soul when thinking appears to me to be just talking—asking questions of herself and answering them, affirming and denying. And when she has arrived at a decision, either gradually or by a sudden impulse, and has at last agreed, and does not doubt, this is called her opinion. I say, then, that to form an opinion is to speak, and opinion is a word spoken, I

mean, to oneself and in silence [σιγῆ], not aloud or to another.” (Jowett III 416) (189e-190a)

Pater shares this definition of dialectic in *Plato and Platonism*, as the soul in conversation with itself (142). The process towards knowledge also agrees with Pater’s tendency towards silence, a notion related to the initiated. But still this is not knowledge (*epistémē*) in the true sense, only opinion (*dóxa*).

Two analogies to conceive knowledge are then suggested. Knowledge can be like impressions in a wax tablet, and here we see the inspiration for Locke’s famous metaphor, noticed by Jowett. The density of the wax will determine the quality of the impression, where either too soft or too hard is inefficient (194d). Pater uses this metaphor in “The Child in the House” (1878), when he writes how impressionable we are as children, for the “the smooth wax, of our ingenuous souls” (*Miscellaneous* 177). The second suggests that our minds are like an aviary, in order to distinguish between possessing knowledge from having it (197c). We could “possess” doves or birds if we had them in an enclosure, but we would only “have” them if going into the enclosure we took them in hand. Socrates, in the style of aporetic dialogues, suggests possibilities without concluding. They arrive closer when Socrates suggests that knowledge is true opinion with a definition (δόξαν ἀληθῆ μετὰ λόγου ἐπιστήην) (202c), μετὰ λόγου “rational explanation.” The definition is the ability to tell some characteristic by which the object in question differs from all others (208c). This is as close as Socrates comes to discovering what knowledge is in the dialogue. But Socrates argues that opinion itself requires recognizing difference, and therefore it is redundant to mark yet another difference from that; for knowledge looks like adding right opinion to right opinion, which is silly. Socrates closes by denying knowledge is sensation, or true opinion, or definition and explanation accompanying true opinion (210A). Like many of Plato’s dialogues that end in *aporia*, it invites ingenious

interpretation, a Platonic seeing behind the thing revealed, as later generations came to believe there are esoteric teachings to discover.

Critical Philosophy at Work

If we take the closest thing to knowledge that Plato offers us, we gain great insight into Pater's method of criticism. A theory of knowledge can be extracted from this dialogue, even if one pessimistically believes *epistémé* is impossible. Plato's disputation against knowledge being true opinion accompanied by definition or account seems unsatisfactory; but what if this definition of knowledge was good enough, deficient perhaps, but good enough critically? In the "Preface" to *The Renaissance* Pater exemplifies his critical epistemology while discussing Wordsworth, when he declares the "virtue" or the "active principle" in Wordsworth is "that strange, mystical sense of a life in natural things, and of man's life as a part of nature"; and the critic's task is "to disengage it, to mark the degree in which it penetrates his verse" (xi). When he asks us, "to know one's impression as it really is," he urges us to contract our judgment, "to discriminate it," to define it, "to realise it distinctly." A good critic's true opinion will require a rational explanation. In agreement with Child and Conlon, this is the second step that René Wellek notices in Pater's criticism, for although many can sense their impressions, Pater is calling for the rarer ability to discriminate the formula and active principle in a work (383). Conlon declares that the "Preface," revealing the method also practised by Sainte-Beuve (53), offers "much to many, but perfection only to a few" (54). As in the *Theaetetus*, although we begin with man as measure, we settle with the belief that certain people are wiser than others. If man is the measure, what separates people is not their senses but their minds' ability to scale-up dialectically towards essence.

We may see the similarity in Pater's aesthetic criticism and the highest definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, which is right opinion, according to, as the Greek reads, a *logos*. A *logos* in this case is an account, a definition, an essence extremely, that without which a thing is not, or as in the *Theaetetus* that characteristic which distinguishes it from others. In "Coleridge's Writings," Pater condemns abstract theories of art, but when it comes to discussing criticism he utilizes these theories.

One of Socrates' problems with even the final definition of knowledge in the *Theaetetus* is that the distinguishing characteristic in the object will likely be in common with another object. In order to discover a truly peculiar characteristic in his subjects Pater often blends two virtues together. Perhaps he learned how to discover a unique blend—as Pater speaks of the critic's work like appreciating wine—from Arnold's pairing of "sweetness and light" to discriminate the pervading Oxonian tone. So, for example, after a deep perusal of Michelangelo's poetry and biography he recognises in him the blend of "sweetness and strength."

In "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" Arnold calls attention to how the word "curiosity" was so little used in English compared to other languages (18). According to him curiosity marks the disinterested free-play of the mind upon a subject, and signals the instinct towards culture: "to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world." "Curiosity" marks the critical temper, and Conlon has noted its influence on Pater (81). Pater uses the word frequently in his essay on Leonardo, his first signed publication in 1869. "Curiosity and the desire for beauty" are the two forces at work in Leonardo's genius, which generate in union "a type of subtle and curious grace" (109).

The Digression: Platonism and Aestheticism

There is an influential digression in the *Theaetetus*, depicting the differences between a lawyer, or man of the world, and a philosopher. Perhaps this is the source beginning of the distinction made between practical and theoretical knowledge. Socrates acerbically depreciates lawyers, who are ruled by time and money, enslaved to the opinion of others, whilst praising the quiet life of the philosopher away from the mob, in leisure (σχολή, *scholé*), a word Pater relates to his scholar in *Plato and Platonism* (216), beholden to no man but himself. The philosopher is truly concerned with knowledge, because he is concerned with what “is,” whilst those promiscuous in the mundane have only the opinions of the ever-changing (175b). “Such are the two characters, Theodorus,” says Socrates:

the one of the philosopher and gentleman who may be excused for appearing simple and useless when he has to perform some menial office, such as packing up a bag, or flavouring a sauce or fawning speech; the other, of the man who is able to do every kind of service smartly and neatly, but knows not how to wear his cloak like a gentleman; still less does he acquire the music of speech (ἁρμονίαν λόγων), or hymn the true life which is lived by immortals or men blessed of heaven. (175d-e) (Jowett III 399)

In this distinction we may find praise for the person away from the mob, satirized lately as the “absent-minded professor,” but also the likely origin of the person in the ivory-tower. We can also discover some values that became specifically associated with aestheticism, paradoxically superficial perhaps: one who knows how to dress like a gentleman and speak with music, uniting in a life both beautiful and divine. This passage may be called a digression, but it really adds much to the argument, for it strongly distinguishes two classes of men and two modes of living. Dandyism and Platonism might appear similar to an external viewer in terms of their aloofness, because what distinguishes them most is a matter of thought, which is imperceptible to others.

It is important that we recognize that some of the principles here carry into aestheticism, because they derive from the study of Plato at Oxford, influencing the ideal of a philosopher through the education of many young men, rather than from a rebellious pose caught by French writers across the Channel.

The dialogue continues that evil is necessary because it reveals the good, and the philosopher, in taking flight, flees from the evils of the world, and simultaneously grows closer to God; we are like God when we strive for goodness: this, says Socrates, is true wisdom. The Neoplatonists made much of this passage, making the goal of life to unite with God. But we can also see many of Pater's narratives sketched from this passage, as we have seen already in *The Renaissance*, and as will be seen in Marius, Gaston, and in Plato himself. Even if there were no final answer to the question "What is knowledge?" in the *Theaetetus*, merely a series of attempts, there is a strong statement made here about how one ought to live, which might be the greatest knowledge. In the terms means and ends, which Pater takes up in "Wordsworth," there are means that make one's life divine, while others that make it evil. We shall see later how Arnold also propels this narrative, especially in *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-68).

Matthew Arnold's Platonism

Arnold came up to Oxford too soon to be immersed in Plato the way Pater was, graduating in 1844 from Balliol College, with a second-class degree in *Greats* like Pater, but before Jowett had changed the course for the entire University. It was not until the mid-century mark that Plato entered the syllabus, gaining importance continually throughout the century, in broadening circles after Jowett's translations in 1871. In Arnold's day *Greats* still revolved around Bishop Butler's *The Analogy of Religion* (1736), along with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which, after the *Analogy*

was dropped around 1864 (Turner 343), continued to work in tandem with Plato. But Arnold, whose reading was broad and current, knew Plato well, at least indirectly, as even his early criticism reveals. In the preface to *Essays in Criticism* he states that beauty “is only truth seen from the other side” (xi). And he increasingly dedicates himself to the philosopher throughout his career. Paul Shorey (1857-1934), an American classical scholar and philosopher, who favourably reviewed *Plato and Platonism*, has charted some of the Platonism in Arnold’s prose. Beyond the many allusions to Plato throughout his work, specially in *Culture and Anarchy* and in *Discourses in America* (1885), Shorey sees Arnold as adopting his temperament as a “conservative religious reformer who seeks to save the spirit by throwing overboard the dogma” (230). He protests against the dumb machinery of society for harming our real selves. Against the excesses of democracy, Shorey also notes Arnold’s plain imitation of classifying three classes within the state, like in *The Republic*, as Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace. Not to be ignored, of course, is that, like Pater, Arnold emphasises Plato the literary artist. More recently, in “Matthew Arnold and the Spirit of Plato” (1994), M. W. Rowe has remarked that Plato is not present in Arnold’s poetry, with the slight exception of “The Scholar-Gypsy,” based on an Oxford scholar who was associated with the Cambridge Platonists (242); and that, although he had read *The Republic* and the *Phaedrus* deeply in the 1840s, Plato does not hold a strong place in his work until after the age of thirty-five, when he becomes Professor of Poetry, begins to write less poetry and devotes himself more to prose. Of course Arnold continues to write poetry, but he comes to be more identified with his prose. We might speculate even that Arnold’s preference for prose grew with his preference for Plato, whose development from poetry to prose was often remarked

upon by Victorian commentators, including Pater, on the authority of Diogenes Laërtius' third-century *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers*.

Rowe sees a progression in Arnold's career "from an identification with the popularist Socrates towards the more embittered, aristocratic, and reactionary Plato" (246). The transitional work seems to be *Culture and Anarchy*, where Socrates' personality and the political ideas of *The Republic* culminate. Rowe indicates that many of Arnold's most identifiable ideas in *Culture and Anarchy* are from Plato's *Republic*, ideas such as "seeing things as they really are" and "the firm intelligible law of things," and the "best self," from *The Republic* (591). Furthermore "doing as one likes" may come from Plato's criticism of democracy there: "and has not every man license to do as he likes?" (557b) (247). He also points to the fact that while St Paul is the paragon of Hebraism Plato epitomizes Hellenism, representing the opposite poles of human perfection (255). In comparing Arnold with Pater, T. S. Eliot said, "Arnold Hellenizes and Hebraicizes in turns; it is something to Pater's credit to have Hellenized purely" (389); but although one hesitates to undo the little credit Eliot gives Pater, his Plato includes aspects of Hebraism: he calls this the Dorian side of Hellenism, and he emphasises this tendency as his career advances.

Arnold emphasises the politically conservative Plato of *The Republic* and *Laws*, as he sees democratic society in decline, and utterly lacking in depth, fixed principles, and direction. Furthermore, the state controls education in *The Republic*, another concern of Arnold's, which he shared with his father, Thomas Arnold (1795-1842), famous headmaster of Rugby School. Like the Arnolds, Plato is concerned with a boy's education from a young age through to maturity, and continuing through adult years. Pater's later short story "Emerald Uthwart" (1892), to which we will return for a fuller discussion in our final chapter, deals with a boy's school days, his

advancement up to Oxford, and eventually to a disappointing end in the army. His education at school is actually the cause of his later failure, or his inability to properly attune himself to English school's education modelled on Plato's system. "Thus Plato unites literary criticism, education, politics, and even to a certain extent religion, in exactly the same way as Arnold" (249), writes Rowe. And with much less influence of politics, Pater increasingly combines these interests, culminating in his final book on Plato.

Arnold holds Plato largely as a literary stylist, as hierarchical politically, and as a spiritual guide, all characteristics that have their effect upon Pater. From rather early in his critical prose, in "Marcus Aurelius" (1863), Arnold praises Plato for his literary charm. And he continues to praise him for this throughout his career: in *Literature and Dogma* (1873) he is in the highest class of writers, among Shakespeare, Goethe, Voltaire, and Cicero (xxiv). In "A Guide to English Literature" (1877) his style is in a class by itself for "its varied cadence and subtle ease" that "has never been surpassed" (249). In "Emerson" (1884) he is one of the great men of letters of whom Emerson falls short: "They are men like Cicero, Plato, Bacon, Pascal, Swift, Voltaire,—writers with, in the first place, a genius and an instinct for style; writers whose prose is by a kind of native necessity true and sound" (174). And he is the only great philosopher—not even Aristotle, Spinoza, or Kant—who is a great literary man, who can put philosophical ideas in "exquisite literary form." In "Sainte-Beuve" (1886) Plato is perfect "in the treatment at once beautiful and profound of philosophical questions" (119). Even a great philosopher requires style.

Platonic Eremitism and Hierarchy

From our perspective, when we discuss Pater's or Arnold's view of Plato, it seems nearly impossible to avoid the term elitism. But we might recall that the

noxious term is somewhat anachronistic in this discussion, considering “élitism” was first coined in 1950s America, as a political term (OED). Yet in the twentieth century Plato is often criticized for elitism, a term of which he was not aware. This does not mean of course that we cannot speak of it as existing before we used the term, but we might be sympathetic to why it occurs in Platonism, and to understand perhaps how elitism from our standpoint seems impossible to avoid. To begin with, Plato’s ideal man would withdraw from the everyday affairs of the people, like eremites, whose habits imitate the spiritual retreat to the desert like John the Baptist. In *Dandies and Desert Saints* (1995), James Eli Adams discusses, especially through Carlyle, the masculine Victorian pose of the prophet enacted through asceticism in contrast to the dandy, but does not particularly look to some classical texts as models for this figure. By looking at the classical roots of these ideas we shall gain a better and more nuanced insight.

The word “anchorite,” as Shorey reminds us, though used in the Christian tradition for saints and sages, is part of the Platonic tradition (75). It is derived from ἀναχώρησις, an expression of the idealist’s withdrawal from the world, literally χωρεῖν, to withdraw or retire, and ἀνά, back. The Greek word is used in precisely this sense in the *Phaedo* (83a) in reference to the soul fleeing distraction. “It is because criticism has so little kept in the pure intellectual sphere,” Arnold writes relatively early in his career, in “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,” “has so little detached itself from practice, has been so directly polemical and controversial, that it has so ill accomplished, in this country, its best spiritual work; which is to keep man from a self-satisfaction which is retarding and vulgarising, to lead him towards perfection, by making his mind dwell upon what is excellent in itself, and the absolute beauty and fitness of things” (22-23). One of the reasons the ideal man, or

philosopher, must segregate himself from others is that he has little business in the flux of worldly affairs, and concerns himself with the eternal.

Arnold anticipates aestheticism in many of these ways—praising segregation from the vulgar, appreciation of the beautiful, self-perfection, a care for style to match matter, and respect for the individual amidst the machinery of society—thoughts and arguments which are rooted in some of the key classical texts of Oxford's *Literae Humaniores*. The three forms of aestheticism discussed by R. V. Johnson are related to one another, and may actually derive from influential critics, such as Arnold and Pater, through the manner in which they interpret and assimilate into contemporary theory works of Plato and Aristotle. The three kinds are the “art for art’s sake” notion, first Anglicized perhaps by Swinburne, significantly also a student and friend of Jowett; the second is “contemplative aestheticism,” which treats life in “the spirit of art,” the sort of aestheticism most remarkable in Pater’s view of Wordsworth; and, thirdly, a negative tendency, is the refusal to be categorised by the moral standards of the day, to stand outside of those canons of judgement that befall the average citizen, and not to have to speak for the age (12). To the third we may add, in Pater’s case, along with the wish not be relegated to the relative values of one’s own age, the desire to be included with other artists throughout history in something like a Chaucerian House of Fame, or in Pater’s case, the *House Beautiful*. But the three strands of aestheticism discussed by Johnson may all be traced back to values found in Plato, specifically his *Theaetetus*, and Aristotle, specifically his *Ethics*, as we shall see. Yet to see someone like Arnold as the Professor of Poetry and eminent national poet and critic professing these doctrines to contemporary concerns, as though filtering the *Greats* course, must have encouraged Pater towards these values further. Johnson rightfully declares the strong influence Arnold’s dislike for the vulgar materialism and

daily machinery of the day and aspiration for a higher culture had upon both Pater and Wilde (41). Pater would later openly praise Arnold in his review of *Dorian Gray*, declaring Wilde more than any writer is carrying on “the brilliant critical work of Matthew Arnold” (125). This influence is made plainer by the 1890s, when aestheticism is being frequently identified with Decadence. Wilde himself pays homage by declaring in “The Critic as Artist” (1891) that, “It is Criticism, as Arnold points out, that creates the intellectual atmosphere of the age” (201). In *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (2009), Evangelista traces some of Wilde’s aestheticism to Arnold and Pater, who hold “Greek culture as an antidote to English middle-class Philistinism” (127).

In his preface to *Irish Essays* (1882) Arnold fondly discusses the “half-a-dozen immortal pages” of the *Theaetetus*, where Plato “described the helplessness of the philosopher in the ways of the world, the helplessness of the man of the world in a spiritual crisis” (315). Arnold praises Jowett’s translation of this passage, but uses the word “freeman” for his educated man, rather than Jowett’s “gentleman,” both of which express the leisure required for taking care of one’s soul. Pater also selects the term “freeman” in regard to this ideal Platonic figure, in “Emerald Uthwart,” where the young man fails at Oxford to control for himself Plato’s “power of the wing,” ἡ πτεροῦ δύναμις, from the *Phaedrus*, and therefore “the status of a freeman in the world of intellect can hardly be for him” (*Miscellaneous* 219). He uses the term again in *Plato*, when, in speaking of the intellectual realm, the philosopher makes us “freemen of those solitary places” (143). Rather than “gentleman,” which suggests rank or land ownership, “freeman” is a very significant word to Pater, and one he shares with Arnold, indicating a scholar’s ability to manoeuvre freely among abstract

ideas, exhibiting a temper associated with Oxford. Oscar Wilde later in *De Profundis* describes the “Oxford Temper” as the ability to “play gracefully with ideas” (686).²²

Arnold reminds his reader in *Culture and Anarchy*’s “Hebraism and Hellenism” that, “It is true, Plato, in words which are almost the words of the New Testament or the Imitation, calls life a learning to die” (126), an allusion to Socrates’ claim in the *Phaedo* (64a). Every deed affects our soul, and the state of our soul determines our lot after death. Not only is segregation for the sake of the jealous care for one’s soul, but because the philosopher has no role in practical affairs. As soon as Arnold describes the three classes of men, as Barbarians for the aristocracy, Philistines for the middle-class, and Populace for the working-class, he professes the goal of the cultured is to escape their class. In each class, writes Arnold, “there are born a certain number of natures with a curiosity about their best self, with a bent for seeing things as they are, for disentangling themselves from machinery, for simply concerning themselves with reason and the will of God, and doing their best to make these prevail;—for the pursuit, in a word, of perfection” (92). In each class some will escape their conditions, and rise above; they may form a common humanity, but they are alienated from their immediate classes. Their instruments for emancipation are in becoming their best self, and this requires the critical talent of “seeing things as they are.” Theoretically, at least, Arnold’s elitism is not class-based, as the chosen are welcome from all classes. We say “theoretically” because practically economic factors will often inhibit people’s freedom to cultivate their intellect. But Arnold’s theories on education are, like Plato’s, idealistic.

One of the reasons for segregation in Platonism is education. Arnold addresses the issue on his lecture tour of America in the early-eighties, stating that Plato’s

²² Quoted from Wilde’s letters.

education is not a modern, practical education. Yet in “Literature and Science” (1882)

Arnold defends Plato’s education as still suited to the day’s educational needs:

‘An intelligent man,’ says Plato, ‘will prize those studies which result in his soul getting soberness, righteousness, and wisdom, and will less value the others.’ I cannot consider *that* a bad description of the aim of education, and of the motives which should govern us in the choice of studies, whether we are preparing ourselves for a hereditary seat in the English House of Lords or for the pork trade in Chicago. (54-55)

We can see the clash in Arnold’s vision more starkly when, several pages later with the abattoir still in our minds, he explains Diotima’s vision of love towards beauty from the *Symposium* (63). Arnold’s faithful allegiance to Plato, because of the philosopher’s innate elitism, sometimes hinders his wider goal of reaching a popular audience. Plato may have become popular at Oxford and beyond, but those who fulfil Plato’s ideal could never be the majority. We found a similar argument in Pater’s “Diaphaneitè,” where the ideal type of soul is a minority. Arnold accepts this reality in “Numbers; or the Majority and the Remnant” (1884). The argument of this lecture in his American tour is that, although the majority will always be intellectually poor, the greater the population, as America’s promises to be great, the greater the select, or “remnant,” who will rule. This ruling class is somewhat of a religious order: “the world being what it is,” writes Arnold, “we must surely expect the aims and doings of the majority of men to be at present very faulty, and this in a numerous community no less than in a small one. So much we must certainly, I think, concede to the sages and to the saints” (145). He continually associates Platonism with Christianity, not only pairing Plato with St Paul in *Culture and Anarchy*, but comparing Plato to the Old Testament prophets, especially Isaiah, as one who follows the law of the Eternal despite the majority in “Numbers,” wherein he also refers to him as “the divine Plato”; and, incredibly, he compares Plato with Jesus in “A Comment on Christmas”

(1885), stating that while Jesus appeals to the masses, Plato appeals to the few; whereas Jesus brought religion, Plato brought philosophy: both have purity (224).

Not only does Plato exhibit the disinterestedness required of culture, but he exemplifies how to see “things as they really are”; indeed, they are “Plato’s words” in *Culture and Anarchy* (135). This sort of vision is possessed by few. “Greek intelligence,” writes Arnold some pages later, in Chapter V: “Porro Unum Est Necessarium,” “has obviously for its essence the instinct for what Plato calls the true, firm, intelligible law of things; the love of light, of seeing things as they are” (144). It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of the source of this statement—that Arnold roots in Plato—considering its influence on Pater. “The one thing necessary,” “*Porro unum est necessarium,*” is what Jesus says in the Vulgate, “But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the best part, which shall not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:42). Mary is the sister of Martha, scriptural models of the contemplative and practical side of life. What she has chosen cannot be taken away because it is immaterial: the love of the good. Plato’s disinterest in serving practical affairs in many dialogues, like the Mary praised by Jesus, enables him to see the intelligible law and light, things as they really are. Arnold likely has Book VII of *The Republic* in mind, where Plato explains how one by fleeing the cave may see the intelligible and good, represented by the sun. Plato’s seeing “things as they really are” is Arnold’s critical “one thing necessary,” his “choosing the best part,” “*optimam partem elegit.*” It is a choice in “a criticism of life” for which Arnold later praises the subject of “Joubert” (1865), and Wordsworth (46), and for which he claims is the end of all literature, exemplified in the former essay by Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare (331). Not surprisingly, then, Arnold says, “Joubert was all his life a passionate lover of Plato” (322).

Behind so much of what Arnold examines in the name of culture we find Plato, giving the sense that no matter what field we enter, philosophical, literary, religious, or cultural, we ought to look back to the ancient philosopher, for surely we would find there some seed of the more current idea: he seems ubiquitously at the root of Western Civilization.

Culture is established as diametrically opposed to anarchy, in Arnold's famous work, implying that mob rule or, in other words, excessive democracy, will ruin culture. Without stating so implicitly Arnold's culture requires a hierarchy, to control the mob. Who else but a select few will determine what constitutes "the best that has been thought and known"? Who else will determine what is real? Only those who have the critical faculty it seems. A hierarchy means literally the rule of the Greek *hierós*, the holy. For Arnold the critic will fulfil this role.

Literature and Dogma (1873) is perhaps his most direct attempt to unite the role of priest with the man of letters. Following the same definition of culture, Arnold basically argues that the Bible cannot be correctly interpreted by theologians, but requires literary men: "And thus we come back to our old remedy of culture,—knowing the best that has been thought and known in the world; which turns out to be, in another shape, and in particular relation to the Bible: *getting the power, through reading, to estimate the proportion and relation in what we read*" (xv). He repeats: "culture is *reading*" (xxx). Religion "turns upon understanding the manner in which men have thought, their way of using words, and what they mean by them" (52). Knowledge of Ancient Greek is particularly important, so that one may interpret the *epieikeia* of Jesus, that is, the "sweet reasonableness" of his words, as Arnold translates for his reader. "This literary criticism, however, is extremely difficult," writes Arnold. "It calls into play the highest requisites for the study of letters;—great

and wide acquaintance with the history of the human mind, knowledge of the manner in which men have thought, of their way of using words and of what they mean by them, delicacy of perception and quick tact, and, besides all these, a favourable moment in the ‘Zeit-Geist’” (177). We can see that hermeneutics for Arnold involves more than a deep knowledge of words, but even the grace of being spiritually attuned. Jesus is Hellenized in language and in temper, as *epieikeia* relates to likelihood rather than the letter of the law: and its discovery is necessarily the work of critics rather than scientists or theologians. Ultimately, if religion is more about literature than dogma, theologians should be literary critics. Arnold often balances his emphasis of the importance of literary criticism by declaring, as he does at the end of *Literature and Dogma*, that conduct is three-fourths of human life; but this conduct seems best determined by a select few critics. We may return to the earlier work “The Function of Criticism at the Present Time” to see that Arnold did not become progressively elitist, that the temper is inevitably part of his Platonism, we may return to where he wrote, “that whoever sets himself to see things as they are will find himself one of a very small circle; but it is only by this small circle resolutely doing its own work that adequate ideas will ever get current at all” (27). Describing Plato’s return to his Academy, like a modern college, Pater likewise uses the image of a ring, a circle, closed among itself: “For the future he sought no more to pass beyond the charmed theoretic circle, ‘speaking wisdom,’ as was said of Pythagoras, only ‘among the perfect’ (*Plato* 148).

We may now have an idea of the sort of Platonism held by Arnold, one of the most eminent Oxonian English critics, around the same time Pater was writing so that we may see the pervasiveness of Plato; and gain some insight into how a popular critic such as Arnold may have influenced and encouraged Pater’s Platonism. In this

chapter we are interested primarily in some of the influences that went into Pater's "Wordsworth," so we need not be immediately concerned with Arnold's works after *Literature and Dogma* (1873), but we went beyond this date in order to sketch Arnold's Platonism throughout his career, which will benefit our understanding of his influence on Pater's later works. A broader understanding of Plato in Arnold's works should also reveal that his Platonism did not alter very significantly throughout his career, though the appearance of Jowett's *Dialogues* may have made him freer with referencing the philosopher. Looking at Pater's essay on Wordsworth now, we should recognize some similar ideas, while also discovering some similar sources; in turn, by reading Arnold's own essay published on Wordsworth approximately five years later, in 1879, we shall see how Pater influences Arnold.

Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*

Oxonian Platonism in the latter half of the nineteenth century includes Aristotle, especially his *Ethics*. It is a mistake to consider as valid the dichotomy in Coleridge's oft-quoted statement that, "Everyman is born an Aristotelian, or a Platonist. I do not think it possible that one born an Aristotelian can become a Platonist; and I am sure no born Platonist can ever change into an Aristotelian. They are the two classes of men, beside which it is next to impossible to imagine a third" (182). Despite David Newsome's basing his *Two Classes of Men: Platonism and English Romantic Thought* (1974) on the influential statement, he concedes that "Plato did not oust Aristotle from the *Greats* course. It would be more accurate to say that the course was widened to include him" (77), and he discusses guide books through the 1870s and 80s that advise students to know their *Ethics* and *The Republic* if they would be successful in exams. And even with the momentum of Plato, Aristotle continues to be a force, according to Mark Pattison, who in 1876, discussing

“Philosophy at Oxford,” wrote with some pride that it would never relent its Aristotle (90). Pattison did lament the loss of Butler from the required reading list of *Greats*, and yet Butler’s value ironically became as a reconciler of any inconsistencies between Plato and Aristotle (Burrows 237). Like many guidebooks of the period Montagu Burrows’s *Pass and Class* (1860) emphatically advises the two ancient philosophers be read as complementary to each other: “Thus, Plato will be the philosopher who must be studied side by side with Aristotle: indeed, a very little reading of *Ethics* will have proved to any one that it is not really intelligible until it is read by the light of its author’s master” (235-36).²³ Burrows (1819-1905) obtained a “first-class degree” in 1856 and went on to become the Chichele Professor of Modern History at Oxford. Balliol graduate Alexander Grant’s edition of *Ethics* (1857) is one of the most authoritative efforts to reconcile the philosophers. The volume is composed of pedagogical essays on how the work ought to be read, the third of which is devoted to how it fits with Plato: “Especially in relation to any part of the system of Aristotle,” writes Grant, “a knowledge of Plato is of overpowering importance. To explain the relation of any one of Aristotle’s treatises to Plato is almost a sufficient account of all that it contains. If one were asked what books will throw most light upon the *Ethics* of Aristotle, the answer must be undoubtedly, ‘the dialogues of Plato’” (135). Even Jowett devoted himself to Aristotle, translating and commenting upon his *Politics* in 1885. Pater’s undergraduate friend at Queen’s College was one of the foremost Aristotelians in the late century, Ingram Bywater (1840-1914), who published his own edition of the *Ethics* in 1890.

²³ Another example is James E. Thorold Rogers’s *Education in Oxford: its Method, its Aids, and its Awards* (1861) (38).

This is not to say that Plato was not favoured, especially for his greater style and religiosity, even in texts such as Grant's which focus on Aristotle, but only to say that Aristotle was often used in accordance to bring out a fuller meaning. As a student of Plato, Aristotle conceived his philosophy as a universal system, covering arts, metaphysics, ethics, and politics, so that indeed the two philosophers share many subjects. Aristotle's style is more analytical and may be seen to explicate ideas Plato only discusses briefly. By teaching the two ancient philosophers together, because of Aristotle's long-standing importance at the University, it brought precedence, continuity, and authority to the dialogues.

If we look at Pater's own lectures he delivered at the University they are comprised of lectures on Plato and Aristotle. William Shuter's "Pater as Don" has shown that his lectures throughout the 1870s and early '80s, along with Plato, especially his *Republic*, are on Aristotle's *Ethics*. As a student and as a teacher, Pater's reading of Aristotle was roughly simultaneous to his reading of Plato, so that he might have naturally associated them together.

We will summarize some of the major arguments in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially those which influence Arnold and Pater. Arnold studied this work as well as Pater: it was an integral part of both men's education. If there is a difference between them it could derive from Pater's reading the text as a complement to Platonism, whereas Arnold originally studied it within more Christian boundaries alongside Bishop Butler.

As the title suggests, the *Ethics* is concerned with how a person ought to conduct himself. What one does informs his character as ethics becomes ethos: the word for habit (ἔθος) is related to the word for character (ἦθος). This touches directly upon the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance*, so we might say a brief word upon it here.

One of Pater's statements that upset some in the Oxford community was: "In a sense it might be said that our failure is to form habits; for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike" (311). Wilde, in his letter to Douglas from prison in 1897, which became *De Profundis*, comments directly on this phrase:

When he said it the dull Oxford people thought the phrase a mere wilful inversion of the somewhat wearisome text of Aristotelian *Ethics*, but there is a wonderful, a terrible truth hidden in it. I had allowed you to sap my strength of character, and to me that formation of a habit had proved to be not Failure merely but Ruin. Ethically you had been even still more destructive to me than you had been artistically. (690)

Much of Wilde's famous letter to Douglas concerns the ability to recognize clearly the events and actions that brought him to prison. When Pater refers to habit he is not deriding ethics, but warning of its dulling effect, which causes the "roughness of the eye" that would weaken someone's critical acuity, the Platonic vision to see things how they really are. As Wilde implies in his interpretation, blindness caused him to form a ruinous habit with Douglas, which he was claiming in his letter now to be able to recognize. Here is an example of how Platonism complements Aristotle's *Ethics*.

Aristotle sets out that in order to know how one ought to act we must know towards which one must act, which is the Good. The question is, therefore, what is the good towards which all things aim. This must be happiness, and the account of which Aristotle establishes is different for philosophers from the popular notion (I.iv.3). It is evident already that Aristotle takes for granted what from our period we might label as elitist, segregating the wise from the rest. The vulgar are said to identify the Good with Pleasure, others, better, the Life of Politics, and, thirdly, the best sort of life, the Life of Contemplation (ὁ θεωρητικός). The third group is small, for the "generality of mankind then show themselves to be utterly slavish, by preferring what is only a life

for cattle”²⁴ (I.v.3). Whatever the Good is it must be good in itself, that is, self-sufficient.

It may be that the good of man resides in his function, his ἔργον. What then is the function of man? It is decided that the function of man is the active exercise of the soul’s faculties (ἐνέργεια) in conformity with rational principle (λόγον) (I.vii.14). Happiness, then, “is a certain activity of soul in conformity with perfect goodness (κατ’ ἀρετὴν τελείαν)” (I.xiii.1). Aristotle, it is worth noting, often uses art as an analogy, and, for instance, in explaining the difficulty of according to the rational principle writes, “but virtue, like art, is constantly dealing with what is harder (περὶ δὲ τὸ χαλεπώτερον ἀεὶ καὶ τέχνη γίνεται καὶ ἀρετὴ), since the harder the task the better the success” (II.iii.10).

Although Aristotle will easily compare art with virtue he qualifies that art has its merit in itself—art is a means, rather than an end—, unlike virtue, which is a means to happiness. Continuing again his analogy, however, he declares that like virtue art avoids both excess and deficiency, striving to hit the mean; and that you cannot take from nor add to a perfect work of art (II.vi.9). It seems likely this is one of the sources for Pater’s idea that the perfect work of art will be the fine balance between form and matter, in other words, the proper measure, like hitting the mean. When Aristotle says next that virtue is the disposition of mind, which determines choice in actions essentially in accordance to the mean in relation to ourselves, this being determined by principle, as the wise man (φρόνιμος)²⁵ would determine it (II.vi.16); it is difficult not to transpose this into the context of art and the critic. In this statement we can find the relativity in knowledge, seen in the *Theaetetus*, and Pater’s “Preface,” and Arnold’s demand for the right principle in *Culture and Anarchy*, from

²⁴ Translations are H. Rackham’s from the Loeb Classical edition of the *Ethics*.

²⁵ Often translated “prudent man.”

the vision of the Good in *The Republic*; and furthermore, from these texts, we get the idea that it is sufficient for man to be the measure so long as he is a wise man (φρόνιμος).

Aristotle next examines the nature of choice, as the actions we choose determine our character. We do not deliberate about our ends, but our means. The relationship between ends and means is significant in Pater's "Wordsworth." Judgment, too, of course, is a special skill: "For the good man judges (κρίνει) everything correctly; what things truly are, what they seem to him to be, in every department—for special things are noble and pleasant corresponding to each type of character, and perhaps what chiefly distinguishes the good man is that he sees the truth in each kind, being himself as it were the standard and measure (κανὼν καὶ μέτρον) of the noble and pleasant" (III.iv.5). The word "to judge" here, κρίνειν, is from where the word "critic" derives, and again we get the good, or serious man, of a select few, deciding what things truly are, how they are in themselves, as Arnold would have it, and noticing the good, or virtue, in each kind of thing.

In Book VI the philosopher makes a distinction between two rational parts of the soul, "one whereby we contemplate (θεωροῦμεν) those things whose first principles are invariable," and another those things that are variable (VI.i5-6). Both functions of the soul attain truth. For our purpose we will further explore what he says about art, which most significantly is not a *doing*, but a *making*:

It follows that an art is the same thing as a rational quality, concerned with making, that reasons truly. All Art deals with bringing something into existence; and to pursue an art means to study how to bring into existence a thing which may either exist or not, and the efficient cause of which lies in the maker and not in the thing made; for Art does not deal with things that exist or come into existence of necessity, or according to nature, since these have their efficient cause in themselves. But as doing (πρᾶξις) and making (ποίησις) are distinct, it follows that Art, being concerned with making, is not concerned with doing. (VI.iii.4-5)

“Making” (*poiesis*), we see, is more dignified, where we get the word poet; “Doing” (*praxis*) in Greek, on the other hand, brings us literally into the “practical” realm, which philosophers often avoid. “Art,” he ultimately defines, “is a rational quality, concerned with making, that reasons truly (ἔξις τις μετὰ λόγου ἀληθοῦς ποιητικὴ ἐστίν).” Art ends up looking just like the highest form of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*.

Aristotle continues, dismissing practical action, declaring “it is absurd to think that Political Science or Prudence is the loftiest kind of knowledge, inasmuch as man is not the highest thing in the world.”

In terms of pleasure, “God enjoys a single simple pleasure perpetually,” writes Aristotle. “For there is not only an activity of motion, but also an activity of immobility, and there is essentially a truer pleasure in rest than in motion” (VII.xiv.8). Man, on the other hand, prefers change, owing to some badness in his nature. In very Platonic fashion, Aristotle declares, man’s thinking part is his real self (IX.iv.3). This is the “best self” Arnold appeals to so often in *Culture and Anarchy*, which Shorey ascribes to his Platonism. And being at rest, rather than in the flux of motion, is how the ideal man avoids the crowd and contemplates inwardly.

Aristotle discusses happiness as an activity, or *enérgeia*, and argues that man’s *érgon*, or function, may be achieved by *making* as well as *doing*, and *making* is the work of an artist. Frank Turner, in *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain*, declares that the word *enérgeia*, as analysed by Alexander Grant’s edition of the *Ethics*, helps Pater conceptualize the intellectual pleasure portrayed by beauty in the “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance* (354). William F. Shuter, following Turner’s remarks, also believes the term is embedded in Pater’s notion of contemplation in especial relation to his essay on Wordsworth (*Rereading* 241). We can recognize here one of the ideas behind the “Conclusion,” as pleasure is equated with our senses. As Aristotle

continues, however, he qualifies that this pleasure may be an activity also of our higher self, such as “thought and speculation”— the latter another mental faculty which takes its name from a sort of vision—, and further he writes that our pleasure depends upon the quality of the object perceived: “For each sense has a corresponding pleasure, as also have thought and speculation, and its activity is pleasantest when it is most perfect, and most perfect when the organ is in good condition and when it is directed to the most excellent of its objects; and the pleasure perfects the activity (*teleioi de ten energeian e hedone*).” The word for pleasure, from which we get the label *hedonist*, which was cast at Pater, is a noble word for Aristotle, for it accompanies also the activities of thought. Ignorance perhaps of Aristotle’s use of the word lay behind Pater’s complaint to Edmund Gosse, as Gosse reports in *Critical Kit-Kats* (1896), of those who used the word for him depreciatingly, attributing to him “all sorts of ‘æsthetic’ follies and extravagances,” because they know not their Greek (258). Only a few years before Pater, E. S. Dallas’s *The Gay Science* (1866) discusses philosophers ancient and modern, including Plato and Aristotle, for whom “the immediate end of art is to give pleasure” (89); but pleasure also of a higher kind. Aristotle actually provides a brief ranking of our pleasures based on purity. Sight excels touch in purity, and hearing and smell excel taste (X.v.7). It is clear that the less tangible a sensuous pleasure the more pure it is. We may note here that in Pater’s efforts towards the sensuous, his pleasures are almost always visual, sometimes auditory, very rarely olfactory, never, it seems, tactile or gustatory. His sensuous pleasures, in other words, are on the higher scale, towards the artistic and intellectual. And since Aristotle ranks pleasure by purity, the highest pleasures are those of the intellect. The standard for all these pleasures is the good man (*σπουδαίω*), and “we hold that in all such cases the thing really is what it appears to be to the good man”

(X.v.10). Many men will find pleasures in lower things, for “mankind is liable to many corruptions and diseases,” but this will not make them true pleasures. If happiness is an activity in accordance to virtue, the activity should be in accordance with the highest virtue, and this will be the virtue of the best part of us (X.vi.7). As intellect rules us, it follows, and knows what is noble and divine (*καλῶν καὶ θείων*), being itself divine, or relatively the most divine part of us, it is the activity of the intellect in accordance with its proper virtue that will constitute perfect happiness. Pleasure is in the activity of contemplation. “Also the activity of contemplation may be held to be the only activity that is loved for its own sake: it produces no result beyond the actual act of contemplation, whereas from practical pursuits we look to secure some advantage, greater or smaller, beyond the action itself” (X.vii.5). It is thought for the sake of thought. Self-sufficiency is said to add to the pleasure of it. The leisuredness (*σχολαστικὸν*), like the inherent characteristic of Jowett’s gentleman and Arnold’s and Pater’s freeman, allows him to be free of worldly troubles, which is an attribute of blessedness (*μακαρίῳ*): “it follows that it is the activity of the intellect that constitutes complete human happiness” (X.vii.7).

Aristotle soon admits that his concern is well beyond that which is good for man now, and is speaking of the good for the divine. But he encourages man, if he wants to achieve immortality, to identify with that part of their being, following “the Life as Contemplation, as following one’s “true self,” “inasmuch as it is the dominant (*κύριον*) and better part; and therefore it would be a strange thing if a man should choose to live not his own life but the life of someone other than himself” (X.vii.9). As the most pleasant life, therefore, is following one’s nature, and intellect is what separates man from beast, then living according to one’s intellect is the best and pleasantest life for man, “inasmuch as the intellect more than anything else is man;

therefore this life will be the happiest.” Accordingly Arnold complains in “Numbers” (1884), also noted by Rowe (225), that “the divine Plato tells us that we have within us a many-headed beast and a man, and that by dissoluteness we feed and strengthen the beast in us, and starve the man” (160), the true man being our intellect.

After stating that the intellect is our highest self, he says something extremely significant, which must have a strong effect on many of its readers. Aristotle says, in a Renan-like fashion, “The life of moral virtue, on the other hand, is happy only in a second degree. For the moral activities are purely human” (X.viii.1). What R. V. Johnson identifies as the third strand of aestheticism may be recognised here, the refusal to be judged by the same moral standards as the majority. Aristotle’s *Ethics* actually stresses the transgression or transcendence rather, of morality, not of course in the sense of contradicting it, but of going beyond it to a higher consideration. We might find in Aristotle’s exception to morality, for the sake of higher claims or transcendence, an influence on Pater’s “Conclusion.” Again Aristotle says, “If we go through the list we shall find that all forms of virtuous conduct seem trifling and unworthy to the gods” (X.viii.7); and a few lines later, “It follows that the activity of God (ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνέργεια), which is transcendent in blessedness, is the activity of contemplation (θεωρητικὴ); and therefore among human activities that which is most akin to the divine activity of contemplation will be the greatest source of happiness.” Aristotle goes so far as to say that lower animals, because they cannot contemplate, cannot partake of happiness. Furthermore the gods will be best pleased by those who, like them, contemplate, adding blessedness to one’s already self-sufficient happiness. This exaltation of the divine life of the contemplator links the *Ethics* with much of Plato, especially the ideal philosopher of the *Theaetetus*. These texts can be seen to shape the critical attitude of some who study in the *Literae Humaniores*, infecting

them with the promise perhaps that they might be admitted to the banquet at the pantheon through purer intellectual attainment.

“Wordsworth”

With our discussion on the *Ethics* as background, we might more easily understand the artistic ideal Pater describes in “Wordsworth,” which reads:

Contemplation—impassioned contemplation—that, is with Wordsworth the end-in-itself, the perfect end. We see the majority of mankind going most often to definite ends, lower or higher ends, as their own instincts may determine; but the end may never be attained, and the means not be quite the right means, great ends and little ones alike being, for the most part distant, and the ways to them, in this dim world, somewhat vague. Meantime, to higher or lower ends, they move too often with something of a sad countenance, with hurried and ignoble gait, becoming, unconsciously, something like thorns, in their anxiety to bear grapes; it being possible for individuals in the pursuit of even great ends, to become themselves thin and impoverished in spirit and temper, thus diminishing the sum of perfection in the world at its very sources. (60)

Whilst the majority of men go astray, Wordsworth follows the life of thought into a sort of blessedness. Only the Life of Contemplation is not a means to an end, but, self-sufficient, an end in itself. “Impassioned contemplation” is another adjective and noun pairing that strives to unite the intellectual and sensuous worlds, as we see with his use of “imaginative reason.” In *Plato and Platonism* Pater uses the term “imaginative reason” as he does in this essay in reference to a similar sort of passionate contemplation. When discussing Plato’s style, he writes: “no one perhaps has with equal power literally sounded the unseen depths of thought, and, with what may be truly called ‘substantial’ word and phrase, given locality there to the mere adumbrations, the dim hints and surmise, of the speculative mind. For him, all gifts of sense and intelligence converge in one supreme faculty of theoretic vision, θεωρία, the imaginative reason” (140). Using the Greek “*theoría*” alongside “the faculty of theoretic vision” and “imaginative reason” leaves no doubt that Pater means

“contemplation” by the term. *Theoría* is most often translated “contemplation,” its Latin counterpart. It means literally intellectual vision, coming as it does from the word “to look at.” It combines our sensuous sight, for which Pater often praises Plato, with our higher intellectual faculty, employing the two realms as requisite of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*. Pater repeatedly yokes the sensuous and intellectual: “substantial” with “word and phrase,” “locality” and “mere adumbrations.” “Impassioned contemplation,” from the Wordsworth essay, is another example of his lifting up the sensuous reality into the intellectual. The word “contemplation” itself combines the upper and lower realms, for, like *theoría*, it means to survey, observe, behold, and consider, deriving from establishing a *templum*, originally a place marked out for auguries, where the word temple derives, opening up a means to access the spiritual from the mundane.

In discussions of Victorian aesthetics early critics such as Algernon Cecil and later ones, such as Hough and Shuter, have noted that John Ruskin made a strong distinction between *Theoría* and *Aesthesis* in the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846). Ruskin contextualizes Part III, “Of Ideas of Beauty,” beside Aristotle’s notion “Of the Theoretic Faculty.” Yet one errs to say merely that Ruskin degrades sensual beauty for the sake of intellectual. Ruskin seeks to exalt the appreciation of beauty above the mere animal senses, but even above what he deems “the mere animal consciousness” of pleasantness he calls *aesthesis*, to the “exulting, reverent, and grateful perception of it,” he calls *theoría* (I.ii.6). Ruskin wants to replace the term aesthetic with theoretic, not because he wants the appreciation of beauty to be entirely intellectual—he wants it neither to be merely sensual nor intellectual—but he wants the physical and intellectual unified, in a sort of moral gauze, as it were, wrapped together, in the emotions of “joy,” “love of the object,” and “the perception of

kindness in a superior Intelligence, finally with thankfulness and veneration towards that Intelligence” (I.ii.8). In the manner that Pater’s contemplation is sensualized with the vision of passion, Ruskin’s *theoría* is Christianized with emotion.

Contemplation full of passion seems to weigh down Pater’s theory, for passion is often related to suffering. Historically the word is ineradicable from the suffering of Christ, signifying full carnality and full spirit. Pater uses this word well over fifty times in *The Renaissance*, often in a similar way of combining the sense and thought, meaning both at once. For example, he speaks of “a passionate exaltation” (8), passion is often coupled with energy or intensity, as though the feeling of *enérgeia* or activity of the artist. The “passionate thoughts” of Michelangelo (85), and the Platonic dream of the soul in that essay is described as the “passionate haste to escape from the burden of bodily form altogether” (86). Leonardo’s *La Gioconda* is said to have, “strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions” (125). Winckelmann is said to have “a passionate intellectual life” (177); and the Hellenist describes Christian life before the Renaissance as a “mystic passion, and monastic reverie” (184). In “Winckelmann” the artist is called upon “to complicate and refine upon thought and passion a thousand-fold” (214); and paradoxically Winckelmann’s nature is “a kind of passionate coldness” (229). Pater also uses the word frequently in his short “Conclusion”: where philosophy enables us to note that “some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us” (236); here he also speaks of “exquisite passion,” “high passions,” “great passions,” “poetic passion”—all adjectives that either literally lift passion up or intellectualize it. Above all: “Only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness” (238). The full-sounding sibilance of its centre seems to give the word a weighty substance, but passion, he assures us, is a kind of

consciousness, fixed in stillness, appreciating, as in a blessed life. But if Pater's reader does not yet recognize the work his use of the word "passion" is doing, he clarifies it in "Wordsworth" by setting it beside contemplation.

We may witness Pater's use of the word "passion" in a long explanation of Wordsworth's ethics, which, simultaneously, in its union of life and art, though perhaps more theoretical, reads like an apology, literally a defence. It acts as an apology by confirming the argument of the "Conclusion":

That the end of life is not action but contemplation—*being* as distinct from *doing*—a certain disposition of the mind: is, in some shape or other, the principle of all the higher morality. In poetry, in art, if you enter into their true spirit at all, you touch this principle, in a measure: these, by their very sterility, are a type of beholding for the mere joy of beholding. To treat life in the spirit of art, is to make life a thing in which means and ends are identified: to encourage such treatment, the true moral significance of art and poetry. Wordsworth, and other poets who have been like him in ancient or more recent times, are the masters, the experts, in this art of impassioned contemplation. Their work is, not to teach lessons, or enforce rules, or even to stimulate us to noble ends; but to withdraw the thoughts for a little while from the mere machinery of life, to fix them, with appropriate emotions, on the spectacle of those great facts in man's existence which no machinery affects. (62-63)

Avoiding the machinery of life follows the tradition of Arnold and the *Ethics*. The "sterility" marks the segregation of the contemplation. In "The 'Wordsworth' of Pater and Arnold: 'The Supreme, Artistic View of Life,'" DeLaura states, "Pater's ideal of 'contemplation—being as distinct from doing—a certain disposition of the mind' is, then, Arnold's disinterestedness, exempted from the social obligations but feely drawing upon the religious ambience of Arnold's very different ethical framework" (656). In "Arnold and Pater" (1930), T. S. Eliot cites this passage, "To treat life in the spirit of art," to prove that, like Arnold, Pater is a moralist (386). DeLaura, too, believes that most contemporary critics see Pater as a moralist (168-69). Yet Pater's

framework seems not to be ethical in the sense of action, as seen externally, but rather to encourage an escape from such action, where one can be free to appreciate:

reducing all things to machinery, though it has on its side the authority of that old Greek moralist who has fixed for succeeding generations the outline of the theory of right living, is too like a mere picture or description of men's lives as we actually find them, to be the basis of the higher ethics. It covers the meanness of men's daily lives, and much of the dexterity and the vigour with which they pursue what may seem to them the good of themselves or of others; but not the intangible perfection of those whose ideal is rather in *being* than in *doing*—not those *manners* which are, in the deepest as in the simplest sense, *morals*, and without which one cannot so much as offer a cup of water to a poor man without offence—not the part of 'antique Rachel,' sitting in the company of Beatrice; and the moralist might well endeavour rather to withdraw men from the too exclusive consideration of means and ends, in life. (61)

The "old Greek moralist" is Aristotle, whom he seems to accuse of not being idealistic enough. He criticizes Aristotle for not dealing with those morals that require grace—the grace of not giving offence, for instance, while giving a gift: the element added that might make virtue more beautiful. Aristotle offers a guide on the virtues, but not the refined beauty that those virtues exhibit. We might think of Mary's gift to Jesus, as opposed to the practical conduct of Martha, for instance, to which Arnold alludes. Pater introduces his own Biblical symbols of the theoretical and practical realms, made famous in Dante's *Purgatory*: Rachel, who gazes contemplatively all day in a looking-glass, and her sister Leah who busies her hands all day among flowers, gathering an anthology (XXVII.100-108). Taking pains over means rather than ends is another way to show concern over the manner, or style, of our lives, as much as the matter. Pater is like a Rachel in this essay, appreciative and contemplative, who calls a Leah to the task of gathering Wordsworth's poems.

The definition of culture for Pater is not necessarily the best that is thought and known, as for Arnold, but rather "witnessing the spectacle," so long, we may suspect, as it is beautiful. Not witnessing life, but witnessing the spectacle, as though

life is meant to be looked at merely. Rather than counterpoising “doing” with “making” as Aristotle compares conduct with art, Pater counterpoises “doing” with “being.” “Being” here is synonymous with observing, and contemplating life. *Being* is simply the manner of the Divine in the *Ethics*. Those who contemplate are close to being, it argues, are closer to their real self. If life is activity, the highest *enérgeia*, here, impassioned contemplation, is to appreciate the spectacle of real life. Evangelista has traced the influence of *Ethics* upon Wilde when he writes in his dialogue (148), “The Critic as Artist,” that, “the contemplative life, the life that has for its aim not *doing* but *being*, and not *being* merely, but *becoming*—that is what the critical spirit can give us. The gods live thus: . . . brooding over their own perfection, as Aristotle tells us” (178). But although the *Ethics* are certainly present as an intellectual authority, Wilde also seems to have further embraced Aristotle through Pater’s article on Wordsworth.

Arnold’s “imaginative reason” in Pater’s “Wordsworth”

In “Wordsworth” we find Pater’s criticism has developed from “Coleridge’s Writings.” His perspective on Wordsworth has broadened. Now, like Coleridge, Wordsworth is a speculative philosopher, yet successful for his ability to incorporate his thoughts into his poems. “Contemplation,” Pater calls out, “impassioned contemplation—that is with Wordsworth the end-in-itself, the perfect end” (60). The focus upon being perfect in one’s personal development figures prominently in Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy*, from the very epigraph, *Estote ergo vos perfecti* (Be ye therefore perfect), from Matthew 5:48. Pater’s essay begins in an Arnoldian tone, addressing a practical critical need—an anomaly in Pater’s work, perhaps never to really be repeated—for someone to gather a good anthology of Wordsworth’s poetry.

Stephen Gill's *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (1998) takes a thorough look at how critics especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century took pains to categorize, rank, and explain the late Poet Laureate and Romantic who lingered in life till 1850. Pater and Arnold were directly involved in this critical guardianship of Wordsworth's legacy. John Keble presented him with an honorary degree at Oxford in 1839, and Wordsworth in turn at the same ceremony presented John Ruskin with the Newdigate Prize, with, among other notables, the Arnolds in attendance (20). Wordsworth is a very important link in the aestheticism of the following years, not merely because romanticism itself was influential, especially for the modern Romantic conception of the artist as apart from society, but because Wordsworth was initially so little read that his poems were the property of coteries (Gill 16). His work survived through small circles. Gill describes the state of publishing Wordsworth as "textual anarchy" (99). There was conflict and confusion between his official publisher and his literary estate, conflict with copyright law infringement, and diverging visions of Wordsworth's identity, such as, for whom he stood, the importance of the Lake District itself to his poetry, and what were his politics, religion, and philosophy. There was also confusion caused by the surfacing of new material, and which of several exiting copies of the same poem was the authorial. Gill declares that, between 1858 and 1882, the period within which both Pater and Arnold wrote on Wordsworth, "more than thirty substantial editions appeared in Britain and America and more than twenty editions of selections or single works" (86). Trying to give form to the mass of material therefore was likely to be anxiety-inducing to those who felt they held a clear picture of who Wordsworth was, and simultaneously, while time passed, saw the increasing addition of false depictions flooding the marketplace.

Pater's essay quickly becomes an appreciation of the poet's life, and an argument for the aesthetic life. It is biographical like the essays of *The Renaissance* in the sense that it focuses on the man more than his works, but it also reads as a sort of apology to the "Conclusion." It is not difficult to believe that after John Wordsworth (1843-1911) of Brasenose College, later Bishop of Salisbury, and nephew to the poet, preached against the sort of philosophy he thought he found in the "Conclusion," Pater responds with this essay, in which he argues that Wordsworth, the famous English poet, lived an aesthetic life also, applying an ancient philosophy to his current mode of life, making, in short, an art of life.

He adopted a phrase of Arnold's early in "Wordsworth," "imaginative reason," which, although Pater would use it throughout his career, he later excised from the essay that appeared in *Appreciations* (1889). Arnold uses the phrase in "Pagan and Mediæval Religious Sentiment" (1864), to represent the fusion of the sensuous and ideal, paganism and Christianity. The poetry of paganism lived by the senses and understanding, writes Arnold, the poetry of Christianity by the heart and imagination, and the Greek poets from around 530 to 430 B.C., Simonides, Pindar, Æschylus, and Sophocles, with their imaginative reason, were most successful at combining thought with religious sense. Pater uses the expression "imaginative intellect" twice in "Winckelmann," in a similar way (212), but he struggles, as DeLaura suggests, with Arnold's union of paganism and Christianity. In the Wordsworth essay, however, he accepts the term to smooth over perhaps the struggle between the intellectual and sensuous world visible in the Coleridge essay, and furthermore to accept the easy influence of Hellenism on a modern poet. The idea of union is on Pater's mind again in "The School of Giorgione" (1877), eventually included in the third edition of *The Renaissance* (1888), where he uses the phrase

three times in a re-articulation of his aesthetic, in order to express the perfect union of form and matter, or as Pater also states: “that complex faculty for which every thought and feeling is twin-born with its sensible analogue or symbol” (*Renaissance* 138). In “Wordsworth,” however, his usage of the phrase is significant for describing the critical faculty one would need for selecting a collection of Wordsworth’s finest poems, amidst all the dross, into a single volume.

Throughout the Wordsworth essay Pater uses the word “imaginative” in various combinations, each in a critical sense of combining the outer and inner worlds. As an adjective, “imaginative” means the exercise of the mental faculty or describes one who is full of imagination. We are in the secondary stage of knowledge in the *Theaetetus*, where reason, beyond the sensuous, is in a process of organization. Pater asks the future anthologizer of Wordsworth’s finest poems, in order to help selection, “What are the subjects and the motives which in him excite the imaginative faculty?” (43). His standard critical question, “What is the object, to *me*?” is complicated and yet opened up to a more objective standard. There seems little doubt that a good “imaginative faculty” will fulfil this task. Pater is not sceptical to the point that only he could complete this duty, but shows faith in another. How fitting that the duty befalls Arnold, who had a long history with Wordsworth. In the *Appreciations* version of the essay a footnote appears on the page that reads, “Since this essay was written, such selections have been made, with excellent taste, by Matthew Arnold and Professor Knight,” suggesting Pater’s criteria were followed by them. Arnold’s selection of Wordsworth’s poetry and critical introduction appeared in 1879, and William Knight (1836-1916), professor at St Andrew’s University, published a scholarly eight-volume edition of *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*

between 1882 and 1886, with a three-volume *Life of William Wordsworth* in 1889 (Gill 222), to put the contemporary need of an authoritative collection to rest.

Later in the essay Pater refers to “moments of intense imaginative power,” in which “the actual world would, as it were, dissolve and detach itself, flake by flake, and he himself seemed to be the creator, and when he would the destroyer, of the world in which he lived” (*Appreciations* 55). Pater imagines the critical act to be so forceful in Wordsworth and active not only on the page but in the very world around him that he can distinguish and unite, create and destroy on a whim. He speaks of an “imaginative energy” that recognizes other moments, when the world is not framed by his mind, with him in artistic control, but he is now susceptible to a greater mind, aware of being framed by “that old dream of the *anima mundi*, the mother of all things,” “the macrocosm to Faust,” “the brooding power of a universal life (56).” The “soul of the world” and Faust’s macrocosm remind us of similar systems operating on ever grander scales, like the Plotinian *hypostases*, as we see the individual soul living amid larger souls. Plotinus adapted Plato’s metaphysical view of the world, to see the individual soul as an emanation of larger souls: first the One, or Divine Mind, emanates its power, to the Soul of the World, and finally to the person’s soul. But Pater, characteristically, is rather suggesting a kind of Neoplatonism in Wordsworth without specifically defining it.

By *Plato and Platonism*, Pater definitely equates the “imaginative power” with the philosopher, where his language of art is, unlike Aristotle’s, “still vernacular, original, personal, the product in him of an instinctive imaginative power—a sort of *visual* power, but causing others also to see what is matter of original intuition for him” (142). Here Plato is compared to Aristotle the way Pater compares Wordsworth to Coleridge, where, although Plato and Wordsworth possess a critical apparatus and a

language for art, they navigate themselves aesthetically by instinct rather than by self-conscious knowledge. They are not dogmatists. With Plato and Wordsworth their power is of vision, which is a susceptibility, the capacity to accept something greater beyond, and worth seeing. It is a passive power as well as a creative power, as “intuition” comes from Latin’s *tueri*, to look. When we look a certain way it also means we are perceived a certain way, acknowledging a macrocosm of greater viewers, beginning with a Divine Mind, but in which the artist’s mind may participate. “Imaginative power” is described as an “intuition” because the words reveal a union between the sensory world and the intellect, being a mental vision.

Pater combines at least two other nouns with “imaginative” in “Wordsworth” for similar desired effects, combining the outer and inner world:

In regard to expression, as of feeling and thought, the duality of the higher and lower moods was absolute. It belonged to the higher, the imaginative mood, and was the pledge of its reality, to bring the appropriate language with it. In him, when the really poetical motive worked at all, it united, with absolute justice, the word and the idea; each, in the imaginative flame, becoming inseparably one with the other, by that fusion of matter and form, which is the characteristic of the highest poetical expression. His words are themselves thought and feeling; not eloquent or musical words merely, but that sort of creative language which carries the reality of what it depicts, directly, to the consciousness. (57-58)

He uses the adjective “imaginative” in such proximity here one might even compare the nouns “mood” and “flame” to measure their similarity. And the imaginative mood is the higher mood, he writes, which promises more reality. If we consider “Wordsworth” a step towards an apology of the “Conclusion,” we may see that the “hard, gemlike flame” is indeed a pleasurable mood rather than a material pleasure. Indeed, as the pleasure is that of the “consciousness,” a word repeated in the “Conclusion”: and to where the pleasure arrives, it is a union of the material and intellectual, here, “the fusion of form and matter,” of word and idea, thought and

feeling. Each of Wordsworth's words seems to perfect unions of form and matter, and this union promises his words higher reality, as though actually bearing the essences they signify. This discussion of the fusion of form and matter anticipates Pater's well-known aesthetic declaration in "The School of Giorgione." It is also the first statement of a Platonic theory of language for Pater very suitable to *Appreciations*, published nearly fifteen years later, where it is further articulated in its opening essay, "Style." We will examine this theory more closely in our fourth chapter on *Marius*, when we consider Plato's *Cratylus*.

Arnold's Wordsworth

Arnold wrote his essay on Wordsworth for his preface to his edition *The Poems of William Wordsworth* (1879), and it was also published in Macmillan's Magazine in July of that year. DeLaura sees the essay as influenced by Pater's, stating that "Arnold's notebooks reveal that by 1880, at least, he had read Pater's essay closely enough to quote from it" (663). Arnold firstly regrets how unpopular Wordsworth is, both at home in England, and on the continent, where he is virtually unknown. He is interested in putting forth Wordsworth as a national poet. The world knows Shakespeare and Milton, and it should also know Wordsworth, because he is of the same rank with Molière and Goethe (40). In critical alignment with Pater, he acknowledges, however, that his body of work must be purged of some rather inferior poetry if he is going to be read by more than a few. One of Arnold's immediate aims is for Wordsworth to reach a wider audience.

Wordsworth's poetry deals with moral ideas, writes Arnold, because it deals with the most important question, *how to live?* (45). Poetry, writes Arnold, "is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life,—to the question: How to live" (46). Yet although

admitting that Wordsworth's talent lies in applying ideas to life, he wants to deny that he is a philosopher. In *The Rescue of Romanticism: Walter Pater and John Ruskin* (2001), Kenneth Daley has noted this same distinction between Arnold's and Pater's view of Wordsworth (32). In his refusal to see Wordsworth as a philosopher, Arnold might be speaking directly to Pater's essay, wherein, as a holder of "bold speculative ideas," Wordsworth's philosophy is embraced. Arnold warns:

The Wordsworthians are apt to praise him for the wrong things, and to lay far too much stress upon what they call his philosophy. His poetry is the reality, his philosophy,—so far, at least, as it may put on the form and habit of 'a scientific system of thought,' and the more that it puts them on,—is the illusion. Perhaps we shall one day learn to make this proposition general, and to say: Poetry is the reality, philosophy the illusion. But in Wordsworth's case, at any rate, we cannot do him justice until we dismiss his formal philosophy. (48)

Philosophy for Pater is not the illusion, but a nutritive power in his poetry, if in the right measure. "He pondered much over the philosophy of his poetry," writes Pater (53); and later in the essay:

he has something, also, for those who feel the fascination of bold speculative ideas, who are really capable of rising upon them to conditions of poetical thought. . . . To him, theories which for other men bring a world of technical diction, brought perfect form and expression, as in those two lofty books of *The Prelude*, which describe the decay and the restoration of Imagination and Taste. Skirting the borders of this world of bewildering heights and depths, he got but the first exciting influence of it, that joyful enthusiasm which great imaginative theories prompt, when the mind first comes to have an understanding of them; and it is not under the influence of these thoughts that his poetry becomes tedious or loses its blitheness. (56-57)

Whereas Arnold is interested largely in Wordsworth's moral ideas, Pater does not limit his ideas, and is interested in morality so long as it is "higher": that higher morality, no doubt, that in the *Ethics* made moral conduct only secondary in happiness. Wordsworth is susceptible to ideas, under their influence with "joyful enthusiasm," according to Pater. His ideas may be expressed in perfect form: they are the matter that sustains his poetry. Though Arnold acknowledges that the success and

failure of Wordsworth's poetry are determined by the presence of inspiration (51), he does not venture to trace the source of such inspiration. Pater also ascribes to him Platonic "enthusiasm," which he sees in many of his subjects from the time of "Winckelmann."

When Pater reviews three editions of Wordsworth in *The Guardian* in 1889, his original judgment of the poet remains, as he uses some of his essay for the later article, and he confidently declares that Wordsworth is "the most philosophic of English poets" (91-92). Pater praises Professor Knight and Arnold for their decisive selections of his poetry, despite the fact that the "professed Wordsworthians, including Matthew Arnold, found a value in all that remains of him" (94). In appreciating Wordsworth, it seems that he, as much as Arnold, did not want to be grouped among the "Wordsworthians."

Disciplina Arcani

In a way Pater also sees Wordsworth as practising the criticism of life. Pater isolates him like many of his subjects, giving the external world around him little influence over his person. "His life of eighty years," writes Pater, "is divided by no profoundly felt incidents: its changes are almost wholly inward, and it falls into broad, untroubled, perhaps somewhat monotonous spaces. What it most resembles is the life of one of those early Italian or Flemish painters, who, just because their minds were full of heavenly visions, passed, some of them, the better part of sixty years in quiet, systematic industry" (44). Pater seems to have no problem with habit, so long as one's vision is clear and the habit one acquires improves their art. He isolates his subjects much more severely than Arnold, especially when he has praise for them. Arnold crowds Wordsworth with other poets in comparison, lowering him beneath the ranks of Goethe, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton. Pater only gives him the company,

without ranking, of Saint Catherine of Siena in the *House Beautiful*. As silent as contemplation promises to be, Pater again mutes Wordsworth's life as he had done in comparing him with Coleridge's. Christopher Ricks has noticed that Pater substituted "quiet" for "pleasant," when from Wordsworth's "Resolution and Independence," he quotes, "My whole life I have lived in quiet thought!" (86). Oddly Pater left the remark exclamatory, but it gives the impression that Pater regards Wordsworth as a rather quiet and solitary poet, even ascetically so in his commitment to the quiet life, rather than to a life that is merely "pleasant." "Pleasant thought" seems to lack gravity and a higher import.

Quiet, the customary tone of Pater's style, leads us to the greatest difference between his essay on Wordsworth and Arnold's, and the cause can be attributed to their difference in Platonism. Arnold's Wordsworth seems led out with other great poets as in a national parade. Pater's Wordsworth is quieter than Arnold's because he is more secret, more mysterious. Wordsworth, Pater writes:

meets us with the promise that he has much, and something very peculiar, to give us, if we will follow a certain difficult way, and seems to have the secret of a special and privileged state of mind. And those who have undergone his influence, and followed this difficult way, are like people who have passed through some initiation, a *disciplina arcani*, by submitting to which they become able constantly to distinguish in art, speech, feeling, manners, that which is organic, animated, expressive, from that which is only conventional, derivative, inexpressive. (42)

The artist's habit must be "organic, animated, expressive." Pater's vocabulary suggests mystery again: "peculiar," "secret," "special," "privileged state of mind," "difficult way," "initiation," and "*disciplina arcani*," which is the secret teaching of the third- and fourth-century Church, especially the Platonism of the Alexandrian Fathers. Pater uses the word "mystery," or a variation, several times. The poet possesses "that old isolating thought of many a brain-sick mystic of ancient and

modern times” (55). Wordsworth’s existing in a tradition of this mystic trait contributes to his style. His poems “Daffodils” and “Two April Mornings” are said to have a “half-playful mysticism” (58). Indeed, Wordsworth participates in a genealogy of mystical poets: he “drew something too from the unconscious mysticism of the old English language itself” (59). Pater is trying to raise the opinion of Wordsworth, and for similar reasons, as Swinburne raised the estimation of Blake. Both critics hold their subjects to be beyond their contemporaries and more closely affiliated to great artists from other ages. Here is an English poet in whose line the writers of his age are succeeding, who possessed as much artistic power as an artist of a great age like the Renaissance, or third-century Alexandria. With respect to Wordsworth’s contributing to a tradition, in the discussion whether he might be the most recent manifestation of the Renaissance in England, his mysticism tells most for the possibility: he would fit among the Renaissance subjects well. And yet, it is portrayed as though Wordsworth cannot avoid it, for the tradition is actually in the very English language he uses. In *Plato*, Pater sees the tradition of Platonic, or Pythagorean, metempsychosis in Wordsworth’s *Ode on The Intimations of Immortality from Childhood Recollections*, and suggests that perhaps he was influenced by another English poet, Henry Vaughan, in whose poem “The Retreat” we find a belief “which indeed, from the unsanctioned dreams of Origen onwards, those doctrines have shown themselves not otherwise than at home” (*Plato* 73). The very tricks of the brain, which often express mysticism in Platonism, are now innate in England’s own race.

Daley emphasizes Pater’s view on the poet as a “Strange Wordsworth,” specifically for Pater’s focusing on Wordsworth’s philosophy, which pursues a prior state of existence, a desire shared by many of Pater’s subjects and characters (30-31).

Furthermore, Daley sees Pater as beginning this tradition of finding strangeness in his poems (32).

Pater, however, albeit vaguely, tries to explain Wordsworth's mysterious philosophy, by describing one of Plato's proofs for the immortality of the soul, the reminiscence argument of the *Meno*. And to mystify it further he mentions one of the initiated in the *Disciplina Arcani*, the Alexandrian Father Origen:

He had pondered deeply, for instance, on those strange reminiscences and forebodings, which seem to make our lives stretch before and behind us, beyond where we can see or touch anything, or trace the lines of connection. Following the soul, backwards and forwards, on these endless ways, his sense of man's dim, potential powers became a pledge to him, indeed, of a future life, but carried him back also to that mysterious notion of an earlier state of existence—the fancy of the Platonists—the old heresy of Origen. It was in this mood that he conceived those oft-reiterated regrets for a half-ideal childhood, when the relics of paradise still hung about his soul—a childhood, as it seemed, full of fruits of old age, lost for all in a degree in the passing away of the youth of the world, lost for each one, over again, in the passing away of actual youth. It is this ideal childhood which he celebrates in his famous *Ode on the Recollections of Childhood*, and some other poems which may be grouped around it, like the lines on *Tintern Abbey*, and something like what he describes was actually truer of himself than he seems to have understood; for his own most delightful poems were really the instinctive productions of earlier life, and most surely for him, “the first diviner influence of this world” passed away more and more completely, in his contact with experience. (54-55)

The experience of daily life will actually efface the knowledge of the soul in Wordsworth, and through his Platonism, vague perhaps yet persistent, he is compared to Origen. Like Wordsworth, Origen the heretic does not always take care to note inconsistencies, he was “inconsistent enough,” for, in all Wordsworth's “pondering,” a heavy, almost dull, mode of thinking, like a divine brooding, his poems were “instinctive productions of an earlier life.” The placement of Origen in this passage is curious, for the Platonists, alone, would also have made the point. He wants to stress the “mysterious” element of the “notion,” and the return as a going back in time,

marks anticipation and repetition, and therefore continuation. Pater drew out the accomplished beauty of the Italian Renaissance as in part the result of the blend of Platonism with Christianity, and he follows the line of thought again in “Wordsworth.” The blend this time, however, is not a straight blend of Plato and Moses, Hellenism and Hebraism, but a more refined blend of Christianity, already a blend, with more Platonism. Mysticism is most closely associated with the Fathers, and as A. J. Festugière has remarked, with special regard to Clement, Origen, and Augustine, “Quand les Pères ‘pensent’ leur mystique, ils platonisent” (5). Their Christian edifice was based on Platonism.

By looking at Origen, we might see some similarities with Pater’s portrayal of Wordsworth. As one of the initiated, Origen is part of the intellectual select, among the ideas of Plato and Plotinus, with other like-minded souls, who have leisure to seek ‘the alone with the Alone’” (Louth 52). His mysticism is a search for light, as he withdraws his soul from external conditions, and through contemplation, the activity of his *nous*, he seeks union with God, the great *Nous* (Louth 72). What sets the mystical strand of Platonism found in Origen apart from later Christianity is that he truly believes he has something spiritual in his nature which is akin to the Divine (xiii). There is not that distance between created and Creator that arrives from the theological formulation of *creatio ex nihilo* in the later Nicene Orthodoxy (Louth 73). The first uses of the word “mystical” as a way of knowing God are found in Origen, and as a commentator, an interpreter of Scripture, his way to God was through the Word (Bouyer 132-33). Origen is responsible for what Gregory of Nyssa called the ‘mystical contemplation of the Canticle of Canticles,’ so influential throughout the Neoplatonic-Christian tradition. In his Commentary on St John, Louis Bouyer informs us, Origen declares the “ineffable and mystical vision (θεωρήματα) give joy and

impart enthusiasm,” accompanying Biblical exegesis (133). Pater coincidentally speaks of Wordsworth’s “joyful enthusiasm, which great imaginative theories prompt, when the mind first comes to have an understanding of them.” It was also Origen who first saw the symbolical status of Martha and Mary which spread so far. “There is a tension,” explains Andrew Louth, “between Mary the contemplative, who seeks God for Himself, and Martha, the active one who is ‘cumbered about much serving’ in attending to the needs of those around her” (194). Origen’s mysticism is an *enérgeia* of his literary criticism. He leads a long tradition of thought, to Wordsworth, of Platonic philosophy.

Matthew Arnold eschews the words mystery, mysticism, and all their forms. Shorey indicates that “Platonic love and the mystic of Plato . . . are repugnant to him” (229-30). He writes, “I have sometimes imagined that it was his Puritanic distaste for this bastard Shelleyan form of Platonic love that closed Matthew Arnold’s mind to this aspect of Platonism. Though a close reader and frequent quoter of Plato, Arnold rarely alludes to the *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus*” (227). Pater, as we have seen, embraces these dialogues, for they provide the personal narrative blueprints the soul must travel, through love and beauty, in order to unify with the Divine. Pater is surely more mystical. In the last work in which he uses the term “imaginative reason,” *Plato and Platonism*, he quotes Diotima’s speech from the *Symposium*, in his own translation, which traces this very course of the soul:

“seeing the beautiful with that through which it may be seen (namely the imaginative reason, ὁ νοῦς) to beget no mere phantasms of virtue, as it is no phantom he apprehends, but the true virtue, as he embraces what is true? And having begotten virtue (virtue is the child that will be born of this mystic intellectual commerce, or *connubium*, of the imaginative reason with the ideal beauty) and reared it, he will become dear to God, and if any man may be immortal he will be.” (122)

“Imaginative reason” eventually becomes synonymous with *nous*, the intellect now. The Greek knowledge of *nous* is expressly an intuitive knowledge, associated, therefore, with vision and contemplation. Arnold would not have used his term in this mystical sense, but Pater connects it with the tradition he describes, of paganism and Christianity, the blend of which would make much use of this aspect of Platonism from the beginning.

It is through the word, as a critic, like Origen, that Pater would arrive towards a form of Platonic knowledge. He writes of Wordsworth, “that old fancy which made the poet’s art and enthusiasm, a form of divine possession, seems almost literally true of him” (41). The poet is under “the influence of received ideas,” beyond the senses, “accidents turning up for a moment what lies below the surface of immediate experience” (54). In the same way Wordsworth is susceptible, has “periods of intense susceptibility, in which he appeared to himself but the passive recipient of external influences” (56), Pater makes himself critically susceptible in experiencing Wordsworth’s words.

As a sort of training for the aesthetic life, of practising one’s imaginative reason, Pater recommends the reading of Wordsworth: “This constant suggestion of an absolute duality between higher and lower moods, and the work done in them, stimulating one always to look below the surface, makes the reading of Wordsworth an excellent sort of training towards the things of art and poetry” (41). The notion of getting beneath the surface to reality is undeniably Platonic, and the belief that Wordsworth can facilitate a deeper knowledge is akin, if to a lesser degree, to Origen’s faith in Scripture. Evangelista has listed Wordsworth as a name repeated throughout Pater’s oeuvre, “among those ‘later mental kinsmen’ of Plato who illuminate ‘the conscious or unconscious drift of his teaching.’” There is, Evangelista

continues, “a sense of inevitable continuity, embodied in the Platonic tradition, in which Pater tries to create a place for himself in the very act of writing about it” (“Romantic Hellenism” 225).

Conclusion

We have seen many similarities in the Platonism of Arnold and Pater; but we shall conclude with their major difference, for the latter’s embracing of mysticism distinguishes their literary philosophies. Perhaps this is a consequence of Arnold’s temperament, but it could also be the way he ingested his Platonism, mostly outside of the Schools. Butler provided him with the religious counterpart to Aristotle. Pater took in his Plato officially, and did not shy from Plato’s mysticism. Pater could make sense of Shelley, where Arnold holds Byron as the much stronger of the English Romantic poets. Although Plato may have replaced Butler because of his good prose style, and because he brought further Greek to the *Literae Humaniores*, he seems also to bring some undefined religiousness. Burrows writes of Plato in his relation to Bishop Butler’s fallen stature that, “it must be remembered that in Butler’s scheme many of the doctrines which more especially distinguish the earlier of the two ancient philosophers from his successor are necessarily merged in the fuller light of that Revelation of which Plato was, in some respects, the prophet” (237). Perhaps Pater and Arnold can share a similar distinction, between Butler and Aristotle’s drier dogmatism on one hand, and Plato’s more mystical piety on the other. Perhaps the distinction is evident in the tone: Arnold speaks to the populace, the entire congregation, as it were, using his knowledge of Platonism in order to talk about their conduct; whilst Pater speaks more quietly, perhaps for those catechumens who held themselves to be already initiated.

Chapter Three

From Myth to Logos: The Platonic Progression of Pater's Mythology

Turning to Myth

Mythology interests Pater throughout his oeuvre, from *The Renaissance* to *Plato and Platonism*, and as in all the prevalent strains running through his work, Plato is its grand influence. It is suitable to follow our discussion of Wordsworth with a look at some of Pater's essays on myth, because, as Evangelista has especially argued, in "'Outward Nature and the Moods of Men': Romantic Mythology in Pater's Essays on Dionysus and Demeter" (2002), the English Romantic poets help generate this interest. The notion of sympathy is one of the key entrance points into understanding Pater's turning towards myth. His myth studies reveal a period of transition, marking, in large, the middle portion of Pater's career, as they come between Pater the critic and Pater the creator of fiction, and have a sustaining influence on his writing. The last essays of *Greek Studies* are published much later, "The Age of Athletic Prizemen" not until 1894. During the period that myth most occupies him Pater makes the important decision to write in a new genre, indicating that he likely acquires from these studies the skill or the confidence, to try his hand at fiction. Pater speaks positively in these essays of Wordsworth, Shelley, Blake, and even Coleridge, seeing them as later exponents of myth in England. That they are poets is quite important to Pater, as poetry retains the licence we find in myth for alternative modes of knowledge. Yet the artists of the Renaissance also reappear—Michelangelo, Leonardo, Botticelli, among others—, representing a similar talent for bringing Greek myth into their own time. Pater continues to look backwards in order to discover things in the past that will shed light on the present, and, increasingly perhaps, about himself as an artist.

Pater's most lucid account of myth comes in "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone" (1876), published in *The Fortnightly Review*, but delivered a year earlier as a lecture at the Birmingham and Midland Institute. Here he sets out a three phase, progressive model to explain the creation of myth, which passes from the oral, to the literary, to the ethical, following, indeed a Platonic pattern. Pater's friend C. L. Shadwell (1840-1919), a Fellow of Oriel College, posthumously gathered this essay into a collection titled *Greek Studies*, among six other essays of similar theme. The mythological model set out in "Demeter and Persephone" explains the structure he uses in other essays such as "A Study of Dionysus" (1876). Those essays that do not deal with myth, deal with statuary, but in Pater's scheme there is a correlation between the two art forms, as Shadwell states in the preface (2), for statuary grows out of myth, as the perfect depiction of a character is the final accomplishment of a mythical figure. One can superficially see this extended relationship in the division of the essay "The Beginnings of Greek Sculpture" (1880), where the first part is devoted to "The Heroic Age of Greek Art," followed by the "The Age of Graven Images." The growth of a statue out of a character's story imitates the relationship of myth and *logos*, which, although often opposed in Western tradition, attempt to unify in Pater's aesthetics. The harmony of thought found among these essays, though written over a period of several years, allows us to explain an aspect of one by the other. Although we can often find consistency in Pater's thought throughout his career, the integrity of *Greek Studies* is owed also to his composing most of the works within a five year period of 1875 to 1880. Of the seven works, only "The Age of Athletic Prizemen" and "Hippolytus Veiled" (1889) fall outside of that time frame. As Pater begins to move from criticism to fiction during this time it is fitting he would engage himself to the study of myth, as the original melting point between fact and fiction.

Pater's writing on myth has received ample critical attention. Most critical queries revolve around his sources. Mythology after all is theoretical, and Pater is not often thought to be an original thinker; if he has peculiarities of thought, it is often believed to be due to a unique blend of influences. Thus, Billie Inman indicates fellow Oxonians, comparative mythologist Max Müller and anthropologist Edward Tylor as sources; James Kissane finds George Grote; Gerald Monsman credits Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872); M. F. Moran identifies a Viconian influence in Pater's myth; Steven Connor sees Edward Preller and, notably, John Ruskin's influential lectures *The Queen of the Air* (1869), a source repeatedly followed by Linda Dowling and others. As a fictional source, John Smith Harrison in 1924 cited Heinrich Heine's *The Gods in Exile*, published in French in 1853. Pater himself acknowledges Heine's influence in "Pico della Mirandola," an essay that discusses the Platonic scholar's enthusiasm for old gods to resurface. Monsman discusses this Platonic resurfacing of gods also in Pater's fiction (24), in connection with Germain d'Hangest's observing the cyclical souls in *The Renaissance* (II 67-68). And, after F. T. Lenaghan's "Pattern in Walter Pater's Fiction" (1961), some have followed Hegel's influence on Pater, though without directly articulating Hegel's philosophy of myth, focusing on *Zeitgeist* and dialectic.

As Carolyn Williams notes of *Greek Studies*, Pater is interested in return (237). Though we might remember that each age possesses its own method of treating myth, the study of myth marks a desire to understand universal stories across ages and various cultures. The return of certain stories and the curators of those stories throughout history, and how these stories bind ages, cultures, and artists together, seems to fascinate Pater. If in *The Renaissance* we witness Pater's interest in the resurfacing of a certain kind of artist, in *Greek Studies* we see that interest expand to

the universal method of creating stories—stories powerful enough to remain and re-awake in different places throughout history.

Plato and Myth

Plato is the single greatest influence on how the entire Western tradition conceives myth, and certainly on Pater's mythology; yet although *Plato and Platonism* is frequently discussed for containing some of Pater's most lucid views on mythology, Plato is widely neglected by critics.

In "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone" Pater distinguishes himself critically, as in *The Renaissance*, from antiquarianism or mechanical scholarship. Because he is grasping after ephemera, traces of persons barely material, he pursues them by an alternative method. The method is not his own discovery, however, but is said to be rooted in ancient days; nor is it an old method to be replaced by a newer science:

side by side with the growth of this more mechanical conception, an older and more spiritual, Platonic, philosophy has always maintained itself, a philosophy more of instinct than of the understanding, the mental starting-point of which is not an observed sequence of outward phenomena, but some such feeling as most of us have on the first warmer days of spring, when we seem to feel the genial processes of nature actually at work; as if just below the mould, and in the hard wood of the trees, there were really circulating some spirit of life, akin to that which makes its energies felt within ourselves. Starting with a hundred instincts such as this, that older unmechanical, spiritual, or Platonic, philosophy envisages nature rather as the unity of a living spirit or person, revealing itself in various degrees to the kindred spirit of the observer, than as a system of mechanical forces. (*Greek Studies* 96)

Much of Pater's mythology is in this passage, and we may find similarities with his essay on Wordsworth. Here is the paradoxical movement that seeks, as he says in "Dionysus," the "unseen powers beyond the material veil of things" (20), and the "living spirit or person": in other words, the abstract personified. Turning to his method, we notice that by declaring this mode of proceeding, inspired by Platonic

philosophy, yet contemporaneous with the scientific method (“side by side”), he escapes potential criticism that he is either out-dated or innovative in his approach to mythology. The scientific method proceeds by external evidence, as it is a more “mechanical conception,” finding knowledge by what it can quantify and measure physically, rather than by human sentiment or the spiritual influence some thing or thought plays upon us. He praises knowledge that comes from within, through intuition and imagination, rather than empirical discovery. By placing this method alongside the scientific method, like a long path travelling back through history, and which, importantly, still continues to run, he establishes for himself both the authority of precedence and modern relevance.

“Such a philosophy,” he declares, “is a systematised form of that sort of poetry (we may study it, for instance, either in Shelley or in Wordsworth), which also has its fancies of a spirit of the earth, or of the sky,—a personal intelligence abiding in them” (96). He seems to say that scientific critics may take one road (he does not criticize this path, overtly), but artists take another; and he is a critic that follows the path of artists. Discussing Romantic strains in “The Myth of Demeter,” Evangelista shows how Pater positions himself among Wordsworth and Shelley within this transhistorical, yet anachronistic, poetic tendency (116). Elsewhere, in “Walter Pater’s Romantic Hellenism,” Evangelista has shown that Shelley’s *A Defence of Poetry* helped persuade Pater’s opinion of Plato as a great poet (228). And our previous chapter has shown how Wordsworth, for instance, exemplified a modern poetic Platonism. Not merely through Plato, then, but with those who followed him, would Pater discover how Platonism relates these poetic mythmakers to one another.

Contemporary Influence

The trail of mythmakers includes contemporary poets Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), both of whom had written poems upon mythological figures. Although Pater alludes to these figures, his custom is not to write extensive criticism about the living (unless placing, often by favour, a review of recent work). Pater writes of Dante Gabriel Rossetti in 1883, only a year after the poet's death, that "One seems to hear there a really new kind of poetic utterance, with effects which have nothing else like them; as there is nothing else, for instance, like the narrative of Jacob's Dream in *Genesis*, or Blake's design of the Singing of the Morning Stars, or Addison's Nineteenth Psalm" (*Appreciations* 210). All of these works contain a religious mysticism one would expect in a mythic hymn. And part of his effect with words is owed, as Pater continues, to his mythic interpretation of the world: "With him indeed, as in some revival of the old mythopoeic age, common things—dawn, noon, night—are full of human or personal expression, full of sentiment" (210-211). The mythopoeic function is mostly associated with the poetic gift in the nineteenth century for various reasons. Immediately, the *poetic* of the word shares its root with poet. But we might more substantially indicate that the mythmaker's power is visionary and linked to the spiritual visions experienced by prophets. The "Poetic Genius" of Blake gives the artist a power materially unexplainable and unquantifiable above others. Yet the mythopoeic faculty, as Blake himself shows us, need not be limited to poetry; it often asserts itself in painting, and Rossetti often presents his mythical visions in both poetry and painting, so they are twin-born like Dionysus himself, once by Semele and Zeus, and again out of the latter's thigh. The artistic modes of poetry and painting may be different, but they both reveal the rare skill of gathering influences and

expressing a vision. Thus their power lay in the expression rather than the fact. Even if the depictions are contradictory, they both persist, and shed light on the other.

Mythic interpretation for Pater finds its end when phenomena are discovered in personal types. Rossetti painted Proserpine and wrote a sonnet on the picture translated into Italian and English. All three forms are translations or manifestations from scattered data of the goddess into a modern form: deriving from many intuitions she is moulded into unity. The interpretation of the myth is joined to the creation of one for Pater, the interpretation being an immaterial gathering of attributes. He compares Rossetti with Dante for “the really imaginative vividness, namely, of his personifications—his hold upon them, or rather their hold upon him, with the force of a Frankenstein, when once they have taken life from him” (208). Rossetti is here tied to the Shelleys, for, like Dr. Frankenstein, the mythmaker or poet, after uniting a body of images in words from sundry sources, will surrender control of his or her creation. And this poetic process, a “revival” of the “mythopoeic age” as Pater terms it, requires a quality in Rossetti defined by Plato:

Poetry as a *mania*—one of Plato's two higher forms of “divine” mania—has, in all its species, a mere insanity incidental to it, the “defect of its quality,” into which it may lapse in its moment of weakness; and the insanity which follows a vivid poetic anthropomorphism like that of Rossetti may be noted here and there in his work, in a forced and almost grotesque materialising of abstractions. (*Appreciations* 209)

Although Rossetti’s mania, a direct reference to Plato’s *Phaedrus*, is described as a poetic madness, the manifestation of abstractions might also explain the method of interpretation, which resembles literary criticism, although here grotesque, as requisite to the mythic artist.

In Swinburne’s *Poems and Ballads* (1866) he published both the “Garden of Proserpine” and the “Hymn to Proserpine.” The latter has parenthetically appended to

the title: “(After the proclamation in Rome of the Christian faith).” The hymn, indeed, is religious, in the melody of the sentence structure, reading in long plaintive sentences after the manner of the Psalms or Solomon’s Song: for example, “Time and the gods are at strife; ye dwell in the midst thereof, / Draining a little life from the barren breasts of love.” Swinburne’s hymn blends the Biblical form with references to Proserpine and Apollo thus blurring the distinction between Christianity and the older gods. Whereas Swinburne and Rossetti use the Roman name of the goddess, Pater uses her Greek name, perhaps in an effort to reach further back and to attain a purer Hellenism. Much of his mythology after all is based on a word’s prime etymological meaning. As a critic Pater makes himself relevant to myths of the past and of the present by recognizing that they inevitably grow from their pagan contexts into Christian territory. His blend of tradition is also much softer than Swinburne’s.

In appealing to the power of Platonic philosophy for both interpretation and creation of myth, sympathetically with the poets, Pater does not fully remove himself from the more scientific approaches of his day; for Plato is often their guide also. Max Müller’s “Comparative Mythology” (1856), to cite an important example, begins with a long quotation from Plato’s *Phaedrus*, where Socrates, by a river bank beneath a plane tree, will not condemn the myth of Boreas as false because he cannot know for certain. Socratic scepticism works both ways, also the suspension of disbelief, as we shall discuss in our fifth chapter in relation to Montaigne. The scene inspired Lucian’s dialogue in *Marius* where Socrates will not deny the possibility of the myth of Halcyon, preferring rather to rely on greater hope (II 81-84). Müller quotes the *Phaedrus* as a common refutation of religious rationalism. He tells how George Grote, for example, in *The History of Greece* (1846-56), cites this same passage in order to warn against digging for truths. The historical weight of the passage is revealed when

Müller sees the passage as an obstacle for his mythological study and therefore argues that Socrates would actually support his work, as it is a study of man, adhering to the command, “know thyself” (302). As a German scholar at Oxford, Müller perhaps recognizes Plato’s authority.

Müller is not interested in the individual self, however, but mankind. In a Hegelian sense, he sees the world as teleologically approaching a rational understanding of itself, in a “Universal History” (303). He explains in his lectures on “The Science of Language” (1861) that, because myth is obfuscated, it is a disease of language (456). Unlike Pater, Müller is not interested in the actual stories of the myth, but rather in clarifying their origins through the sanitization of their original misunderstandings. Poetic mythmaking, or mythopoeia, is not praised, and Wordsworth’s poetry, it follows, when it personifies abstract nouns, is merely child-like (“Comparative Mythology” 363): an immature state in the world’s development.

George Grote is far more complimentary towards the basis of Greek myth because he has a greater appreciation for narrative and more reverence for religion. Pater cites Grote as an authority on the Homeric Hymns, one of his main sources in “Demeter and Persephone” (*Greek Studies* 82). And the idea that the first phase of myth comes from the people before the poets ameliorate them might also derive from Grote, who writes: “Raised originally by hands unseen and from data unassignable, it existed first in the shape of floating talk among the people, from whence a large portion of it passed into the song of the poets, who multiplied, transformed and adorned it in a thousand various ways” (*History of Greece* I 460). As a man of his time, Grote did not escape the analogy of the stages of the world and the stages of man. This analogy was originally made popular by Vico’s writings in the previous century. But like Vico, and unlike many of the Hegelian influenced thinkers such as

Müller who adopted the metaphor, Grote was sympathetic with the child-like stage of man. In Vico's case, which is a cyclical view of history rather than a teleological view, one believes that man will again be child and thus conceives a closer unity of ages. The child's story is very much the adult's. Grote declares that the same mythopoeic tendency of Greece appeared again in Europe when the legends of the Catholic Saints and the Romances of Chivalry created two types of characters to uphold two personified ideals (623). The Saints' legends, tells Grote, met the inquiry of the Reformation, and ceased credence, despite how useful its legends were for inspiring true religious sentiment (629). Pater will not permit his mythology to lose sight of myth's narrative power upon us, and he warns his reader when discussing the application of theories, that in "comparative literature"—referencing Müller's work—"the student of Greek religion must never forget that, after all, it is with poetry, not with systematic theological belief or dogma, that he has to do" (*Greek Studies* 112). Greek myth, then, must not be scrutinized like the Bible in *Essays and Reviews* (1860).

For this same reason, Grote cites the passage in Plato's *Phaedrus* where Socrates draws back from assailing myth through scientific investigation (585). Following Plato, Grote believes that myth stands outside scientific enquiry, for it forms a separate category, standing as a "class apart":

If Plato thus directly discountenances all attempts to transform the mythes (sic) by interpretation into history or philosophy, indirectly recognising the generic difference between them, we find substantially the same view pervading the elaborate precepts in his treatise on the Republic. He there regards the mythes, not as embodying either matter of fact or philosophical principle, but as portions of religious and patriotic faith, and instruments of ethical tuition. (587)

That the myth finally becomes ethical allows Plato to be standing at the *trivium* of Pater's mythology, for Plato himself represents the oral in the Socratic dialogues, the

poetic as myth-maker, and thirdly the ethical, through the characterisation of virtue, in many dialogues. Grote tells us that Plato recognizes some myths as false, and some as true, but even some that are false have a marvellous ability for training youth (588). Myth for Plato is perhaps too important, and thus in his ideal State he places strict regulations upon just whom shall be permitted to create them. Plato of course is permitted to make myths and tell them; for although poets are notoriously banned from his State, he closes out his *magnum opus* with an eschatological story of the after-life in the Myth of Er. Myth's importance sets it into a category outside of historical enquiry. Grote sides with Plato, telling us that although its narrative resembles history and its illustrative depictions resemble philosophy, it is neither; it is exclusively "a popularised expression of the divine and heroic faith of the people" (291).

Pater hesitates on Plato's banning of myth from *The Republic*, acknowledging that the modern reader will not stand for this; but he also subverts this statement by repeatedly revealing the hieratic necessity of myth, and that under the guidance of few who are qualified to teach the spiritual meaning of myth, philosophic poets, such as Plato himself, are fully condoned to do so. In these studies Pater aligns himself in this teaching tradition.

In the middle of the nineteenth century it was a popular belief that Plato's myth was what sustained Platonism alongside Christianity, especially in its early centuries. German theologian, Dr. C. Ackermann, for example, states in *The Christian Element in Plato and the Platonic Philosophy* (1835), translated into English in 1841, that, "Plato, like Christ, loves to unite the higher to the lower, and to rise in his dialogues and inquiries from the sensuous to the spiritual" (56). Most notable of English theologians perhaps are R. D. Hampden (1793-1868) and Brooke Westcott

(1825-1901). Hampden was educated at Oriel College and embroiled in some of the commotion of the Oxford Movement; he was Professor of Moral Philosophy and later Regius Professor of Divinity, and eventually became Bishop of Hereford. His 1862 *The Fathers of Greek Philosophy* argues for the Christian soul to progress with the mind's eye up to Truth itself, invoking the *Timaeus*, in the dialectical progression instructed by Plato in *The Republic* (294). Westcott also became a bishop, of Durham, having been educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, and there becoming Professor of Divinity. In 1866 he published "The Myths of Plato" in the *Contemporary Review*, arguing that Platonism's virtue stands "face to face" with Christianity (2). The Platonic myth is not below reason, but a truth unto itself (3); it deals with inward, subjective fact, rather than outward (5). "The Platonic myth is, in short, a possible material representation of a speculative doctrine, which is affirmed by instinct, but not capable of being established by a scientific process. The myth is itself a doctrine so far as it is at present capable of apprehension by men" (6). Platonic myth repeatedly represents efficient, alternative knowledge amidst a growing popularity for external fact. Finally, myths represent the manifestations of Divine Wisdom (48); for, after quoting Simmias' desire for the Word in the *Phaedo* (85a), writes Westcott, Plato reveals the way to St John (50). The Logos understandably is perhaps the most significant principle shared between Platonism and modern Christianity.

Yet, as we witnessed with Müller, even with the new scientific approaches towards myth, Plato often kept his place; perhaps because in one of the field's seminal works, Vico's *Scienza Nuova* (1744 3rd ed.), Plato is so prominent. Myths are archetypes to Vico, created through the imaginations of the first peoples; more precisely, myths are poetic archetypes: universals like gods or heroes (24). Along with the pursuit for archetypes, Vico's conception of myth is Platonic because the myths

move from the senses of poets to the intellects of philosophers (136), who are fewer, and in whom the myth becomes esoteric; therefore there is a progression of knowledge towards the immaterial from sense to intellect. Then, as with the mythology Pater adopts, there is an ethical stage. “Since Greek poets were well versed in the teaching of Socratic philosophy,” explains Vico, “they could use general maxims of civil ethics to create notable exemplars of ideal people. . . . The lustre and splendour of their characters could inspire the masses, who are as quick to learn from striking examples as they are slow to profit from rational precepts” (364). In Plato’s *Republic* myth is likewise used, especially in the education of the young, when rational argument is not efficient. Even in religion Vico has high faith in Plato, for “the true religion,” Vico writes, “which is our Christian religion, is confirmed in human terms by the sublimest philosophies: by Plato, by Aristotle, insofar as he agrees with Plato” (28).

Pater’s Religious Myth

Pater’s interest in myth might derive from his effort to see continuity between paganism and Christianity. He finds power in these mythical stories despite their “having no link on historical fact,” and value inestimable to the spirit of man. He closes “Demeter and Persephone” with the following statement:

The myth of Demeter and Persephone, then, illustrates the power of the Greek religion as a religion of pure ideas—of conceptions, which having no link on historical fact, yet, because they arose naturally out of the spirit of man, and embodied, in adequate symbols, his deepest thoughts concerning the conditions of his physical and spiritual life, maintained their hold through many changes, and are still not without solemnizing power even for the modern mind, which has once admitted them as recognized and habitual inhabitants; and, abiding thus for the elevation and purifying of our sentiments, long after the earlier and simpler races of their worshippers have passed away, they may be a pledge to us of the place in our culture, at once legitimate and possible, of the associations, the conceptions, the imagery, of Greek religious poetry in general, of the poetry of all religions. (151)

If these myths do not necessarily have a link on the chain of conventional history, they certainly for Pater have a place in the life of man, which to Pater is the most valuable history. And their relevance continues. He writes that “there are traces of the old temper in the man of to-day also” (100). Pater uses the word “trace” often in these mythological studies. Coming from Latin’s *trahere*, to draw, we may picture a mark upon us inherited from our ancestors, or a line that connects us to them. He is claiming the survival of the Greek temper within the student of Greek myth. He uses the word to define scant, yet real, indications of myth’s occurrence. “We trace it in the dim first period of instinctive popular conception,” he writes explaining his methodology; “we see it connecting itself with many impressive elements of art, and poetry, and religious custom, with the picturesque superstitions of the many, and with the finer intuitions of the few; and besides this, it is in itself full of interest and suggestion, to all for whom the ideas of the Greek religion have any real meaning in the modern world” (81-82). If the Greeks were our childhood, then we may still recall that childhood with instances of clarity, as Pater conveyed in “The Child in the House.” Pater would not have us forget our childhood, and the “trace,” the line shared by the successive ages, will not be severed. As Walter Benjamin has written, “The trace is the appearance of nearness, however far removed,” whereas “aura is the appearance of distance,” however close (M16a, 4).²⁶ Pater never uses the word “aura,” but writes “trace” often, for he wants to show that his subject is close at hand. We will discern Pater uses the word “trace” especially when he speaks of the poetic temper required for myth’s creation in its second stage, when the myth moves from its oral stage among the people to its literary stage among the select few, where intuition is required. “Trace” for Pater is rather internal than external, and aided by one’s temper.

²⁶Translation by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin.

Noticing the ways Greek myth have been adopted for contemporary religious purposes, we might speculate that some of Pater's motivation is to approach religious questions in a safer field than orthodox Christianity. He certainly invites comparison between ancient and modern religion, and this seems to reflect more than the temper of the *Greats* course. The power of narrative in Christianity began to consume his time more and more in the early '80s until he turned full time to the writing of *Marius the Epicurean*. Some of the issues he explores there are first approached in these early myth studies, such as the individual's role in a religion based upon community and the place feeling as opposed to reason has in religion. Sympathy among characters and the interpretation of myth in texts are also very important in *Marius*.

As though trying to close gaps in time, Pater draws lines between ideal figures and layers them over each other. He employs the word hymn in his investigation so the stories may retain their religiousness and draws a connection to the Christian Mother Mary, declaring early in "Demeter" that, "in this hymn we may, again and again, trace curious links of connexion with the original purpose of the myth. Its subject is the weary woman, indeed, our Lady of Sorrows, the *mater dolorosa* of the ancient world, but with a certain latent reference, all through, to the mystical person of the earth" (*Greek Studies* 114). He both infuses Demeter's importance as a religious figure and shrinks time by conflating Demeter's and Mary's character in a sort of cyclical history. More than showing continuity between paganism and Christianity,²⁷ Pater is accumulating the weight of the iconic personages by adding them together.

Pater is working at a similar effect when he superimposes ideal figures atop one another to join their identities in his reader's mind. "To illustrate this function of the imagination," he writes in "A Study of Dionysus,"

²⁷ Anne-Florence Gillard-Estrada, among others, has indicated Pater's tendency to merge paganism with Christianity in his myth studies (177).

as especially developed in Greek art, we may reflect on what happens with us in the use of certain names, as expressing summarily, this name for you and that for me—Helen, Gretchen, Mary—a hundred associations, trains of sound, forms, impressions, remembered in all sorts of degrees, which, through a very wide and full experience, they have the power of bringing with them; in which respect, such names are but revealing instances of the whole significance, power, and use of language in general. (36-37)

The effect here is similar to the famous passage of the Mona Lisa, which combines pagan and Christian figures together, both to reveal similarities and to morph one another by proximity. The word “association” is frequently used in these studies, and carries with it the idea of joining “companions” together, as the Latin root, *socius*, means “companion” or sharing, or acting together. Our perception of things often carry associations, making us think of others, but Pater also means figures who might be associated throughout history for fulfilling similar roles to different people and cultures. Inevitably the name is subjective because each individual mind carries its own associations of a name, but with mythic archetypes the mass of minds share impressions. Pater will not lose this kind of history because it is subjective rather than factual. If an archetype can also be known as a *logos*, its account, or name, representing an entire class, in this case, of revered women, their conflation of the three together creates a hyper-archetype, under which these women fall into a single trinity, thus bridging their divergent ages and cultures. Some mind, or Mind, might hold all these archetypes together, and Pater’s mind, both looking back and anticipating, will approach this great gathering of figures.

“Helen, Gretchen, Mary”—how much of Pater’s thought and writing can be found in that relief of figures? The pagan world in the Spartan Helen, trafficked across the Mediterranean, warred over, and brought home in shame by Homer; Goethe’s Gretchen from *Faust*, whom the Doctor corrupts through his own lust for the unseen Helen, revealing the dangers of German Hellenism to Christian morals; and Mary, the

Mother of Christians, name of Oxford's Church, retained through the Reformation, through J. H. Newman's coming and going from Oxford, where the Virgin Mother could be more often on his lips. This is a relief of literary ideals, notably, of the poetic, second phase of mythmaking; and portrays continuity in mythical stories through the ages, whether fiction or fact, not chronological, therefore not teleological, but repetitiously empathetic and sympathetic. Myth may be revered because it is close to us, as he exemplifies in his writing, and it feels known, just beyond yet shared with others.

Myth and Logos

There is another good reason why writers on mythology in the nineteenth century look to Plato as an authority. More than being a philosopher who relied on myth and saw its value, he is the most famous writer for whom the value of "myth" is not diminished for the sake of "logos." The Western tradition has largely developed the distinction whereby "myth" is false and "logos" is true. Grote reminds us that we saw this again with the word "legend" after the Reformation. Why then would a mythologist want to devote himself to an enquiry wherein the goal of the pursuit is a fallacy: the understanding of a misunderstanding? It is not motivating to discover why people had it wrong; a mathematician would not devote long hours to a theorem long ago proven false. Müller saw a rational weakness in myth, and he was not really interested in its stories *per se*, but rather how their linguistic evidence may prove a common Indo-European language. To investigate myth for its own sake, one should believe in its value. In order for myth to be saved it must be shown to have a place alongside "logos."

There have been many arguments made on both sides for what Plato believed about the relationship between 'myth' and 'logos': that he is the first to make the

strong distinction between myth and logos, and, contrarily, that he made none, or, more relatively, he made a distinction, but not very strongly, and not at the expense of myth. The latter view seems to prevail with Pater. Superficially, those who claim Plato opposes myth often cite his banning the poets from *The Republic*; while those who claim he championed it cite his using it in his dialogues and even the fictional form of the dialogue itself. It shows *The Republic*'s gravity in the Platonic corpus that an argument made there would be thought to outweigh the rest of his writing. The *Laws*, for example, aspiring towards a Dorian society, relies heavily upon poets to educate. In "Comparative Mythology," Müller shows Plato's ambiguous use of the two terms where the "story of Eros in the 'Phædros' is called a myth μῦθος, 254D; λόγος, 257B); yet Sokrates says ironically 'that it is one of those which you may believe or not' (τούτοις δὴ ἔξεστι μὲν πείθεσθαι, ἔξεστι δὲ μή)" (375). And later in the dialogue myths and "Egyptian stories" are called *logoi*. More recently, Luc Brisson argues in *Mots et mythes* (1982) that Plato was the very first to use *muthos* and *logos* in their modern senses of legendary and true, revealing a philosophical advancement on Greek thinkers such as Homer and Hesiod, the Presocratics, such as Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles, and Pindar and Herodotus; Thucydides is also inconsistent in telling fact from fiction. The term Logos was used by Heraclitus, as noted by Pater in both *Marius* and *Plato*, but not in the sense of logos contra myth. Yet Brisson argues that Plato does not abuse myth in favour of logos. Rather he sees myth as the oral stories of poets, which were widely replaced by the logos of the written word. The written word frees up the conscious memory so that arguments can be made, rather than telling stories (xvi), so that ideas may advance. Yet myths are unfalsifiable according to Plato, because they reveal a beyond (7), and therefore belong to a category of the "likely," rather than an argument certified by the deductive

method (10). Myth appeals to the senses and emotions, whereas logos appeals to the intellect. But myth can also be used when the rational argument can go no further and has reached *aporia*, as Plato uses it; myth can carry truths that logos cannot.

These arguments say that myth carries the seed of an oral community, whose truth is not yet articulated in argument; that although Plato is the first to argue many truths, he could not articulate them all fully, and relied upon myth to portray them partially. Steven Connor points precisely to myth's ability to carry the unconscious in the conscious that attracted Pater to using myth in his fiction (40).

In *Myth and Philosophy from the Presocratics to Plato* (2000), Katherine A. Morgan is even more apologetic of Plato's handling of myth. She indicates the oft-cited passage in the *Gorgias* (523a) where Socrates admits that the story of the soul can be called a myth or logos depending on one's point of view (156). In fact, Socrates there calls it a logos. Myths that discuss the soul in the *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, *The Republic*, and *Phaedrus*, she argues, may fulfil the task of leading people towards philosophy (164), and extend "philosophical speculation into the realm of the unseen" (240). Myth is a literary representation of dialectical logos, and it in effect rises out of and reflects dialectic, blurring the boundary between myth and logos (286-87). More recently, Catalin Partenie, in *Plato's Myth* (2009), would echo myth's complementary relationship to logos, where together they form a single whole, resembling "in a way that strange hermaphrodite creature of the Symposium myth" (21). Myth also reveals Plato's piety towards philosophy by focusing on knowledge hoped for rather than what can be proven.

Another way to approach the relationship of these words is to look at their etymological roots. Again Vico is followed by many in this approach. In his characteristically circumlocutory way, Vico finds a common meaning in the words:

“The word logic comes from Greek logos, which at first properly meant fable, or *fabula* in Latin, which later changed into Italian *favella*, speech. In Greek, a fable was also called mythos” (157). He gives various other meanings to logos, from word and idea, to thing, reminiscent of, indeed quoting from, Plato’s *Cratylus* in the process. He concludes that, “Myths were born as true and severe narratives, which is why the Greek word mythos has been defined as a true narrative” (366). Grote takes a similar approach, explaining that *muthos* meant *fabula* or story, not necessarily untrue, but over time coming to mean fictitious (479). He then reveals logos had the same origin: “The original use of the word λόγος was the same as that as μῦθος—a current tale, true or false, as the case might be; and the term designating a person much conversant with the old legends (λόγιος) is derived from it (Herod.i.1; ii.3). Hecataeus and Herodotus both use λόγος in this sense.” The object of these etymological investigations is to correct a strong bias favouring logos over myth. In the beginning the distinction was not there; therefore investing logos with the rational and myth with the false is contrived. By going back to myth, therefore, we return to a crossroads where one may salvage a kind of knowledge before the Western tradition might split, choosing the scientific route over another, losing its naïve knowledge. Pater, it seems, longs to return to the historical intersection.

Because Pater interprets and depicts myth with care and reverence in *Greek Studies* we may assume he was aware of these words’ deeper meanings, of how they both shared the sense of telling and story, especially narrative. Logos can mean “word,” “idea,” “account,” or the conceptualization of their gathering in argument and story; for the root of logos, *legein*, along with “say,” means “to gather,” “reckon,” and “recount.” It is this intellectual gathering for the telling of a story which means so much to Pater’s craft; if logos is the result of gathering details so that a rational

account is formed, a collection of the matter around one, Pater might say, a choice selection into form, discovering the details of a story, or attaining logos, may resemble the practice of discovering a myth, no less a story. As these words, such as narrative, carry both the conceptual meaning of selected account and also the verb to speak (as narrative comes from Latin's *narrare*, to tell or recount), we are dealing with the tradition that spans the oral and the literary, the sensuous and abstract, the word and the idea from which myth and logos both begin. Pater appreciates the tradition of stories, primitive and modern, with their continuity, not to analyze them scientifically in order to show their fallacy, but to take them whole.

Pater does not diminish myth in favour of rational account. Much of his idea of beauty has to do with the mystical and unknown, the beyond. And yet he demands sanity in artwork, intellect, and form's instructing, or the informing mind over, matter. He reconciles these terms in practice rather than by explicit argument. The way of myth is the way of logos, for he proceeds in his account of myth as one would proceed in a rational argument. Yet when he accounts for the myth, the myth still lives. Like Plato's dialogues, his arguments proceed like a story. In Connor's influential article on Pater's myth, he observed that Pater's mythological study was closely involved with his aesthetic study, that the struggle between myth's idea and manifestation into art form influenced Pater's own fiction, particularly his *Imaginary Portraits* (33). Wolfgang Iser also recognizes that "Myth becomes the 'objective correlative' of Pater's aesthetic creed" (114). But, as we shall see, because of this, myth will not lose its ethical value. Central to understanding Pater is seeing that he uses similar models for his criticism, interpreting other artists, into which *Greek Studies* ultimately falls, and his own fiction; but the line between Pater's genres fades when we notice he uses a similar theoretical structure for both.

When Monsman declares that “Pater alone conceived of the revelation of personality (Marius’ and Lisa’s) in terms of mythic archetypes” (*Walter Pater* 182), he is referring to the way in which Pater’s archetypes often take the shape of persons. Thus in *Plato and Platonism*, Pater explains that the second-phase of Platonic idealism, one’s ascendance to the intelligible world from the physical, through the love that powers our ascent, the ideas come to seem like living persons. “Abstract ideas themselves became animated, living persons, almost corporeal, as if with hands and eyes,” writes Pater (*Plato* 170). This is why Beauty comes to be the central Idea for Plato. Thus, the Platonic lover’s relationship with the ideas will be like a person to person relationship. The same process is described by Pater’s account of Rossetti’s talent for mythopoeia: “Not Death only and Sleep, for instance, and the winged spirit of Love, but certain particular aspects of them, a whole ‘populace’ of special hours and places, ‘the hour’ even ‘which might have been, yet might not be,’ are living creatures, with hands and eyes and articulate voices” (*Appreciations* 208). Again, with “hands and eyes,” Pater predictably sees Platonic ideals as conceptually similar to mythological archetypes. Pater does not see the tendency towards personification that we see in even modern mythopoesis, as seen in Rossetti’s work, for example, as out of keeping with philosophical thought.

The personification of abstract concepts seems to bind together myth and logos, and through this junction the sculptor will work in a similar fashion to the mythmaker. In the case of the school of Praxiteles, Demeter, for example, whose “archaic hands and feet, and a certain stiffness in the folds of the drapery, give it something of a hieratic character, and to the modern observer may suggest a sort of kinship with the more chastened kind of Gothic work” (*Greek Studies* 150). All the natural phenomena and mythical culture went into Demeter’s physical manifestation

in stone. The model of the logos, whether archetype or ideal, requires the gathering and refining of local phenomena, the earthy corn waving in the fields, the seasons of harvest, its threshing barns: these are idealized into the goddess of Demeter. The physical world is the material out of which she is formed. Likewise, Dionysus is the spiritual form of fire and dew, the Greeks' intimacy with dew and fire and the very grape on the vine being necessary to his being; for he is "the vine-growers' god" (28).

The early Greeks create their myths like artists:

the mythical conception, projection at last, in drama or sculpture, is the *name*, the instrument of the identification, of the given matter,—of its unity in variety, its outline or definition in mystery; its *spiritual form*, to use again the expression I have borrowed from William Blake—form, with hands, and lips, and opened eyelids—spiritual, as conveying to us, in that, the soul of rain, or of a Greek river, or of swiftness, or purity. (37)

We are just a year before Pater's paean to form in "The School of Giorgione" (1877), and he is already occupied with the notion. He repeats "spiritual form" several times throughout the essay. We continue to see the effect perhaps that Swinburne's essay on Blake has on his artistic imagination. Blake uses the term "spiritual form" in the title of his painting, "The Spiritual Form of Nelson Guiding Leviathan" (c. 1805-9). The painting is a good example of a myth-maker's new rendering of a legend; after Admiral Lord Nelson was killed during the victory of the Battle of Trafalgar in the Napoleonic Wars, he might be seen as heroically subduing evil forces, as represented in the Old Testament's mythical sea creature, Leviathan. Blake recasts the legend of Nelson, combining mythological beast to fully ensconce him in the mythic realm, thus making Nelson a universal figure. In the painting he is stripped of clothing that would mark his position, age, or place, and he is surrounded by anonymous figures writhing in the grips of Leviathan. The figures, with their muscular yet contorted frames, recall some of Michelangelo's, especially those lurking in the shadows in the upper walls of

the Sistine Chapel, in order to induce further mythical associations; and the giant snake entwined around the figures recalls the famous statue of Laocoön. Nelson is standing safely in the middle of the struggling ring of life around him and sanctified with a halo. Blake's new vision of Nelson's story is not factually true, but emblematic of his myth, and extols him as Nelson's Column would over thirty years later. Around the same time Blake also painted "The Spiritual Form of Pitt Guiding Behemoth," manipulating similarly a contemporary figure with a Biblical beast from the Book of Job, in effort to apotheosize a national hero into someone universal. Pater does not enter into these details in Blake's paintings, but the process in which Blake works is present in his mythography. Pater's association of different ages and places universalizes his depictions, as seen above by his comparing the work of Praxiteles to Gothic work (150). The background becomes blurred by associating inconsistent dates and locations, while the individual figure is centralized in the foreground.

The method Pater describes in "Dionysus" is much like that he described Rossetti undertaking, also conjoining or associating several poets together. That he italicizes "name" and "spiritual form," in the off-set quotation above, joins the terms together, where logos may describe both. The word and the idea are inseparable; and the name as spiritual form here reminds us of combining the ideal figures together of Helen, Gretchen, and Mary in order to show the power of the name, or word, to convey meaning in mythic archetypes. Again this ideal is given hands like Plato's abstract ideas, taking on the very form of beloved persons. There is a sort of return transcendence in Pater's conception of the "spiritual form" that favours the artist. When it moves from the physical phenomena or data in its making into a stricter idea, it can then be manifest in the perfect form in which the artist conceives it. "Hence," as Pater says, "all through the history of Greek art, there is a struggle, a *Streben*, as the

Germans say, between the palpable and limited human form, and the floating essence it is to contain” (*Greek Studies* 34). The criticism of myth is interesting to Pater largely for revealing an artistic process.

Seeking Logos

There is a Christian pattern that can be reconciled with Platonism, as the Logos, became man in Jesus Christ. We do not want to fall into the same vice of contorting Pater’s writing to fit another’s idea, because he never explicitly makes this connection; yet we can follow his gestures towards it. Pater holds a more Christian-analogised Platonism, notably after *Marius* (1885), that grows stronger by *Plato and Platonism*, and this tendency may be seen in his mythography. At the close of *Greek Studies*, Pater writes in “The Age of Athletic Prizemen” (1894), discussing the work of the Greek sculptor who made visible the “eternal type,” and merited Revelation; and thus, “We are reminded of those strange prophetic words of the Wisdom, the *Logos*, by whom God made the world, in one of the *sapiential*, half-Platonic books of the Hebrew Scriptures:—‘I was by him, as one brought up with him; rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth. My delights were with the sons of men’” (298-99).

In Pater’s use of logos, therefore, Plato is at times involved with a blend of Christianity, as practised by Renaissance scholars such as Pico della Mirandola. Yet, as in the passage of “Athletic Prizemen,” the thought of Logos in the conception of Christ is not quite entertained. His notion of a single Logos is closer to Plato’s Divine Mind. Christ seems only mentioned by Pater to date Greek artwork. In terms of logos manifest, he seems to conceive of the idea in plurality, of *logoi*, as ideals and gods returning throughout the ages—“a recrudescence” (168), as he calls it in *Plato*—, which may be made concrete in artwork.

As Pater often blends art with religion, taking seriously the hymnal aspect of the Greek myths, he sees a similar blend in the statuary of Demeter and Persephone:

In this living picture, we find still lingering on, at the foot of the beautiful Greek marbles, that phase of religious temper which a cynical mind might think a truer link of its unity and permanence than any higher æsthetic instincts—a phase of it, which the art of sculpture, humanising and refining man's conceptions of the unseen, tended constantly to do away. For the higher side of the Greek religion, thus humanised and refined by art, and elevated by it to the sense of beauty, is here also. (*Greek Studies* 144)

Beauty and religion have an auxiliary effect on one another, bound up as they are in “refining man’s conceptions” of the seen.

The artistic journey of trying to attain logos proceeds like the philosophic dialectic of Socrates—the ascension to retain the logos, the essence, or type, that explains something’s being and gives a true account of it: its idea. And the journey to attain the logos might result in gathering the full story. In mythology a logos could be contained in the very name of a goddess, which carries all her attributes. It will fall to the responsibility of the poets in the second phase to ensure the goddess attains the attributes under her head in her story.

Significantly to Pater’s Platonism, the Idea for which one strives is called *eidos* in the *Phaedo* (99d-100a), which translates as “what is seen” or the form of something; the verb *eidein*, meaning both to see and to know. The abstract is visual to Plato, and thus Pater gives the ideas hands and feet. The word “idea” derives from these Greek words. Like logos, *eidos* might mean its abstract form, or its concrete form. Platonically, however, the ascent dialectically is towards the abstract, to that which names the physical and explains the phenomenon.

“The works of the highest Greek sculpture are indeed *intellectualised*,” he writes in “The Beginnings of Greek Sculpture” (1880), “if we may say so, to the utmost degree”:

the human figures which they present to us seem actually to conceive thoughts; in them, that profoundly reasonable spirit of design which is traceable in Greek art, continuously and increasingly, upwards from its simplest products, the oil-vessel or the urn, reaches its perfection. Yet, though the most abstract and intellectualised of sensuous objects, they are still sensuous and material, addressing themselves, in the first instance, not to the purely reflective faculty, but to the eye; and a complete criticism must have approached them from both sides—from the side of the intelligence indeed, towards which they rank as great thoughts come down into the stone. (190)

“Thoughts come down into stone,” describes the process of manifestation, which is a Platonic process because the physical is explained by the ideas. The Platonic model of artwork also provides motivation for reaching the Ideas that other metaphysical models do not. Because the ideals take the shape of persons, love may pass between seeker and sought, and the ideal may inspire enthusiasm. As Pater shows in “Winckelmann,” and in *Greek Studies*, the artists are empowered by these gods. Thus of Dionysus, Pater writes:

he inspires; he explains the phenomena of enthusiasm, as distinguished by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, the secrets of possession by a higher and more energetic spirit than one's own, the gift of self-revelation, of passing out of oneself through words, tones, gestures. A winged Dionysus, venerated at Amyclæ, was perhaps meant to represent him thus, as the god of enthusiasm, of the rising up on those spiritual wings, of which also we hear something in the *Phaedrus* of Plato. (18)

Enthusiasm may be found throughout *Greek Studies*: it signifies lifting one out of one's self, in transcendence, in this instance through words or inarticulate tones and gestures, with the music of the reed, as Apollo inspires with music. For music, too, is an intelligible principle in the universe for Plato, one half of his education which lifts one up to the eternal law, according to which the soul seeks harmony, under the influence of Pythagoras in Pater's *Plato* (52). For Plato, music derives from the realm of the intelligible among the Ideas, a notion we shall explain more thoroughly in our final chapter.

Many critics have indicated Pater's three-phased mythology is influenced by John Ruskin's account of Greek myth in *The Queen of the Air*. Ruskin's model emphasises the vertical ascendance of myth's growth, for it is described as a root with two branches. The root, expectedly, is the physical world, "sun, or sky, or cloud, or sea"; the phenomenal realm is not to be seen merely as an obstacle to transcend, it provides the material for the spiritual. In the next stage, Ruskin blends the material and the spiritual in the person: "then the personal incarnation of that," a deity, "with whom you may walk hand in hand, as a child with its brother or sister; and lastly the moral significance of the image, which is in all the great myths eternally and beneficently true" (13). Finally, the myth seems to solidify into the eternal goodness of a Christianized, Platonic form, having absorbed the physical into an image, or *eidos*.

Pater's three-step mythology refines itself numerically in its creative progression, the way Plato's ontology progresses from the many to the one. Beginning with a myth's inception, it seems ubiquitous, passing from "mouth to mouth," changing from "place to place," formlessly, just "primitive impressions of the phenomena of the natural world" (*Greek Studies* 91). Anyone may be involved: in fact, it takes "the whole consciousness of an age." "The myth grew up gradually," writes Pater, "and at many distant places, in many minds, independent of each other, but dealing in a common temper with certain elements and aspects of the natural world, as one here, and another there, seemed to catch in that incident or detail which flashed more incisively than others on the inward eye, some influence, or feature, or characteristic of the great mother" (101). The use of "flashed" reminds us that he speaks of a visionary power given to some, as we saw with Blake. Yet the visionary power seems to be receptive, rather than active, and some will catch more of the

vision than others. One seems unable to invent myth from nothing. The myth exists to be received, an entity to be recognised, by its “characteristic” marks that differentiate it from others. Character, indeed, becomes increasingly important on myth’s narrative.

The second stage is that which Pater privileges with the literary, for it is when the poets, who are more interpretively sensitive in the eye than others, take over the myth. This is the stage that the Platonic philosophy becomes most significant perhaps, for Pater declares the “philosophy is a systematised form of that sort of poetry,” invoking Shelley and Wordsworth, which “makes to us of a sympathy between the ways and aspects of outward nature and the moods of men” (96-97). Myth passes from “the picturesque superstitions of the many” to “the finer intuitions of the few” (81). In writing of myth in “Winckelmann,” Pater states with less caution, “Religious progress, like all purely spiritual progress is confined to a few” (*Renaissance* 202). The paucity of poets causes some myths to lie fallow. “In that world of floating fancies there was a struggle for life; there were myths which never emerged from that first stage of popular conception, or were absorbed by stronger competitors, because, as some true heroes have done, they lacked the sacred poet or prophet, and were never remodelled by literature” (*Greek Studies* 113). “Poet or prophet” as interchangeable terms is revealing for grasping the importance of the work into which Pater enlists them as visionaries, and the subject’s spiritual blend of religion and beauty. It is due to the Platonic poets that the Eleusinian mysteries are known to us, writes Pater; for if it were left to the “antiquarians, dealing, letter by letter, with what is recorded of them,” few details of the myths would have found their way to the student of mythology. If it were left to material evidence, or those who deal largely with linguistics, like Max Müller, myth would not be preserved, thinks Pater. It requires those who know how to turn their vision into spiritual form for myths to live. The

poets entered upon the mysteries of Demeter's cult. "And who, everywhere," asks Pater, "has not felt the mystical influence of that prolonged silence, the *mystic silence*, from which the very word 'mystery' has its origin?"

Something also there undoubtedly was, which coarser minds might misunderstand. On one day, the initiated went in procession to the sea-coast, where they underwent a purification by bathing in the sea. On the fifth night there was the torchlight procession; and, by a touch of real life in him, we gather from the first page of Plato's *Republic* that such processions were popular spectacles, having a social interest, so that people made much of attending them. (123)

Here Plato himself acts as the poetic purveyor of mystery for those who know how to read him, and to recognize the "real life" in him. By acknowledging this esoteric aspect of the mysteries, Pater disagrees with Grote, who denies it (582).

Ethical Art

The mysteries, however, take us into the third phase, where religion is turned into practice. The third, "ethical" phase, as Pater terms it, further refines the mythic process by making its ideal one, whole, unified character. Introducing these essays, Shadwell significantly states that Pater is trying to depict the "essence" of the "Greek character" (2). In an early review of *Greek Studies*, classical scholar F. G. Kenyon, noted the "perfect harmony" in the volume, despite its being a posthumous collection of essays written over several years. Of the nine essays he counts, five are concerned with mythology and four with sculpture. Although the two subjects seem to fall rather apart, Pater's handling of them brought them into accord (qtd. in Seiler 328). Underlying Kenyon's statement is Pater's vision that the two art forms are created in the same manner and depend on each other. The way myth develops, statuary does similarly; actually, statuary grows out of myth. In myth's ethical stage, the two art forms are most alike, just as at this third stage we can say that "myth" and "logos" are least distinguishable. Myth develops through the gathering together by poets in order

to form a story or account, a logos in itself, and in statuary the idea is manifested into material: the logos becomes manifest. The two arts travel initially in the same direction, working upwards Platonically; but statuary is circular in that it returns to the earth again in its manifestation. Myth, of course, returns to the earth, too, when told or written. Yet even when a logos is manifest into art, its ideal also still exists, eternal-like, while an instance of it is brought before our eyes. In a way, a mythic god or goddess will always remain immaterial, like archetypes, on the model of Plato's forms, facilitating her reappearance to different persons in different ages.

In *Greek Studies*, Pater calls statuary ethical as well as myth. Pater entwines the art forms, grafting sculpture out of myth, declaring that "as the Homeric hymn is the central expression of its literary or poetical phase, so the marble remains, of which I shall have to speak by and bye, are the central extant illustration of what I have called its ethical phase" (93). The myth in stone seems the myth's culmination, or consummation. Yet this was already becoming clear to the reader when Pater defines this third stage, wherein "the persons and the incidents of the poetical narrative are realised as abstract symbols, because intensely characteristic examples, of moral or spiritual conditions" (92). Within the myth, we can foresee that the story may crystallize on its main character, the "poetical narrative" realized in "abstract symbols." Hence the descriptive "intensely characteristic," as in extremely concentrated, an essence, of the myth's moral or spiritual conditions, made visible through its narrative of a single character.

Myth shows the moral nature of the character to a select few, relates Pater: "Dionysus, like Persephone . . . has also a peculiar message for a certain number of refined minds, seeking, in the later days of Greek religion, such modification of the old legend as may minister to ethical culture, to the perfecting of the moral nature"

(49). It would seem that the poets' modification of the old legends will enable a moral nature. These myths will provide model narratives for how to live. "Perfecting" also points to something eventually accomplished or complete. The story has been fulfilled, and may now be understood as whole, and typified by a character. Sometimes more than one character may typify, as in the case of Demeter and Persephone, but importantly a statue of either one may symbolize the moral or ethical natures of both women in association, as determined by their story. The typification of character for the story cannot be diminished by being called a synecdoche, because the character is not merely a part representing the whole; the character is the whole herself, whose story could not possibly exist without her; and whose very sight in stone or the mention of her name includes her story.

Linda Dowling, in "Walter Pater and Archeology" (1988), has tried to reduce the moral nature from Pater's third phase of mythology, because he uses the term "ethical" in his description of statuary. Finding that *ethos* may be partly defined as "character," she takes this to signal that Pater uses the term "ethical" in an aesthetic rather than in a moral capacity (218). She sees Pater following Aristotle whom she witnessed meaning "character" by the term for "ethical" when discussing statuary. "In short," she writes, "Pater's 'ethical' pertains to right conduct only insofar as that conduct is aesthetic – as it impresses the sense as 'intensely characteristic'" (219). But it seems far more likely that Pater means ethical in the more common Aristotelian sense, from *ethos*, as it appears in his influential works the *Ethics*, and especially the *Poetics*. In "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone," Pater writes, "in proportion as the literary or aesthetic activity completes the picture or the poem, the ethical interest makes itself felt" (92). Dowling is correct when she observes a close relationship between the terms, for out of the aesthetic grows the ethical, as logos grows out of

myth. When Aristotle uses the Greek word for “ethical” he means what one does, not right conduct. One could be ethical and vice-ridden; as moral derives from one’s custom, good or bad, rather than good custom. As we learn in his *Poetics*, literary character is determined by one’s actions; the same standard applies in Aristotle’s *Ethics*: our character is determined by our actions: a good person makes good actions. It is rather simple, but what his *Nicomachean Ethics* teaches is that if one wants to be a good person, to be temperate, say, he or she ought to be temperate: we become temperate by acting temperately. If Dowling means by aesthetics the triumph over ethics, the appreciation of beauty in artwork at the sacrifice of good action, she is mistaken. For Pater—and this is the key to his ethics—good action is beautiful. The work will become ethical when it is complete, or perfect, when it can be appreciated for its proportion. Following the passage where Pater speaks of the complete aesthetic activity making the ethical interest felt, it becomes clearer that Pater is discussing the mythopoeic method. Demeter’s story is said to lend itself “to the elevation and correction of the sentiments of sorrow and awe, by the presentment of the senses and the imagination of an ideal expression of them. Demeter cannot but seem the type of divine grief” (93). Demeter’s story, therefore, has reached the ethical stage of myth.

Edward Thomas, an early biographer of Pater, tells the story that Pater was once asked by an undergraduate after two terms of Aristotle’s *Ethics*: “Why should we be good?” To which Pater responded, “Because it is so beautiful” (31). When Pater uses the word ethics in his unpublished manuscript “Plato’s Ethics,” for example, or in discussing the ethical import of Plato’s teaching in *Plato and Platonism*, it might be related to aesthetics as the appreciation of beauty; but he never intends for aesthetics to deplete the importance of good action in ethics.

Character is the mark by which we know a person's narrative; it is also the result of that narrative in Platonic-Aristotelian ethics. In Pater's *Greek Studies* the statue of Demeter reveals her character to the extent that we recognise her narrative, through association, in her very features; her beauty is not severed from her motherly devotion to Persephone. If we look to Pater's most successful effort towards a long narrative, in *Marius*, we find that the novel, so concerned with beauty, leads towards a refined moral act in Marius' character, to the climax, where Marius sacrifices himself to save the life of his Christian friend Cornelius, simultaneously sustaining the hope of Cornelius' future wife, Cecilia. The beauty of the act, and Pater's description of it, has its value almost entirely in ethical terms, associated with knowledge of the narrative. And only at the book's close, when the narrative is perfect, the artwork becomes ethical.

Apollo

Although Pater's attention upon Apollo becomes more intense in his later years, he is already showing interest for the god in "Dionysus." The process of refinement from the many and material to the fewer and less material in the myth, to finally the concentrated manifestation of materials, where the story may stand alone for one who looks upon the character in statue, is not an easy one. The artist is described as ascending under a Dorian influence of music, which accords one's soul to the logos:

there was that limiting, controlling tendency, identified with the Dorian influence in the history of the Greek mind, the spirit of a severe and wholly self-conscious intelligence; bent on impressing everywhere, in the products of the imagination, the definite, perfectly conceivable human form, as the only worthy subject of art; less in sympathy with the mystical genealogies of Hesiod, than with the heroes of Homer, ending in the entirely humanised religion of Apollo, the clearly understood humanity of the old Greek warriors in the marbles of Ægina. (34-35)

The heroes of Homer humanize the art work, as the characteristic depictions in the marbles of Aegina portray the knowledge of humanity. The natural argument being made here, impossible to separate in Platonism, is the importance of art to life. Pater's growing appreciation for Apollo differentiates him from those nineteenth-century artists and critics whom Margot K. Louis, in *Persephone Rises, 1860-1927* (2009), perceives as favouring the Chthonic mythic deities over the Olympians, by way of losing sympathy with dogmatic Christianity. Pater is deeply concerned with ritual, as found in the Eleusinian mysteries, but Apollo, through music and art is able to inspire the highest religious devotion. Furthermore, Pater never makes this distinction; and it is a complex one to make considering the subjects he chooses. Dionysus, for example, despite his metamorphic nature resides at Mount Olympus, and Demeter, though Chthonic, is also included in the pantheon among the twelve. Pater's myth studies strive to show the continuity between earth and sky, and the traceable development between the physical and abstract in religious life.

Robert Keefe has argued, in "Walter Pater's Two Apollos," that the Victorian Apollo could be seen as very Christian, as an analogue even to Jesus (160). While we would deny such a strong analogy, we accept, in keeping with what we have said already, that Pater was influenced by the Christian model of the Logos manifest, but in a more subdued manifestation of pagan gods. Many critics have written about the importance of Apollo to critics and artists in the nineteenth century, as the god of the muses, the figure of light and knowledge. *The Sun is God* (1989), a collection of essays edited by J. B. Bullen, looks in part at this conflation of paganism and Christianity in the reverence for Apollo. Much of the focus on Apollo is said to be inspired by Max Müller's influential theory of solarism, which purports that many myths were created in a primitive attempt to explain metaphorically the reverence for

the sun and its seasonal and daily phenomena. Dinah Birch discusses Apollo's strong influence on Ruskin, while Thais E. Morgan examines aspects of Swinburne's complicated relationship to the Olympian. Pater may easily accompany Ruskin and Swinburne in this regard, and might even be said to be more positive towards Apollo. One of the strong influences that Birch finds upon Ruskin is another Müller, Carl Otfried (115), whose *The History and Antiquities of the Doric Race*, translated into English in 1830, Pater cites as a source for his chapter on the Lacedaemonians in *Plato*. C. O. Müller especially traces the reverence of Apollo at the centre of the Spartans' religion. For his association with the Dorians, Pater emphasises Apollo's influence as similar to the general Dorian qualities: discipline, sanity, controlled music, and physical beauty born out of *gymnasia*. Janice and Robert Keefe, in *Walter Pater and the Gods of Disorder* (1988), have strongly declared that "Pater's turn in the 1880s toward the moral pattern of religion he had abandoned took the form of an artistic allegiance to Apollo" (109).

A reverence for Apollo also fits perfectly into Plato's sun analogy as knowledge and the Good in Book VI of *The Republic*. The metaphor of the sun simply equates knowledge with vision, so that which is light we know and that which is dark we do not (508c). Comparing this to the soul, the light that makes objects visible, and therefore able to be known, is the Good, like the sun; causing some to argue Plato was monotheistic. We may say the association of light to goodness and knowledge, and dark to evil and the unknown, is innate in our language; but Pater emphasises the Platonic metaphor in his writing. The Forms themselves are often described as bright light (ἀύγη), even sun-like, by Plato, up to which the soul aspires (*Phaedrus* 250c). We may recall that the benefit of the diaphanous soul is so that light may shine right through it, or Pater's description of Hellenism in "Winckelmann" as a

“an intellectual light” and being “pre-eminent for light” (*Renaissance* 190). In *Marius* and throughout his work light represents the intellect, often associated with the Greeks. And he makes the connection explicit in *Greek Studies*, calling Apollo, “‘spiritual form’ of inward or intellectual light” (254). Light is a suitable metaphor for knowledge in part because we can recognize it, measure our distance from it, without its being articulate in language, and it illuminates the objects around us. After explaining the importance of general knowledge in *Plato* in order to appreciate particular objects, in his example, a seashell, he exclaims: “What broad-cast light he enjoys!—that scholar” (159).

Man as Art

In “The Marbles of Aegina” (1880), the Dorian tendency represents the Platonic education because its forces are both music and gymnastics. Dorian is associated with the religion of Apollo, who is the musical god. “In relation to music, to art, to all those matters over which the Muses preside,” writes Pater:

Apollo, as distinct from Hermes, seems to be the representative and patron of what I may call *reasonable* music, of a great intelligence in a work of art, of beauty attained through the conscious realisation of ideas. They were the cities of the Dorian affinity which early brought to perfection that most characteristic of Greek institutions, the sacred dance, with the whole gymnastic system which was its natural accompaniment. And it was the familiar spectacle of that living sculpture which developed, perhaps, beyond everything else in the Greek mind, at its best, as sense of the beauty and significance of the human form. (255)

“Human form” indicates his analogy between art and man, and we see also gymnastic related to music; Pater even earlier uses the word *ascésis*, as structural discipline upon the work (254). The use of the term gymnastic supplies further evidence that Pater is employing the Platonic education as a model of artwork: “It was the Dorian cities, Plato tells us, which first shook off the false Asiatic shame, and stripped off their clothing for purposes of exercise and training in the *gymnasium*; and it was part of the

Dorian or European influence to assert the value in art of the unveiled and healthy human form” (262). The human form promises an ethical fulfilment of art.

The Dorian as opposed to the Ionian has all the favoured qualities. It is European rather than Asiatic, Centripetal rather than Centrifugal. As the symbol of music Apollo takes the highest place mythologically, passing beyond even Demeter and Dionysus:

For the development of this or that mythological conception, from its root in fact or law of the physical world, is very various in its course. Thus, Demeter, the spirit of life in grass,—and Dionysus, the “spiritual form” of life in the green sap,—remain, to the end of men's thoughts and fancies about them, almost wholly physical. But Apollo, the “spiritual form” of sunbeams, early becomes (the merely physical element in his constitution being almost wholly suppressed) exclusively ethical,—the “spiritual form” of inward or intellectual light, in all its manifestations. He represents all those specially European ideas, of a reasonable, personal freedom, as understood in Greece; of a reasonable polity; of the sanity of soul and body, through the cure of disease and of the sense of sin; of the perfecting of both by reasonable exercise or *ascêsis*; his religion is a sort of embodied equity, its aim the realisation of fair reason and just consideration of the truth of things everywhere. (254)

Pater is speaking of the popular conception of these figures here. Demeter and Dionysus have a “spiritual form” but their physical side is emphasized; Apollo has a physical side, for there must be something to suppress “almost wholly” (but not quite). Apollo becomes “exclusively ethical” because he exists largely in the third phase of myth. His physical beginning is not effaced, however: all stages of the myth remain in the logos. Pater often describes Apollo in material human form.

It really is difficult to imagine Pater being sympathetic to the centrifugal, to cunningness, even Odyssean cunningness, over Marian calm. Although we could imagine his condoning a “myriad-mindedness,” as we saw in some of the Renaissance scholars, that movement unifies rather than dissipates. Why he sets up these antinomies seems rather to indicate his habit to think of progress dialectically and to

dramatize the choice, than to reveal a true division of mind. He favours the Dorian and centripetal without writing in a pedantic way. Without saying so explicitly in *Greek Studies*, he seems to decide with Plato apologetically:

This exaggerated ideal of Plato's is, however, only the exaggeration of that salutary European tendency, which, finding human mind the most absolutely real and precious thing in the world, enforces everywhere the impress of its sanity, its profound reflexions upon things as they really are, its sense of proportion. It is the centripetal tendency, which links individuals to each other, states to states, one period of organic growth to another, under the reign of a composed, rational, self-conscious order, in the universal light of the understanding. (253)

In 1880, Pater is engaged with themes he will revisit in his published lectures on Plato over a decade later. The sculptor would be fortunate to be guided by the Dorian temper, whose work was intended to take myth to the ethical stage. What is depicted here is also the struggle for logos, the conscious order, but we see in Pater that logos contains myth, the unconscious order. By the Dorian tendency nothing is left behind.

When he first began to write explicitly about myth, around 1875, in the lecture on "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone" he delivered in Birmingham, Pater was attentive to Plato's puritanical or pious censure of the changeful when it came to divinities. "Plato," he says,

in laying down the rules by which the poets are to be guided in speaking divine things to the citizens of the ideal republic, forbids all those episodes of mythology which represent the gods as assuming various forms, and visiting the earth in disguise. Below the express reasons which he assigns for this rule, we may perhaps detect that instinctive antagonism to the old Heraclitean philosophy of perpetual change, which forces him, in his theory of morals and the state, of poetry and music, of dress and manners even, and of style in the very vessels and furniture of daily life, on an austere simplicity, the older Dorian or Egyptian type of a rigid, eternal immobility. The disintegrating, centrifugal influence, which had penetrated, as he thought, political and social existence, making men too myriad-minded, had laid hold on the life of the gods also, and, even in their calm sphere, one could hardly identify a single divine person as himself, and not another. There must, then, be no doubling, no disguises, no stories of transformation. (118-119)

Pater, then, seems to distance himself from Plato, by saying, “The modern reader, however, will hardly acquiesce in this ‘improvement’ of Greek mythology.” And yet Pater’s mythology is a continual clarifying of evidence, of traces followed, and stories gathered. It is an act of recognizing who Demeter is, who Dionysius and Persephone are, and setting them before the reader so we may know them better, in their stories. They change, but he will explain to us just the nature of these changes, that we may better recognize them, learn how to recognise them. He works out of the myth towards the logos himself, by the same process he sees in myth’s grand movement, like the poets. But perhaps he passes beyond the poets, for he writes with more rational design, while containing myth, in well-proportioned and beautiful prose, which will both philosophically explain and artfully exemplify his subject.

When we look at the closer structure of Pater’s mythology, he seems very much to acquiesce to Plato’s improvement of myth. Pater’s mythical dialectic is complete when the myth becomes effectively hardened permanently into stone: perfect. A myth for him achieves its final ethical stage when the story of the character is so complete that the very image of the figure will religiously convey his or her moral actions. Demeter, Dionysus, Apollo, though they may change in their earlier primitive oral forms, are seeking stability by the time an artist brings them into manifestation. And, secondly, the refining tendency of Pater’s mythical structure, ensures that only a select, hieratic few are involved in the shaping of myths. The practice of shaping myth is too important to be opened up for the practice of all citizens, though all will be educated by them—perhaps myth is the educational tool that allows the greatest influence to artists. The sculptor must know mythic story better than others, as the poets came to tell it better than the rest. The mysterious

nature of these myths makes their stories that much more sacred, for the poets who tell them must also be initiated as into a religion:

It is the finer, mystical sentiment of the few, detached from the coarser and more material religion of the many, and accompanying it, through the course of its history, as its ethereal, less palpable, life-giving soul, and, as always happens, seeking the quiet, and not too anxious to make itself felt by others. With some unfixd, though real, place in the general scheme of Greek religion, this phase of the worship of Dionysus had its special development in the Orphic literature and mysteries. (*Greek Studies* 50)

Pater, therefore, often uses the word “hieratic” in *Greek Studies*, in order to depict this priestly class that allows the myth to pass through its successive stages and be seen in its final iconic form in stone.

Conclusion

Out of the myth grows the logos in Pater’s Platonic scheme. Although the logos may be the myth’s culmination, myth does not lose importance in the process of its growth. The kind of history that interests Pater in *The Renaissance* is the separate story of an individual, where a narrative is raised in importance above the forming conditions of his time and place; there he cares mostly for artistic genius. In the mythography of *Greek Studies*, his focus broadens to the greater communal effort towards the creation of artwork; to important artwork, the kind that raises reverence in the minds of its witnesses, and outlives its creators. In his mythology, the relationship of artists to artists across ages gains greater significance also, as myth spans and therefore gathers together generations that are centuries apart. There is high value placed upon interpreters and poets that perpetuate myth. And Pater fulfils both these roles here, for he is critic and artist, by gathering their data and reforming again the characters of these myths for the Greek student. These roles are for the select few, however, as Pater repeatedly shows, and by fulfilling them he implicitly argues that he is one of the initiated. Whereas the narratives were personal and much shorter in *The*

Renaissance, those in *Greek Studies* unfold over a longer period, but more directly touch far greater people; indeed, as Pater reveals, those of the ancient Greeks are still with us today. But then the subjects of the art themselves are the focus: this is where the greatest shift occurs, from emphasis on the artist to artwork. Pater engages with the most powerful of artistic creations with myth, those that even inspire religious worship. He is both learning and teaching how the most enduring art is created. He seems to be working out a place for himself in a society that needs storytellers. Ultimately, he defends the ideas behind these artworks, and their right to be taken seriously as subjects of true history. As a critic he has invested artwork with the same historical energy as the more conventional subjects of scientific history, those that may be called “facts.” But logos, the knowledge towards which historians traditionally aspire, may also be found in stories. These myths are recycled over and again, in different art forms, attesting to the value of their old ontological status: they may even be truer for living in successive ages. The stories are certainly closer to us, Pater argues, and no less real.

Chapter Four

Form and Matter in the Aesthetic Education of *Marius the Epicurean*

It might surprise those who have not read *Marius the Epicurean* that Marius is not an Epicurean. Marius passes through a type of Epicureanism on his philosophic journey, yet he does not stay, growing dissatisfied with it and ostensibly becoming Christian. Why is the definition of Marius incorrect, making the title of the novel a plain contradiction? Pater himself said in a letter that he meant the novel to be “anti-Epicurean” (Evans 58), which forces readers to be ever correcting the contradiction.

Since his “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance* the Oxford don had been trying to mitigate the impression that he was against Christianity. Not being one for conflict, Pater’s characteristic response was silence. He withdrew the “Conclusion” in the second edition (1877), only to return a slightly altered version in the third (1888), after the appearance of *Marius*. The novel was Pater’s apology against the common notion of Epicureanism he had been accused of, which was rather a sort of hedonism, as he complained. Although there are twelve years between the publications of the “Conclusion” and *Marius* (seventeen if we consider its first form appearing anonymously in the *Westminster Review* as “Poems by William Morris” in 1868), the two works are inextricable. On returning the “Conclusion” he declares in a footnote, “I have dealt more fully in *Marius the Epicurean* with the thoughts suggested by it” (233). Pater’s word “suggested,” meaning literally what is carried beneath, well explains the relationship between his words there and his idea. The ideas in the “Conclusion” are brought to fulfilment in the novel, where they have more time and space to become evident to the reader. To show Pater’s ideal, which is intellectual growth attaining towards perfection, required a longer narrative.

Marius the Epicurean clarifies Pater's thought on the Heraclitean flux, which in the "Conclusion," because it seems unresolved, causes readers disquietude. The epigraph to the "Conclusion" is a saying of Heraclitus': "Λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει": "somewhere Heraclitus says that everything flows and nothing remains." In fact this quotation is taken from Plato's *Cratylus* (402a), a dialogue that deals with the nature of language. In the dialogue, the doctrine of Heraclitus is proposed by the sophist Cratylus, a believer in the flux, who says that words either are the thing itself or nothing; he does not admit of degrees of imitation. A second interlocutor Hermogenes believes names are mere convention and have no true relation to things outside of what we determine. Socrates takes the middle view by arguing that words are like paint that, changeful in themselves, nevertheless depict the true essence of things. The *Cratylus* is one of the dialogues in which Plato posits his Ideas or Forms. In order to avoid the Sophists' view of our lack of hold over the world through language, which would lead to anarchy in many ways, especially knowledge, Plato's Socrates indicates that, indeed, words correspond to the form of what they are, which is their essence. General knowledge of a thing's form allows us to recognize its particular. Thus, the words of Heraclitus, in the epigraph of the "Conclusion," motivate Socrates to posit the Forms as an informing principle over matter in order to stabilize language, and therefore knowledge. Pater uses the quotation likewise, vivifying the consequences of the flux upon us:

Like the elements of which we are composed, the action of these forces extends beyond us: it rusts iron and ripens corn. Far out on every side of us those elements are broadcast, driven in many currents; and birth and gesture and death and the springing of violets from the grave are but a few out of ten thousand resultant combinations. That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours, under which we group them—a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it. This at least of flamelike our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways. (*Renaissance* 234)

Many critics cite this passage as proof of Pater's materialist philosophy in the tradition of Epicurus and Lucretius. Angela Leighton, for example, in *On Form* (2007), calls the "Conclusion" "one long hymn to matter" (79). She believes "Pater sets form and matter in an extended, syntactically wrestling combat which is not resolved into a conclusion" (84). In other words, matter wins this wrestling match, because that which is resolved has form, while that which is unresolved, literally "untied," is free to roam without closed boundaries. Leighton declares that for Pater the "Heraclitean flux is not only a congenial theory of life; it is a practised style" (90).

Not all critics, however, interpret the "Conclusion" to mean that Pater held a materialistic philosophy. Carolyn Williams, for example, believes that he was actually using all of his rhetorical might to argue the opposite in the "Conclusion" (*Transfigured* 12). Yet it is essential that Pater seems less partial in the choice he presents to his reader. Using the Socratic method his argument is heuristic in the sense that we must willingly take the steps to arrive to a solution on our own.

Form and Matter to Pater

DeLaura, who argues Pater shares the intellectual inheritance of John Henry Newman and Matthew Arnold, writes: "Pater's prolonged emphasis on the fusion of form and matter in art, which might be called the aesthetic analogue of his humanistic attempt to cancel any opposition between morality and the world of intellectual and aesthetic perception, is one of the unifying themes of his whole career" (331). One of Pater's last, and most thorough, statements on the terms comes in *Plato and Platonism*:

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that in Plato, in spite of his wonderful savour of literary freshness, there is nothing absolutely new: or rather, as in many other very original products of human genius, the seemingly new is old also, a palimpsest, a tapestry of which the actual threads have served before, or like the animal frame itself, every

particle of which has already lived and died many times over. Nothing but the life-giving principle of cohesion is new; the new perspective, the resultant complexion, the expressiveness which familiar thoughts attain by novel juxtaposition. In other words, the *form* is new. But then, in the creation of philosophical literature, as in all other products of art, *form*, in the full signification of that word, is everything, and the mere matter is nothing. (*Plato* 8)

Form is the life-giving principle; and Pater's use of "palimpsest" corresponds with "obliteration" used in "The School of Giorgione." Pater adheres very closely to the etymological meaning of words, and to obliterate something means originally to overwrite something, not to destroy it. But in "The School of Giorgione," as in *Plato and Platonism*, form cannot really be everything while the matter is nothing, for that would cause a lapse into Sophistry.

It is therefore more correct to say, in order to understand how Pater conceives the relationship between form and matter, that the two should be indistinguishable the form should so penetrate the matter. He encourages their union in art from the first instance he discusses the terms together in "The School of Giorgione," where he writes that "*All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music*":

For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it. That the mere matter of a poem, for instance, namely, its given incidents or situation—that the mere matter of a picture, the actual circumstances of an event, the actual topography of a landscape—should be nothing without the form, the spirit, of the handling, that this form, this mode of handling, should become an end in itself, should penetrate every part of the matter: this is what all art constantly strives after, and achieves in different degrees. (*Renaissance* 135)

The "musical law" for Pater is not form over matter, but form through matter. He later describes the process in *Plato* as "making the invisible show through" (69). When form and matter are mentally inseparable we have a work of art that achieves a greater state of being, for it now seems autonomous—able to exist for itself, by itself—in the mind of a viewer. In a rare moment of bluntness for Pater, in the "Postscript" to

Appreciations, he says simply that one must guard against “the stupidity which is dead to the substance, and the vulgarity which is dead to the form” (261).

Although Pater’s understanding of form and matter does not alter dramatically in his works throughout his writing career, which spans roughly from 1866 to 1894, there is a remarkable change in 1877, when he publishes “The School of Giorgione.” Up until this point he shares the basic understanding of form and matter that fits into his understanding of Platonism, but he does not use the terms together to argue his point. The discussion of music encourages him. Yet his working previously within its philosophical framework, without using the actual terms, separates him from some of his literary contemporaries and shows his affiliation to Platonism. In *The Renaissance*, for instance, he says of da Vinci: “No one ever ruled over the mere *subject* in hand more entirely than Leonardo, or bent it more dexterously to purely artistic ends” (119); and of Botticelli that he is of the “type” that “usurps the data before it as the exponent of ideas, moods, visions of its own; in this interest it plays fast and loose with those data, rejecting some and isolating others, and always combining them anew” (53-54). This manner of handling one’s subject or material represents what Pater identifies as form.

Generating Form and Matter in *Marius the Epicurean*

One of the most remarkable things about *Marius* is that its plot is not presented in a traditional manner. Many critics deride the want of traditional dramatic action in the novel, as if Pater were incompetent in writing fiction.²⁸ But *Marius* is intentionally a novel of observation. Marius is ever on the search for what is “real,” in

²⁸ In his introduction, to the issue of the journal *English Literature in Transition: 1880-1920*, devoted to the novel, “Essays in Marius” (1984), Ian Fletcher states this want of action to be the general critical sentiment. Bernard Richards, for example, begins his essay: “*Marius the Epicurean* is a disaster. It is no good as a novel, and obviously unsatisfactory as a piece of historical analysis. It might serve as an indicator of Pater’s mental processes, but we require more of major literature than that” (II 90).

the manner the “Conclusion” urges its readers. Many critics from the beginning of the novel’s reception have found biographical elements in it,²⁹ but perhaps the most biographical element is this lack of dramatic action in favour of contemplative observation. It is difficult to imagine Pater acting in another fashion. Thus other fictional representations of him, such as W. H. Mallock’s *The New Republic* (1878) or more recently Tom Stoppard’s *The Invention of Love* (1997), render Pater ridiculous. What makes Pater most modern is that his character is not revealed in the traditional Aristotelian manner of action, but in thought. In this sense his characters resemble Aristotle’s ideal philosopher, rather than a dramatic character. It seems improbable for him to exist in a mechanical third-person narrative at all, where someone must try to learn his nature from outside. Pater’s self is like the imperturbable “narrow chamber of the mind.” Here lies also part of the problem of Pater’s biographies: they must always return to his own writing, which wrests them away from biographers to become his own autobiography. In *Self Impression* (2010), Max Saunders finds the biographical nature of Pater’s writing the result of his concern with the expression of personality (43).

Marius takes the very form Pater’s biography requires. It is a remarkable testament to the power of Pater’s form that, despite the obvious fictional details, the great remove of time and place, the different material details from Pater’s own life, critics still see the novel as biographical. *Marius* is biographical, in form. Although the matter is much different from his own life, the importance of the matter, rising up

²⁹ William Sharp, in *Papers Critical and Reminiscent* (1912), declares “There are a few more autobiographical writers” (204). Some other works of criticism that see *Marius* as autobiographical are: Monsman’s *Walter Pater and the Art of Autobiography* (1980) (10), J. Hillis Miller’s “Walter Pater: A Partial Portrait” (1979) (77), Carolyn Williams’s *Transfigured World* (189), Laurel Brake’s *Walter Pater* (44), R. V. Osbourn’s *Discovering Walter Pater* (2005) (45), and Max Saunders’s *Self Impression: Life-writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (2010) (35).

to elevate its form, and the manner in which it is organized so exclusively around a single character, makes Pater's novel seem like biography.

Marius is often called an imaginative portrait after the manner of some of Pater's shorter fiction. In a letter to Macmillan Publishers he explains that when he calls it a portrait, he means "readers, as they might do on seeing a portrait, to begin speculating—what came of him?" (Evans 30). Pater's first imaginary portrait, "The Child in the House"—of which he wrote on a small scrap of paper in the Harvard manuscripts: "Child in the House: voilà, the germinating, original, source, specimen, of all my imaginative work"—appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1878.³⁰ That it was originally entitled "The House and the Child" when it was first sent to publishers (Evans 29), emphasizes the importance of the environment on the child, for the child, as receiver of sensations, comes after the house as a store of all its memorable qualities. Some critics believe that a second imaginary portrait was planned to follow that same year, entitled "An English Poet," but it was never completed and only published posthumously in 1931 (Wright xvi). After the publication of *Marius*, Pater eventually published *Imaginary Portraits* as a collection in 1887, all four of which appeared in *Macmillan's Magazine* shortly after *Marius*; but neither of his original portraits were included. If "An English Poet" was begun in 1878, it follows that Pater broke off this creation in order to begin *Marius*.

What about these early portraits had Pater found somehow deficient and yet simultaneously inspired him to write a much longer one in the form of a novel? As Pater himself said: an imaginary portrait "is meant to be complete in itself," though there could be "some real kind of sequence in them" (Evans 30). Having more than sequence in common, however, these early portraits nearly depend upon each other.

³⁰ The story is later collected into *Miscellaneous Studies* (1895), from which volume we will cite.

And their form, a near first-hand, intimate account of an aesthetic education, differs from other imaginary portraits. Gerald Monsman indicates that the two portraits and the novel are *Künstlerromans* (*Art of Biography* 10); and he declares that if “we suppose ‘The Child in the House’ to describe the initial awareness by the soul of itself and its identity with the external world, then ‘An English Poet’ deals with the second major stage in the development of the creative personality, namely, the awakening of the ‘imaginative reason,’ of artistic vision, in the expanding soul” (*Pater’s Portraits* 52). “An English Poet” grows out of “The Child in the House.” It seems Pater had a longer narrative to unfold, one that does not so quickly arc, and conclude, but sustains a steady progress and finds climax at its end.

“The Child in the House” explores the influence of sensation. The plot concerns merely how sense may form our temper. The brevity of the child’s portrait, although through reminiscence in a dream, is visible in the character’s name Florian, which, like a flower, from Latin *flos, floris*, must have its bloom and wither. The child leaves the house at the age of twelve: as the narrator seems to regret nostalgically, it was only a period in his life: “for a time he walked through the world in a sustained, not unpleasurable awe, generated by the habitual recognition, beside every circumstance and event of life, of its celestial correspondent” (*Miscellaneous* 195). Only “for a time” Florian experiences “the gradual expansion of the soul” (173), where all Platonic education impresses itself, where beautiful objects influence him like music (195). Florian experiences a mental ascension from the material world to the spiritual through the recognition of “celestial correspondents.” The image that depicts the lower and higher worlds meeting comes significantly in a book of religion, from whose pictures he “knew by heart the exact mode in which the wrestling angel grasped Jacob” (193). Through his intellectual growth, the process of “brain-

building,” so called, Florian comes to grasp towards the ideal: “Some ideal, hieratic persons he would always need to occupy it and keep a warmth there. And he could hardly understand those who felt no such need at all, finding themselves quite happy without such heavenly companionship, and sacred double of their life, beside them” (194). This hope for ideal companionship returns strongly in the character of Marius.

Pater’s unfinished story “An English Poet” also explores the advancement from sensation to ideas. Monsman connects this portrait to Wordsworth, as though a supplement to *The Prelude* (*Pater’s Portraits* 55), which is subtitled the *Growth of a Poet’s Mind*, but he does not follow the deeper significance of his statement. One of Pater’s first fictional characters is modelled on Wordsworth, in whom he prominently saw the effect of contemplation, over action, on an artist’s nature, as we saw in our second chapter. As Cruzalegui has noted (646), Aristotle’s metaphysical and theoretical thought was more prevalent on Pater, for, in *Plato*, he includes him in the idealistic wing of Platonism, those strongly influenced by “Theory of Ideas” (193). Pater shows an increasing awareness in the growth of an individual’s mind, in which a portrait is too limited to reveal. His ideal aesthetic characters were outgrowing the genre.

Like Florian, the poet passes from interest in the material world to a desire for something higher. An ideal is again grasped towards: “A dim brooding divination of a great far-off world, the focus of all power and passion, where all precious things might well be plenteous, ‘the world,’ as we say, but as divined in ideal mood by the fine unprostituted soul of poetic youth, already possessed him” (441). His longing for something ideal finds satisfaction in literature, specifically, the “desire of literary form, the ideal of literary life” (443). Where Florian finds pleasure with pictures of

the ethereal, the poet indulges in words. The character's love for literature, and its deep influence on him, also anticipates *Marius*.

Pater leaves the story mid-sentence with the budding poet awaiting his companion, to whom the reader has not yet been introduced. It is said the companion is above all a confidant in the boy's poetry. The longing for the ideal in the poet, indicated by the rising desire for the immaterial in the narrative, might have drawn Pater to a state of perplexity as to the sort of companion he would be to the poet, or of what value he could be to his aesthetic education. The poet has already discovered on his own what Marius learns from Flavian: the secret of reconciling form and matter. This is nearly the height of the instruction Pater has to give aesthetically; that, and not to be a poet but a writer of prose, which would, like *Marius the Epicurean*, make a paradox of the title. What more could this companion offer him? Or perhaps, as the companion in "The Child in the House" is divine, in the process of refining, and longing for the ideal, Pater is uncertain from which order along the scale of being from human to divine the companion of the poet's would be.

Something in the form of the early portraits urged Pater to quit his teaching duties at Brasenose in the early '80s, though retaining his fellowship, and devote himself full time to writing (d'Hangest 289). He required a longer narrative to portray his message. Starts and stops would not suffice, various minds at various times, in diverse places, would not convey the sort of aesthetic education he held as real. He wanted a single mind in a given time to live a full life in some country, a unified body of land, with its capital and home counties, its provinces and government, schools and churches of a single people. In order to depict growth, imagined Pater, one must follow a unit; one needs a full life. The good life in Aristotle's *Ethics*, whose details we discussed in chapter two, on which he lectured throughout the 1870s, can only be

judged at its end, once it has been lived (I.vii.16). Marius is a single mind, a single perspective through which an aesthetic life can only be known.

Marius the Epicurean is subtitled “His Sensations and Ideas,” which corresponds almost respectively to the education in “The Child in the House” and “An English Poet.” The correspondence is not exclusive, because both sensations and ideas influence the character in each. Yet, in some way, each earlier portrait failed to achieve what Pater desired. “An English Poet” is easy to consider a failure because of its incompleteness; and, despite the author’s praise for “The Child in the House,” he also realized that it was after all only a germ of a not yet fully-grown specimen. One could apply to his motivation what Pater later says of Mrs Humphrey Ward’s *Robert Elsmere* (1888): “For, in truth, that quiet method of evolution, which she pursues undismayed to the end, requires a certain lengthiness; and the reader’s reward will be in a secure sense that he has been in intercourse with no mere flighty remnants, but with typical forms, of character, firmly and fully conceived” (*Guardian* 56). *Marius* tries to show how one can live a full life under the prescription of the “Conclusion,” beyond merely a brief period of a blossoming in one’s life, where one can actually maintain an enduring ascendancy to higher knowledge.

Manipulating Sources

Pater’s understanding of form and matter in *Marius* is exemplary of his use of the terms in other works, from *The Renaissance* onwards. Form is the principle that organizes old elements into a new pattern. Such is the manner he describes Marius’ appreciation of Cecilia’s house:

It was the old way of true *Renaissance*—being indeed the way of nature with her roses, the divine way with the body of man, perhaps with his soul—conceiving the new organism by no sudden and abrupt creation, but rather by the action of a new principle upon elements, all of which had in truth already lived and died many times. The fragments of older architecture . . . had put on, by such juxtaposition, a

new and singular expressiveness, an air of grave thought, of an intellectual purpose, in itself, aesthetically, very seductive. (II 95-96)

The recognition of the “intellectual purpose,” its form or formula, leads one, as “seductive” suggests, towards what is real. As in Platonism, where Form is the “principle upon the elements,” artefacts exhibit a new principle on matter. Characteristically, Pater transfers the essence of one art form into another. So, where form controls matter in architecture, it works similarly in literature:

The more highly favoured ages of imaginative art present instances of the summing up of an entire world of complex associations under some single form, like the *Zeus* of Olympia, or the series of frescoes which commemorate *The Acts of Saint Francis*, at Assisi, or like the play of Hamlet or Faust. It was not in an image, or series of images, yet still in a sort of dramatic action, and with the unity of a single appeal to eye and ear, that Marius about this time found all his new impressions set forth, regarding what he had already recognized, intellectually, as for him at least the most beautiful thing in the world. (II 128)

We can see here also Pater’s understanding of the form of dramatic action is composed by the impressions of a single person. This passage leads the chapter “Divine Service,” where Marius witnesses the beauty of a mass at Cecilia’s. Literature as a unifying principle of ideas, here, helps explain the process of life; and the notion of form unifying diverse matter is everywhere in *Marius*. Pater makes it far more than a theory by actually following and revealing the method.

Marius of course does have a plot. Marius is born in the Italian countryside; his father dies when he is young; he falls ill and is sent to recover at the temple of Aesculapius, and when he returns home his mother dies; he is sent to school in Pisa, where he meets Flavian, whom he loves and with whom he shares the intense experience of literature; Flavian dies. Marius has a crisis of faith and commits himself to philosophy, settling for “New Cyrenaicism.” At the age of nineteen he is sent to be the amanuensis of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius in Rome, to where he walks most of the way. On the way he meets Cornelius, a Roman Soldier, who will have a strong

influence upon him. He learns of Aurelius' philosophy in Rome, and becomes acquainted with the emperor and his family. But he is increasingly taken by Cornelius' purity, compared to whom Flavian now seems vulgar. More and more, under the influence of Cornelius Marius finds Roman customs brutal. He listens to speeches by Fronto and Aurelius, about philosophy, and contemplates how they relate to their authors. He questions his own philosophy, New Cyrenaicism, and then abandons it. He hears Platonic dialogues read by Apuleius and Lucian at a banquet in the former's honour. Cornelius brings Marius to the beautiful Cecilia's house, where she has a church. He listens to another Platonic dialogue about the confusion of philosophy between Lucian and Hermetimus. He writes in his diary about the need for human sympathy; he goes to Cecilia's house to find her burying one of her children. He attends mass with her and listens to a letter of Eusebius that glorifies martyrdom. He returns to his childhood home, "Whitenights" (which refers to the paradox of lightness in the dark), finds it run down, sees the grave of many family members. Cornelius visits him there at his old home. In town they're taken prisoner for being part of a Christian ceremony. They are to be brought to Rome for trial. On the way there, Marius bribes a guard to let Cornelius go, believing his friend should marry Cecilia. Soon Marius dies, perhaps a Christian martyr.

This synopsis may satisfy those who say it is without plot: but it really satisfies our desire for the traditional Aristotelian narrative structure, which, made to conform to drama, desires a mechanical third-person account. Rather, Pater's fiction explores the internal drama of influence on the mind. His novel tells how these experiences affect Marius, especially his temper, and it is relayed so intimately, making readers feel they are sharing his experiences, that readers sympathize with

Marius. Such was Pater's purpose, not to relay life as a series of facts, but to reveal and share psychological beauty.

Intellectual experience is more important to Pater, whether stimulated by the sensible or ideas; and of intellectual experiences the abstract is richer. Thus, beyond merely showing the movement of bodies, he invites a reader to witness the motion of a mind, to gain a picture of the true Marius. "This is what Marius read," he seems to say, "can you see why he now thinks this way? Can you sympathize with him? For thoughts are emotions too." Denis Donoghue says depreciatingly that, "Marius is not an imagined person but a system of thoughts encountering objects, events, people, and places as further systems of thought. And, in the end, as extensions of his own. He never comes upon a system that is not a system of thought" (188-89). But this is how Pater conceives of persons, who, Platonically, are not material bodies but souls, the highest part of which is the mind, so that thought is what we truly are. Thus when he is concerned with his subjects' individuality he firstly discusses their temperaments and tendencies, the subtle peculiarities in one that receives and organises thought in his own particular way.

Pater is excellent at assimilating systems of thought and he absorbs entire works into his novel. *Marius* is a cento, a composition of other compositions. It reminds one of Pater's quotation from Heinrich Heine, in "Coleridge," that there can be no plagiarism in philosophy (*Appreciations* 75). Pater extends this to literature, believing that it is comprised of ideas, where writing is fundamentally the brainwork of a scholar (13). The scholar in Pater is inextricable from the artist: "In him the two strains are twined together," writes David Cecil (4). The self is the receptor of the matter and the agent of the form. Learning is equated with passivity while writing is related to activity. One might say of Pater what he said of Amiel: "But then, again,

with him ‘action’ meant chiefly literary production” (*Guardian* 32). We would qualify this by saying action is even the organization of matter.

That Marius’ sensations and ideas are contributed to by many genres of literature creates a strong literary atmosphere. The reader experiences alongside Marius the Platonic fable of Pater’s translation of Apuleius’ Cupid and Psyche from *Metamorphoses*; some stanzas of the Latin poem the *Pervigilium Veneris*, which Pater ascribes to the dying Flavian, orations by Marcus Aurelius and Cornelius Fronto; other Pater translations of the very Platonic dialogues of Lucian, *The Hermitimus* and *The Halcyon*, both centring on Socrates; selections from the *Epistle of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, a diary of Marius, and many other kinds of hymns, quotations, and epitaphs. There is a blending of sacred and profane authors that gives new meaning to old forms, new form to old matter. Given the literal context of *Marius*, where texts are woven into each other and grand culture narratives overstretch, such as Christianity and the old Roman religions, Pater is able to exploit the hyper-transitional period of second-century Rome. He often chooses works of authors that chart transition themselves, such as Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* of the third and fourth centuries, and Tertullian’s *Apologeticum*, from which comes the title of the concluding chapter, “Anima Naturaliter Christiana,” (a soul by nature Christian), describing Marius. These authors are there obliquely, by having their works absorbed into the atmosphere of *Marius*. Apologetic writers specially interest Pater, because they specifically mark a transition in culture, often being individuals defending new ideas to resistant majorities. An apology might be said to defend a new form upon old matter.

Monsman declares that “Pater’s typical hero is an almost incorporeal presence whose personality is covertly implied and whose physical existence seems to inhere in the ‘texts’ of his age, a living text as it were, woven from the aesthetic artifacts—

poetry, prose, painting, sculpture, architecture—of the past” (*Art of Autobiography* 24-25). *Marius* truly lends itself to textual metaphors of weaving, as references cross throughout. Among all the historical references, Monsman cites many that are anachronistic, some of the most recent of which are, in alphabetical order, “Arnold, Bacon, Bunyan, Calvin, Comte, Dante, Defoe, Jonathan Edwards, Gautier, Goethe, Michelet, Montaigne, Pascal, Rousseau, St Francis, St Gregory, Schlegel, Shakespeare, Shelley, Swedenborg, Swift, Tennyson and Wordsworth” (“White Bird” 94). Such anachronistic references give a more universal quality to *Marius*’ story, as we saw in our chapter on myth.

Marius can be seen as the unifying element, in fact, of his environment, for he becomes, similarly to Pater’s *La Gioconda*, “the head upon which ‘all ends of the world are come’” (*Renaissance* 124). The difference between *Marius* and *Mona Lisa*, however, is that he is the accumulation of what he directly experiences, his sensations and ideas, while the Lady, whether she experiences the elements or not, swells up despite herself, like a mountain, as necessarily as the shifting tectonic plates, for to Pater she is primarily the conception of an artist. *Marius*, importantly, is an agent of what he learns, and, therefore, of whom he becomes.

Return to the “Conclusion”

The “Conclusion” challenges us by forcing us to question what we *really* know. The word “real” relates to what is true, coming from the Latin *res*, which in medieval metaphysical discourse means a thing’s essence, in other words, the Form of a particular object. “Real” is the key concept of the “Conclusion.” The fear of solipsism is that no “real voice” has ever pierced “that thick wall of personality” (235). “To such a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, with a relic more or less fleeting, of such

moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down” (236). Only that which has form in our life is real; only that, therefore, which participates in the idea, of beauty, for instance. Pater’s idea of beauty, though enmattered, or embodied, is just that: an idea. In *Plato and Platonism* he is continually reminding his reader of the importance of seeing the abstract in the particular: “the idea of Beauty becomes for Plato the central idea; the permanently typical instance of what an ideal means; of its relation to particular things, and to the action of our thoughts upon them” (*Plato* 170). Philosophy plays a crucial role in recognition. Quoting Novalis, he reminds us that the “service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it into sharp and eager observation” (*Renaissance* 236). Be ever watching for form manifest. “Every moment some form grows perfect in hand and face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood or passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us,—for that moment only.” Beauty requires an observer and exists when we are conscious of it in a given moment; a moment being no measurement of time but an intellectual movement; a movement that recognizes form through flux, vivifying matter when its form grows perfect, but brief for being enmattered. “How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?”

Again, philosophy allows us to recognize what is real in the world around us: “Philosophical theories or ideas, as points of view, instruments of criticism, may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us. ‘Philosophy is the microscope of thought’” (237). But thought must be well related to our own temper. “The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some

abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves, or what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us” (237-38). He does not ask us to avoid the abstract, but to be sure we embrace it through our own experience, perhaps by reading some beloved author, rather than slavishly accepting society’s doctrines. In art, we do not sacrifice what is real, but we enter into it. Beauty has a real claim upon us. “Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among ‘the children of this world,’ in art and song” (238). We are naturally inclined towards beauty: “Great passions may give us this quickened sense in life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us” (238). “Ecstasy,” “enthusiasm,” “love,” all terms used in the final essay on Winckelmann to describe Plato’s *Phaedrus*. “Only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments’ sake” (238-39). Multiplied consciousness: to know more than what is habitual, the mere quotidian dress, to really know.

Critics who recognize this petition for what is real in the “Conclusion” tell of Pater’s aesthetics not as a refuge from the world, but an enhancement of it: “Pater,” says Ruth Child, “speaks in the same breath of art for the sake of art, and art for the sake of life. Appreciation of beauty is to be the direct aim, enhancement of life the indirect result” (23). Wolfgang Iser, in his discussion on Pater’s aesthetic moment, sees a similar motive: “Pater’s concept of *l’art pour l’art* differs subtly from that of Gautier, for he does not see his hypostatized art as a protest against a specific sociological reality; for him, art is not an attitude towards a given outside world, it is a

heightening, an intensification of reality” (31). “The ideal in art, however,” says Iser again, “does much more than merely allow us to vanish for a while from our unsatisfactory world into a delightful one. It sums up for us the quintessence of life” (49). Graham Hough, in *The Last Romantics*, also recognizes Pater’s aesthetic intention “to treat life and art in the same spirit,” for by this attitude art will have powerful effects on the formation of one’s moral character (161).

In the same manner that recognizing the real becomes the vocation of the lover of beauty, so is revealing what is real the work of the artist. The “Conclusion” is like the *Cratylus* in its objections to convention, causing one to either despair or consider a new mode of looking at the world, and living.

Probably because of how notorious the “Conclusion” was in Pater’s career, critics often exaggerate the presence of the flux in his work. Although it was no doubt a point of anxiety early in his own philosophy, he seems to have reconciled the problem before his writing began; indeed, the presence of his writing reveals confidence in words, and indicates that he had resolved these terms for himself already. And Pater’s method for freeing himself from the seeming meaninglessness of the flux was, as he recommends to others, knowing how to recognize form in matter, to appreciate and to create art.

Daímon

The chord of Platonism is struck on the second page of *Marius*, and resonates all through. But perhaps the greatest Platonic influence on the novel is Marius’ fascination with a personal genius or tutelary god, known in Greek as a δαίμων, which Socrates is said to possess in the works of Plato. Each soul in the Ancient Greek religion was thought to possess a personal god, a spirit, which would act as an intermediary between the earthly and celestial realms, between men and the gods. A

daímon might be seen as a spirit that accomplishes the same task as beauty, for it bridges the gap between the material and abstract world. The Roman pagan religion thought everyone was born with a spirit guide, or genius, that determines one's fate and character.

Marius is not written in the first person, but it feels as though it is, the distance between the narrator and Marius being so slight, as though you are listening to someone speak about themselves in the third-person. This slight distance comforts the reader, by adding a near religious element to the narrator's voice for being different yet inseparable from the mind it describes. The narrator is an advocate of Marius, who, guiding his narrative, really does determine his fate. On a grander scale the voice knows more than Marius, commenting on events across history and land, yet it is also aware of his every little flutter, of heart, memory, and intuition, and can access them at any point, in retrospect or future. Marius experiences this presence as a young boy: "A sense of conscious powers external to ourselves, pleased or displeased by the right or wrong conduct of every circumstance of daily life—that *conscience*, of which the old Roman religion was a formal, habitual recognition, was become in him a powerful current of feeling and observance" (I 5).

As with some of his other idealistic notions, Marius for a time denies the feeling of his genius after the death of his beloved friend Flavian. He goes through an intense period of philosophical enquiry, settling for a time upon a modified form of Epicureanism, based upon a disciple of Socrates, Aristippus of Cyrene, which Marius alters yet more into "New Cyrenaicism." His youthful philosophy, as he'll later call it, has little patience for the numinal. But when he becomes disillusioned with the philosophy of "here and now," even losing fondness for the dead friend who led him to it, suspicions and hope of a personal companion return. It is nourished by contact

with Marcus Aurelius' Platonism. To Fronto, the tutor of the Emperor's children, it is only a doctrine, but to Aurelius it gives consolation:

There was, besides, a special moral or doctrinal significance in the making of such conversation with one's self at all. The *Logos*, the reasonable spark, in man, is common to him with the gods—κοινὸς αὐτῷ πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς—*cum diis communis*. That might seem but the truism of a certain school of philosophy; but in Aurelius was clearly an original and lively apprehension. There could be no inward conversation with one's self such as this, unless there were indeed some one else, aware of our actual thoughts and feelings, pleased or displeased at one's disposition of one's self. (II 47-48)

The conversation with one's self recalls Pater's definition of dialectic in *Plato and Platonism*, being "that dialogue of the mind with itself, which any converse with Socrates or Plato does but promote" (142). Such union of thought and conversation throughout the novel partly explains why Pater's dialogue with others is, as critics complain, much less vivid. Pater's preferred conversation is within.

Marius' contact with Aurelius is very significant, especially for being his amanuensis, one who writes down the thoughts of another. Pater describes the Antonine emperor to be as near as possible the exemplum of the Philosopher King for which Plato calls in *The Republic* (II 65).³¹ Naturally Pater's greatest instrument to gaining insight into Aurelius' character is through reading his *Meditations* or *Thoughts*, from which he often borrows ideas for characterisation, as in the offset quotation above. The "Conclusion" may actually be read as adopting the rhetorical method of Aurelius' discourses in *Meditations*, for he frequently depicts the universe in the flux of Heraclitus by way of asking his reader to strive for the higher law. "Revive the alternative," Aurelius writes: "either Providence or blind atoms', and the many proofs that the Universe is a kind of Commonwealth" (Farquharson 53). Many passages from *Meditations* are strikingly similar to the "Conclusion"; an example

³¹ Pater repeats this nomination in *Plato and Platonism* (265)

from Book II follows: “Of man’s life, his time is a point, his existence a flux, his sensation clouded, his body’s entire composition hard to predict, his fame uncertain. Briefly, all the things of the body, a river; all the things of the spirit, dream and delirium; his life a warfare and a sojourn in a strange land, his after-fame oblivion. What then can be his escort through life? One thing and one thing only, Philosophy” (33). Repeatedly, Aurelius expresses this sentiment, “that each of us lives only in the present, this brief moment; the rest is either a life that is past, or is in an uncertain future” (45), not in order to call us to a life of hedonism, but rather to a life that recognises the necessity of turning towards something more eternal. For Pater, philosophy, as he says in the “Conclusion,” helps us appreciate the form of beauty, the recognition of which makes our days the most worthwhile. It is quite significant that Pater, in the novel which he declares better explains the ideas of the “Conclusion,” would have Marius work closely with the Emperor, and remarkably as one who must know his words almost as well as the speaker himself if he is going to fulfil his duty as amanuensis and set them down accordingly. *Meditations* is an important link between the “Conclusion” and *Marius*.

The importance of one’s *daímon* is a crucial idea that Marius shares with the discourses of Emperor Aurelius. But such a consoling companion is not merely part of pagan philosophy to Marius, for the narrator relates the god to the Biblical book of Proverbs (9:2), thus sanctioning the notion with his future belief in Christianity. “Wisdom,” he quotes, “hath mingled her wine” (II 49). The call to examine one’s self, as Socrates so famously demanded, is an eminent tendency in Aurelius:

A soul thus disposed had ‘already entered into the better life’:—was indeed in some sort ‘a priest, a minister of the gods.’ Hence his constant ‘recollection’; a close watching of his soul, of a kind almost unique in the ancient world.—*Before all things examine into thyself: strive to be at home with thyself!*—Marius, a sympathetic witness of all

this, might almost seem to have had a foresight of monasticism itself in the prophetic future. (II 50)

In Marius' own future, he would come to rely less on people and more on the idea of this spiritual person. His great companion is ranked above his two great friendships with Flavian and Cornelius, and now he desires a solitude that promotes inner dialogue (II 67).

As earthly friends, Flavian, which means blonde (from *flavus*, "golden-yellow"), and Cornelius, represent the gold and white influences in the novel that together resembles a chryselephantine statue of reverence. Cornelius is compared to the pure white bird as the metaphor of one's soul, though etymologically his name signals the trumpet call signalling the arrival of Christianity, *cornu* in Latin meaning horn. The friends of Marius portray the unification of sensible and abstract which the aesthetic education learns to identify, and which religion, as well as art, depends upon. In their union man shows his reverence to the Creator from below. A *daímon*, as a third sort of friend, is much more special, however, for while it harmonizes the abstract into a particular spirit, its communion signifies higher life.

While pondering the possibility of such a being in his life, Marius arrives at his climactic moment from which the rest of the narrative does not descend, but loses intensity. For all his early praise for the "here and now" of New Cyrenaicism no moment has a greater hold upon him than his Platonic realization. Reflecting on his spiritual companion, he thinks of the relation of Plato's Eternal Reason to the Old Testament's Creator and the New Testament's Father of Men (II 68). His "tutelary or genius," as he later calls it in his diary (II 172), seems to be in touch with Plato's "World of Ideas," which even "sober-minded" Aristotle supposed (II 69):

Himself—his sensations and ideas—never fell again precisely into focus as on that day, yet he was the richer by its experience. But for once only to have come under the power of that peculiar mood, to have

felt the train of reflections which belong to it really forcible and conclusive, to have been led by them to a conclusion, to have apprehended the *Great Ideal*, so palpably that it defined personal gratitude and the sense of a friendly hand laid upon him amid the shadows of the world, left this one particular hour a marked point in life never to be forgotten. (II 71)

His “sensations and ideas” are made synonymous with himself, referring again to the novel’s subtitle. In recognition of Marius’ adhering to the subtitle, Cruzalegui declares it is, more than a novel, “the history of a moral and intellectual pilgrimage in which the protagonist primarily conveys his ideological or intellectual fluctuations” (623). His soul’s companionship with a higher being lifts him to his sought-after realisation. The moment changed Marius, however: ever after it was as if he viewed the world “through a diminishing glass” (II 75). Such is often the complaint of Platonism. It is a pivotal phrase in *Marius*, for carrying within it the two most important systems of thought in the novel: Platonism and Christianity. It recalls St Paul’s famous phrase from 1 Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I know even as also I am known” (KJV). But “through diminishing glass” also recalls the vision of the philosopher who returns to the cave who has seen the sun in *The Republic*’s allegory of the cave, and is furthermore a paraphrase of the same sentiments of the *Phaedrus* (250b), which states that only a select few will ever see things how they really are, and even those “through the darkling organs of sense” (Fowler). The word translated “darkling” is ἀμυδρός, meaning dark, dim, faint, obscure (Liddell and Scott). This distance between the observer and the action is sometimes felt by critics as a flaw of the book; Williams, for instance, calls it a world of shadows (“Typology” 35); but the nature of the narrator to Marius, and its increasing proximity to him, from distant to intimate, in an inverse proportion to things in the world, explains an intentional technique. As the

accidents of the mundane become less material in his life, and the inner world of ideas richer, he is determined less by what happens to him, and more by what he thinks.

To Marius, the narrator only seems to be a *daímon*, that constant traveller he sometimes feels. In the house of Apuleius,³² for instance, when he speaks from “On the Gods of Socrates” (*De Deo Socratis*) (Monsman’s *Portraits* 86), although Marius feels an unknown “companion’s hand laid in the darkness on his shoulder” (II 90), he remains sceptical. But we as readers witness the truth that he can only hope for: we *know* that he is indeed not alone. The narrator never leaves his mind, never enters into the mind of another, as though there truly is an immaterial boundary around persons, yet a boundary which includes another being. Pater comes to find the idea of a personal genius even more credible than Plato. In *The Republic*, Socrates’ glibly says of his *daímon*, “My own case, the divine sign, is hardly worth mentioning—for I suppose it has happened to few or none before me” (496c), whereas Pater describes “that voice, that sign from heaven, that ‘new deity,’” as “his singularly profound sense of a mental phenomenon which is probably not uncommon” (*Plato* 89). Socrates’ *daímon* counselled his ethical choices, but Pater’s *daímon*, never separating the relation between life and art, also guides one aesthetically. Thus, Charles Du Bos calls *Marius* more than an autobiographical portrait, but a spiritual portrait (16).

Paideía

An understanding of Marius’ aesthetic education cannot be complete without understanding *paideía*, which, coming from *paidion*, child, means bringing up a child through discipline and education (Liddell and Scott). *Paideía* is commonly translated into English as “culture,” the result of cultivation, which nurtures some parts while cutting away others. Culture implies rising, for etymologically it means “reverence.”

³² Cruzalegui sees Apuleius as guiding Marius from aestheticism into “a sort of poetical Platonism” (619).

The connection in *Marius* is easily made to Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-1868), especially when Pater mixes in the word perfect: "Pitched to a really high and serious key, the precept—*Be perfect in regard to what is here and now*: the precept of 'culture,' as it is called, or of a complete education—might at least save him from the vulgarity and heaviness of a generation, certainly of no general fineness of temper, though with a material well-being abundant enough" (I 145-46). Arnold's influence continues to be seen in Pater's emphasis on self-culture by separating one's self from the materialism of his contemporaries.

One of the attractions of *The Republic* at Oxford was its emphasis on education, and Pater shares its ideal with other Oxonian figures. He may be seen to hold similar ideas of the Platonic education with R. L. Nettleship (1846-1892), for example, who as a Fellow of Balliol contributed "The Theory of Education in the Republic of Plato" to *Hellenica: A Collection of Essays on Greek Poetry Philosophy, History, and Religion* (1880), edited by Evelyn Abbott (1843-1901), another graduate and Fellow of Balliol. Nettleship writes:

from every thing that they see and hear, loveliness, like a breeze, should pass into their souls, and teach them without their knowing it the truth of which it is a manifestation. In such an atmosphere they will not only acquire a natural grace and proportion of bearing and character, but an instinctive sense of what is fair and what is foul in nature and in art; and this instinctive sense is a kind of anticipation of a rational understanding of the nature of good and evil; for the reason which is now presented to them in forms of sense, and calls forth sensuous delight, is the same reason which they will afterwards learn to know in its own form as an intelligible principle, and which they will then recognise as an old friend with a new face. (115-16)

We may find here similarity with the "Conclusion" and *Marius*. The "form" of sense is increasingly important to Pater, as the intelligible principle is recognised in the passing flux of things around us. Furthermore, the face of a friend, as only recognisable through intelligible form is reminiscent of both works, as this "breeze" is

like the passing stream that Marius learns about from the *Phaedrus*. Not surprisingly for an education that seeks to gain the most nutritive influences of passing experience, Nettleship also makes the recognition of form an important element of Platonism, like Pater, declaring,

alike in art, in science, in morality, it is the “form” which is essential and important, the “form” which the imagination discerns through the chaos of sense-impressions, the “form” which the reason separates from the accidental conditions of time and place, and the “form” in which the moral consciousness finds rest and guidance amidst the distractions and contradictions of experience. (147)

Although Pater encouraged the critic’s ability to recognize form apart from matter, he is more comfortable in seeing them joined through his desire for beauty. Form is not merely important to the aesthetic education, but is crucial in Platonic education.

Plato’s *paideía* is based upon music and gymnastics, both required for the sake of one’s soul in a correct measure because they give harmony (*Republic* 410). It is not a coincidence that Marius’ school is “one of many imitations of Plato’s Academy in the old Athenian garden” (I 46). Music, or μουσική (*mousiké*), is a more complicated term in Greek and can mean playing the lyre, music, poetry, letters, culture, philosophy, according to the context. But Pater holds it to mean generally all those arts that are governed by muses. Gymnastics relates more to the sensible world, while music, coming Platonically from Pythagoras, is more abstract. The presence of music is easy to recognize in the education of Marius:

With this view he would demand culture, παιδεία, as the Cyrenaics said, or, in other words, a wide, a complete, education—an education partly negative, as ascertaining the true limits of man’s capacities, but for the most part positive, and directed especially to the expansion and refinement of the power of reception; of those powers, above all, which are immediately relative to fleeting phenomena, the powers of emotion and sense. In such an education, an ‘aesthetic’ education, as it might now be termed, and certainly occupied very largely with those aspects of things which affects us pleurably through sensation, art, of course, including all the finer sorts of literature, would have a great part to play. The study of music, in that wider Platonic sense, according to

which, *music* comprehends all those matters over which the Muses of Greek mythology preside, would conduct one to an exquisite appreciation of all the finer traits of nature and of man. (I 147)

Music plays also an ethical role, increasing as the novel advances, governing even Marius' manners, providing harmony where any jarring would be like a sign of evil: "The old Greek morality, again, with all its imperfections, was certainly a comely thing.—Yes! A harmony, a music, in men's ways, one might hesitate to jar" (II 23). By way of conduct, music, an appreciation of the muses, or grace, improves actions beyond the merely mechanical, as we saw in the chapter on Wordsworth. Music to Marius is not an activity of listening for a time and then tuning out, it is as permanent an element in his daily life as the rotation of the earth; indeed, the importance of music, as Pater stresses in *Plato and Platonism*, comes from Pythagoras' understanding of it as the ordering principle of the cosmos.

As the ordering principle, music provides form, which is exactly what the Heraclitean flux is supposed to lack. Music is strangely distant from the first edition of *The Renaissance*; there are references here and there about harmony and disharmony, but nothing to the extent of Pater's later Platonic works. "The School of Giorgione," where Pater holds music as the ideal work of art, for blending form and matter indistinguishably—although it seems so natural now to *The Renaissance*—was an aftermath. Simultaneously, in the third edition of 1888, it appeared when the "Conclusion" was restored. The idealism of "The School of Giorgione" counters the ostensible scepticism of the "Conclusion." In terms of content, "The School of Giorgione" has much less to do with a school of painters than it is a positive statement of Pater's aesthetic. Giorgione's school is not mentioned in the first ten pages of the essay.

Much of the disquietude in the “Conclusion” is due to its lack of music, in content and style. Passages are vivid, but they jar one rather than encourage grace. The “Conclusion” might be called the negative side of his aesthetic, what motivates one to go beyond. Let us compare exemplary sentences in each work to notice their difference. Here are three sentences from the “Conclusion”:

For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give us this quickened sense in life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. (238)

This style is typical of the whole piece—short clauses, counter-punctual, of abrupt statements. It creates a sense of desperation, a sense that an obstacle has been met which forces a traveler in a new directions, imitating also the breathlessness of imminent ending. Now let us look at two sentences from “The School of Giorgione”:

In choice of subject, as in all besides, the *Concert* of the *Pitti* Palace is typical of all that Giorgione, himself an admirable musician, touched with his influence. In sketch or finished picture, in various collections, we may follow it through many intricate variations—men fainting at music; music heard at the pool-side while people fish, or mingled with the sound of the pitcher in the well, or heard across running water, or among the flocks; the tuning of instruments; people with intent faces, as if listening, like those described by Plato in an ingenious passage of the *Republic*, to detect the smallest interval of musical sound, the smallest undulation in the air, or feeling for music in thought on a stringless instrument, ear and finger refining for themselves infinitely, in the appetite for sweet sound; a momentary touch of an instrument in the twilight, as one passes through some unfamiliar room, in a chance company. (151)

In this idyllic passage music is present in both matter and form. We may see the harmony in the adjacent clauses that merely qualify each other, and add to the greater sense, rather than forcing one in a new direction. The passage is made up of one sentiment rather than several: it seems open-ended and takes its time, unfolding leisurely. And what a different effect the passage has upon us: we experience here the

musical side of culture, the water is clean from running gently and the air moves sweetly, even in waves, unlike the congealed and harsh “short day of frost and sun” of the “Conclusion.”

Form meets the matter in each, but the goals are different in the two passages. In *Plato and Platonism*, when Pater addresses Plato’s own confrontation with the Heraclitean flux, the inquisitive style of the “Conclusion” returns: “Was not the very essence of thought itself also such perpetual motion? a baffling transition from the dead past, alive one moment since, to a present, itself deceased in turn ere we can say, Is it here?” (15)

In *Marius*, Pater explains the common conception of flux, and the effect it had upon young men. In describing one’s ascendancy upon the “aesthetic education” he calls the doctrine of Heraclitus “the first, merely sceptical or negative step, the easiest step on the threshold,” but still “the ‘doctrine of motion’ seemed to those who had felt its seduction to make all fixed knowledge impossible” (I 131). “Heracliteanism,” the narrator continues, “had grown to be almost identical with the famous doctrine of the sophist Protagoras, that the momentary, sensible apprehension of the individual was the only standard of what is or is not, and each one the measure of all things to himself. The impressive name of Heraclitus had become but an authority for a philosophy of the despair of knowledge” (I 131-32). Pater makes a philosophical clarification in *Marius* that the “doctrine of motion” ascribed to Heraclitus is intended to direct one to the positive alternative: the search for something over and above the flux that offers more stable meaning. When Pater removes the “Conclusion” he is removing that sceptical step on the aesthetic ladder that had become a scandal, that is, a stumbling block, to some. The inclusion of “The School of Giorgione” when the

“Conclusion” is returned is a seductive pull upwards from music to encourage the second step on the ladder.

As *Marius* concerns his sensations and ideas, they are governed and harmonized by gymnastics and music. Both aspects of *paideía* have a strong effect on his soul. Marius, it is true, does not seem to have a body, and we may wonder what sort of physical activity he may pursue besides walking. Because we always learn of his mind, and share his perceptions, it is difficult to gain the third-person view that looking at his body would require. Readers might be shocked that by the novel’s end he is middle-aged (II 208). The gymnastics of Marius, however, concerns the physical or sensuous influence of the world upon him and frequently takes the form of mild *ascesis* and chastity rather. The extreme asceticism of Marcus Aurelius’ bodily gymnastic is judged to be inharmonious to the soul (II 191). Pater’s asceticism is not about bodily exercise as much as avoiding vulgarities. When his mother compares Marius’ soul to the white bird being carried through the marketplace, she means that love would return him to his ideal “amid many distractions of the spirit” (I 22). “Had the Romans a word for *unworldly*?” asks the narrator later: “The beautiful word *umbratilis* perhaps comes nearest to it; and, with that precise sense, might describe the spirit in which he prepared himself for the sacerdotal function hereditary in his family—the sort of mystic enjoyment he had in the abstinence, the strenuous self-control and *ascêsis*, which such preparation involved” (I 25). “*Umbratilis*” recalls Pater’s own cloistered life in the shadows of a college originally fashioned for clergy. Marius accommodated that “first, early, boyish ideal of priesthood, the sense of dedication, survived through all the distractions of the world, and when all thought of such vocation had finally passed from him, as a ministry, in spirit at least, towards a sort of hieratic beauty and order in the conduct of life” (I 25). His idealism draws him

inward to a philosophy that holds the individual as its standard, “with a certain incapacity wholly to accept other men’s valuations” (I 25). We may see how the self-discipline of selection with one’s senses becomes a sort of scepticism.

There is another side to gymnastic, however, motivated by the fear of death which says: “Given the hardest terms, supposing our days are indeed but a shadow, even so, we may well adorn and beautify, in scrupulous self-respect, our souls, and whatever our souls touch upon” (I 137). The argument from the “Conclusion” is evident here, beseeching one to find the real and beautiful amidst decay. In the final chapter, discussing *Marius’* soul, “Anima Naturaliter Christiana,” the narrator says of his temper: “all its movement had been inward; movement of observation only, or even of pure meditation; in part, perhaps, because throughout it had been something of the *meditatio mortis*, ever facing towards the act of final detachment” (II 208-209). The sentiment is reminiscent of Socrates’ in the *Phaedo*, which we discussed in chapter two in relation to Arnold, that philosophy is a preparation for death.

His gymnastic also reveals itself in chastity: “Chastity,—as he seemed to understand—the chastity of men and women, amid all the conditions, and with the results, proper to such chastity, is the most beautiful thing in the world and the truest conservation of that creative energy by which men and women were first brought into it” (II 110). “Amid all the conditions” represents his desire for self-preservation by selecting and avoiding those conditions that would play upon his soul. And the energy saved would go into his art. When Frank Kermode discusses the isolation of Pater in *Romantic Image* (1957), he too broadly imagines it is motivated merely by the opinion that artists must be alone with their suffering. Pater’s isolation is due to avoiding the vulgar and adhering to the beautiful, because these conditions affect his soul. The soul, like a plastic thing in Platonism, may be self-fashioned. The goal of

gymnastic for Pater is to develop temperance, that is, the control of one's appetites. The epitome of temperance for Pater is Plato's *Charmides* (I 35), with whom he was said to be obsessed (Thomas 226), for Charmides himself is said to exist like a finely composed work of art.

The model for his aesthetic education is learned in a single evening, when, ill as a child, he was sent to convalesce at the college of Aesculapius. There, in a fitful state between dream and attention, a young priest comes to his side to speak. The first discourse, Marius discovers later, is from Plato's *Phaedrus*, a dialogue "which supposes men's spirits susceptible to certain influences," which are, says Pater, "diffused, after the manner of streams or currents, by fair things or persons visibly present—green fields, for instance, or children's faces—into the air around them, acting, in the case of some peculiar natures, like potent material essences, and conforming the seer to themselves as with some cunning physical necessity" (I 32). This paints the positive side of sensuous experience: the person must receive from the stream of beauty those examples of form that will shape his soul, much like we saw in Nettleship's essay on Platonic education. The second discourse that the priest shares with the febrile Marius is influenced by Plato's *Charmides*:

"If thou wouldst have all about thee like the colours of some fresh picture, in a clear light," so the discourse recommenced after a pause, "be temperate in thy religious motions, in love, in wine, in all things, and of a peaceful heart with thy fellows." To keep the eye clear by a sort of exquisite personal alacrity and cleanliness, extending even to his dwelling-place; to discriminate, ever more and more fastidiously, select form and colour in things from what was less select; to meditate much on beautiful visible objects, on objects, more especially, connected with the period of youth—on children at play in the morning, the trees in early spring, on young animals, on the fashions and amusements of young men; to keep ever by him if it were but a single choice flower, a graceful animal or sea-shell, as a token and representative of the whole kingdom of such things; to avoid jealousy, in his way through the world, everything repugnant to sight; and, should any circumstance tempt him to a general converse in the range of such objects, to disentangle himself from that circumstance at any

cost of place, money, or opportunity; such were in brief outline the duties recognised, the rights demanded, in this new formula of life. (I 32-33)

A sea shell representing the genus is an idea Pater returns to in *Plato* to exemplify the importance of general or abstract knowledge for appreciating particular instances. And the temperance Marius learns this night governs his life in an immediately practical way, and “made him revolt with unfaltering instinct from the bare thought of any excess in sleep, or diet, or even in matters of taste, still more from any excess of a coarser kind” (I 34). In a review of *Marius* that Pater called “sympathetic” and “judicious” (qtd. Seiler 113), William Sharp said the night Marius learned Platonism from the priest was the first of his two conversions in the story (116). And it may be the stronger of the conversions, more than for the duration of its influence, for though some readers doubt the veracity of Marius’ final conversion into Christianity, no reader could doubt his early initiation into Platonism, and its enduring influence on the narrative. Of Plato, he says in his final book, “He seems, in fact, to promise all, or almost all, that in a later age natures great and high have certainly found in the Christian religion” (*Plato* 264). He seems reluctant to qualify “all.”

Musical understanding in the Platonic education begins more abstractly, by way of harmonizing ideas. As Marius progresses Platonically, from sensations to ideas, music plays a greater role. Very significantly, the idea of Christianity reaches Marius through this medium. Through the music of the “Divine Service,” he hears the “voice of human philosophy, haunting men’s minds from of old” (II 134), guiding him to intellectual beauty.

The purpose of *paideía* is to achieve a balance within oneself between our senses and our ideas, for in the soul they are intermingled. When a soul is educated,

aesthetically in Pater's case, in beauty, then he is ready to be a scholar-artist, or a dialectician in the case of Plato.

Selective Style

Much of the vocabulary Pater uses for his description of the aesthetic education's gymnastic finds a correspondence in his discussion of style. Exclusions exercise a sort of chastity. "Self-restraint," he writes in "Style," "a skilful economy of means, *ascêsis*, that too has a beauty of its own" (*Appreciations* 17). The narrator's discussion of euphuism in Marius stresses one's "duties" towards writing: "from the very beginning of professional literature, the 'labour of the file'—a labour in the case of Plato, for instance, or Virgil, like that of the oldest of goldsmiths as described by Apuleius, enriching the work by far more than the weight of the precious metal it removed—has always had its function" (I 97-98). The aesthetic is directly translatable from art to life, signifying that Pater's theory of art is also a theory of life. Flavian's instruction in the craft of writing, for example, is directly applicable to his life:

education largely increased one's capacity for enjoyment. He was acquiring what it is the chief function of all higher education to impart, the art, namely, of so relieving the ideal or poetic traits, the elements of distinction, in our everyday life—of so exclusively living in them—that the unadorned remainder of it, the mere drift or *débris* of our days, comes to be as though it were not. (I 53-54)

A finely wrought composition is no different from a soul, whose well-selected experiences polish his soul like a pumice-stone. And, as Pater says of dialectic in his lectures, it proceeds to truth "by a gradual suppression of error" (*Plato* 179). The debris is comparable to the omissions Pater recommends in writing, like ridding those vulgarities that distract a soul. Beauty, as Truth, all that is real to Pater, is life refined.

Flavian's euphuism is saved by the quality of the matter with which he works, whose composition shaped "itself, little by little, out of a thousand dim perceptions, into singularly definite form (definite and firm as fine-art in metal, thought Marius)"

(I 104). Marius seeks a method to increase the quality of his own matter. Ideas become increasingly important, because, like the sensible matter of the world to him, ideas are beautiful when placed in the proper form, most beautiful, perhaps, in the form of writing. One quarter of the way through the novel “his care for poetry had passed away, to be replaced by the literature of thought” (I 125-26). The literature of thought is more difficult to attain, because its form can only be captured by one practised in its recognition. Thought is repeatedly described as something attained only through sharpness: “The happy phrase or sentence was really modelled upon a cleanly finished structure of scrupulous thought” (I 156); the great acuity involved is made rare by harmony: “this rare blending of grace with an intellectual rigour or astringency, was the secret of a singular expressiveness” (I 156-57).

As Marius’ aesthetic education progresses he is able to discover form more easily, and such a skill persuades him to become an artist:

the form and the matter of thought alike detached themselves clearly and with readiness from the healthfully excited brain. . . . The presentable aspects of inmost thought and feeling became evident to him: the structure of all he meant, its order and outline, defined itself: his general sense of a fitness and beauty in words became effective in daintily pliant sentences, with all sorts of felicitous linking of figure to abstraction. (I 164)

Pater traveled much the same route, passing upwards dialectically so that his progress may even be seen in his very writing. He moves away from the sensory and closer to ideas, as refining suggests: becoming less and less material, so that its form is more clearly revealed. If “what is real in our life fines itself down,” our perceptions must be willing to follow.

Pater’s vocabulary reveals a similar yearning for refinement. Edmund Chandler’s study of *Marius* lists his most frequently used words there, in order: “the word ‘great’ 87 times; ‘true’ and ‘truth’ 77; ‘soul’ 57; ‘beauty’ and ‘beautiful’ 52;

‘vision’ 42; ‘mere’ and ‘merely’ 39; ‘dead’ 36; ‘gold’ and ‘golden’ 33; ‘spirit’ 30; ‘body’ 27; ‘moral’ 27; ‘ideal’ 26; ‘natural’ 25; ‘strange’ 24; and ‘flowers’ 23” (91). The frequent use of “great” might be a result of much Latin translation, but the first four afterwards, “truth,” “soul,” “beauty,” “vision,” (even “great,” perhaps), are Platonic terms related to ideas. “Mere” coming from Latin’s *merus*, meaning “unmixed,” reveals a desire for purifying his terms, qualifying and clarifying them into a singular meaning through perfect selection. Although Pater can be reflective on mortality, his frequent use of the word “dead” is mostly in its adjectival use, reflecting matter that wants form. And the relative balance of “spirit” and “body” is not surprising given his interest in aesthetics, and his aim to lift man up and pull heaven down.

Dialectic

The goal of aesthetic education is to progress upwards on the Platonic ladder through dialectic. Upwards refers to the progression from sensation to ideas. Pater frequently suggests this ladder: the allegory of “Cupid and Psyche,” the soul’s ascendancy towards love, the repeated references to the *Phaedrus*, another Psyche and Cupid, and the very form of *Marius* as a personal journey in Pater’s narrative.

As enthusiasm drives us up with love towards beauty, the way travelled must be through knowledge, for by that alone can we recognize the really beautiful:

He becomes therefore literally an enthusiast for knowledge as by a right method of questioning, of self-questioning (the master’s questioning being after all only a kind of mid-wife’s assistance, according to his own homely figure) may be brought to birth in every human soul, concerning itself and its experience; what is real, and stable, in its apprehensions of Piety, Beauty, Justice, and the like, what is of dynamic quality in them, as conveying force into what one does or creates, building character, generating virtue. (*Plato* 83)

Knowledge allows us to judge correctly, and aesthetic judgment plays into morality for Marius: “For had not Plato taught (it was not paradox, but simple truth of

experience) that if people sin, it is because they know no better and are ‘under the necessity of their own ignorance’?” (I 219-20) Like the ugly, evil in Platonism is a falling away from what is real, that is, a falling away from form. Character depends on the knowledge of form. In *Plato and Platonism* Pater makes explicit connection between a journey and dialectic, the latter being the method, the way, towards true knowledge (180). Monsman has noticed Marius’ journey as a dialectic (*Pater’s Portraits* 76), and Olivia Ayres affirms that “dialectic is a way to get at Truth, the form of which necessitates the form of the quest; it becomes not a facet to his life, but Marius’ whole life” (698).

Pater holds there are two traditions of Platonism, the ideal, held by such as Aristotle, the Schoolmen, and Hegel, and the sceptical tradition, held by such as Lucian, Cicero, and Montaigne. (*Plato* 193-94). These two forces, the ideal and sceptical, represent the positive and negative forces of his dialectic, by which we ascend the ladder. Dialectics is the height of the Platonic education, reached after many years of study, and, therefore, one must first be thoroughly trained by gymnastics and music, must be practised in the negative and positive movements of each. The repulsive sight of a snake must be avoided, while the sight of a beautiful flower is sought, and musically, the inharmonious notion of cruelty is to be eschewed for the sake of graceful manners. The inharmonious is by nature less real Platonically, for containing less form. Marius is sceptical about what he judges to be real, for our senses relate to matter that can possess a lesser degree of form. But his scepticism comes from his idealism, says the narrator:

constructing the world for himself in great measure from within, by the exercise of meditative power. A vein of subjective philosophy, with the individual for its standard of all things, there would be always in his intellectual scheme of the world and of conduct, with a certain incapacity wholly to accept other men’s valuations. (I 24-25)

Only his own vision of the ideal can help him, through the beautiful, to grasp the real. It is ever a series of selections, for what is choice or elite. As one passes through life, he is “prompting always the selection of what was perfect of its kind, with subsequent loyal adherence of his soul thereto” (II 107).

In his dialectic, the dialogue with the self, the student refines his judgments. Pater never describes anything impartially for his reader, but has an adjective or adverb that indicates its beauty, harmony, truth, or lack of. As Ward reminds us, “dialectical method ‘does not provide a proposition, nor a system of propositions, but forms a temper’” (*Plato* 188) (192). Pater aspires to have said of him what he relates Goethe says of Winckelmann: “one learns nothing from him,” “but one becomes something” (*Renaissance* 185).

When Pater speaks of enthusiasm he also likens it to a “possession of one person by another” (*Plato* 172). When Marius hears about the *Phaedrus*, where the soul’s ascension is discussed, he is aware of another being above encouraging him on his way, “the possibility of some vision, as of a new city coming down ‘like a bride out of heaven,’ a vision still indeed, it might seem, a long way off, but to be granted perhaps one day to the eyes thus trained, was presented as the motive of this laboriously practical direction” (I 32). Much of his dialectic is precipitated by the receptiveness that would guide him towards beauty. “Some transforming spirit was at work to harmonise contrasts,” in *Marius*,

to deepen expression—a spirit which, in its dealing with the elements of ancient life, was guided by a wonderful tact of selection, exclusion, juxtaposition, begetting thereby a unique effect of freshness, a grave yet wholesome beauty, because the world of sense, the whole outward world was understood to set forth the veritable unction and royalty of a certain priesthood and kingship of the soul within, among the prerogatives of which was a delightful sense of freedom. (II 116)

It is significant that the angel grasps Jacob in the picture book of “The Child in the House,” all beautiful artwork to Pater must have a physical life, but its structure and design, its harmony and grace, derive from the immaterial principle of form.

Harold Bloom and others have criticized the ending of *Marius* (Buckler 266), either because death is said to be an easy way out of the struggle to Christianity, or because it is unclear whether Marius really believes in Christianity or is only a martyr from the third-person perspective. But Marius may be seen as being in one of the two states of mind which make dialectic possible at all: scepticism, a state of suspended belief. “Place, then,” says Pater, “must be left to the last in any legitimate dialectic process for possible after-thoughts” (*Plato* 190). The “mystic bread had been placed . . . between his lips,” as natural and unavoidable as a snowflake from the sky: he is in reception, and has accepted (II 224). Scepticism is an act of will also, and in life, at least, the dialectic never ceases. As our next chapter reveals, scepticism is not incongruous with Christianity, but, in fact, it is a vital part of it, because scepticism is also a sign of hope.

Conclusion

In the end, *Marius* is the book; not the title, but the feelings and thoughts inside. For Pater, like *Marius*, follows a careful process of selection, accumulating experiences that would make a life; a life, furthermore, like an anthology, in the pursuit, amidst all this matter, of form. *Marius* is a long way from the “Conclusion,” but the “Conclusion,” the early imaginary portraits, and *Marius*, are places on the same journey. Pater’s criticism in *The Renaissance* and his early attempts at fiction may be described as studies or sketches, for they capture life in briefer forms. Despite his impressionistic criticism in *The Renaissance*, which sought to understand the minds of other artists, he approaches them from an outside perspective: they were

other lives. The imaginary portraits show Pater what is possible when his subject is not a historical character, but a creation of his own mind, of all the subtle influences that make that character. Yet only his novel, *Marius the Epicurean*, allows him to fully develop this character. A sketch gives priority to its end, while a novel may display its method—make, in fact, method its aim. As in Platonism, and seen in “Wordsworth,” the method is more than the end; in *Marius* the method is its beauty, which takes a lifetime to practise.

Chapter Five

Platonic Influence in *Gaston de Latour*

The Novel's Blueprint

Pater never finished his second novel, *Gaston de Latour*. There lies a paradox in the statement, that, despite the fact that the novel was never finished, it was never aborted, and still very much exists with a life of its own. Although its end is not known, its early life is well documented, the first five chapters appearing monthly in *Macmillan's Magazine* between June and October of 1888. Pater's friend Charles Shadwell published an edition of *Gaston* posthumously in 1896, editing and including two more chapters from Pater's manuscripts. He suitably subtitled the work *An Unfinished Romance*, leading one to think of a *roman*, especially in the French tradition, whose fictional narrative revolves around a hero's quest for love. Considering the brutality of the period through which Gaston lives, however, the political upheaval and religious wars in France during the sixteenth century between the Catholics and Huguenots, and the carnage of events, as the slaughter on St Bartholomew's Eve, a romance is not the genre that comes easiest to a reader's mind. The romance refers to what Shadwell sees as Pater's intention, the quest of a soul journeying through intellectual love, ascending through knowledge of writers who are ever more spiritual, from Pierre de Ronsard to Michel de Montaigne to Giordano Bruno, in the same manner as Marius, from the more sensuous realm to the less material. It is often noted that Pater intended *Gaston* to be the second work of a trilogy that deals with how someone develops religious beliefs in historical periods of great transition, resembling his own Victorian England. "The work, if completed," writes Shadwell,

would have been a parallel study of character to "Marius the Epicurean": the scene shifted to another age of transition, when the old

fabric of belief was breaking up, and when the problem of man's destiny and his relations to the unseen was undergoing a new solution. The interest would have centred round the spiritual development of a refined and cultivated mind, capable of keen enjoyment in the pleasures of the senses and of the intellect, but destined to find its complete satisfaction in that which transcends both. (vi)

The question remains what form this transcendence would take, leaving the answer much more mysterious perhaps than the last moment of Marius.

Yet Pater has left us the possibility of judging the incomplete whole from the solid structure that remains. From the book's very beginning Pater establishes the ominous fact that Gaston's house remains incomplete. "That it was never completed could hardly be attributed to any lack of means or interest," writes the narrator (1). "It might seem a kind of reverence rather that had allowed the work to remain untouched for future generations at precisely this point in its growth." We may think here of those whom Pater left behind, his friend and literary executor, Charles Shadwell, and sister Clara, and later critics such as Gerald Monsman, who have tried to help complete what he began, at least to add more stages to the work.³³ Pater develops an analogy here that he later extends a few months later in his essay "Style," between the author and architect, an essay that, significantly, begins a collection of criticism, *Appreciations* (1889). For Pater, the critic of art may recognize a kind of blueprint in a work that has not been finally achieved: "And the expert architectural mind, peeping acutely into recondite motives and half-accomplished purposes in such matters, could detect the circumstance which had determined that so noticeable irregularity of ground-plan" (*Gaston* 2).

³³ We reference Monsman's 1995 edition of *Gaston de Latour: The Revised Text*. He joins the Berg manuscript, composed by Pater as a later revision of the seven parts published, with progressively less finished manuscripts at Brasenose and the Houghton Library also in Pater's hand for chapters 8-13. Monsman also includes annotations for all chapters and Diplomatic Transcriptions for those chapters previously unpublished so that a reader may follow textual emendations and variations. Shadwell's edition in 1896 only includes up to chapter seven.

Homeric Hero

On the model of the Homeric hero Gaston's journey is homewards, in the analogy of *The Odyssey*, which in the Platonic sense is to his native purity of soul. Whenever Gaston is impeded by some negative influence, it is represented as Circe, who delays Odysseus from his journey home, as Queen Margaret of Navarre, who keeps Gaston from becoming his better self. As the goal of Gaston is homeward geographically, it is simultaneously like a chronological reversal or transcendence to his birth-state or true self, which is "instinctively religious."

Yet as a hero Gaston must pass through episodes of influence and steer his soul amidst dangerous impressions. In *Marius* the narrative moves steadily towards religious transcendence, but in Gaston it is more dialectical, including almost as many steps backwards as forwards. Following his companions in the triumvirate (three school-friends), however, is an example of a need to come out from himself, as it were, where otherwise no real progress can be made, to pursue new influences to lead him to his perfected nature. The poet of the group, Jasmin, introduces Gaston to the "Odes" of Pierre de Ronsard, the leader of the literary movement the Pleiad. The word "influence" remarkably was first used as an astrological term, as it is written in Job 38:31: "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades or loose the bands of Orion?" (OED) The poetry of the Pleiad would work as strongly on Gaston and his friends, even against their will. In comparison to *Marius*, *Gaston* portrays a character who seems to have fewer options of selection and is therefore less active in choosing influences, seeming rather to gain them by accident. There is a less benign presence, even in the narrator. As in *Marius*, the narrator makes anachronistic references revealing a kind of omnipresence; and yet one does not get the sense he is advocating on the protagonist's behalf. The narrator is slightly indifferent, and cares almost as

much for describing the historical personages as describing Gaston's personal life, and how these figures influence him intellectually. Jasmin plays the equivalent role of Flavian in *Marius*, the poetic youth who leads one towards a book that enhances his love of physical beauty (36).

Personal Criticism

Gaston's interest in Ronsard's poetry brings him right to the poet himself, in the direction where all Pater's interest in the written word leads: from a written style to the author himself. One of Pater's characteristic gifts he gives readers in his fiction is portraying historical writers personally so that we may see them as he perceived them through the perspicacity of his literary criticism, which so often seeks the person.³⁴ We see this in *Marius* with Marcus Aurelius, Apuleius, and others. It is within the poet's presence that Gaston realizes that this particular edition of modernity has failed:

In spite of his pretension to the Epicurean conquest of a kingly indifference of mind, the portrait of twenty years ago betrayed, not less than the living face with its roving, astonished eyes, the haggard soul of a haggard generation, whose eagerly-sought refinements had been after all little more than a theatrical make-believe—an age of wild people, of insane impulse, of homicidal mania. The sweet-souled singer had no more than others attained real calm in it. Even in youth nervous distress had been the chief facial characteristic. (34)

The calmness, also revealed as tranquility and quietness, towards which Pater's ideal artist strives, is the surface upon which Pater's aesthetics meets ethics. Pater is looking back twenty years to Ronsard's beginning to see how his aesthetic made his soul haggard. If one would see this critical interpretation as analogously biographical, Pater looking back twenty years would find himself in 1868, when aestheticism was first making its name in England with Swinburne's essays, such as the one on Blake,

³⁴ We shall explore further what Pater means by "person" in our final chapter on *Plato*.

and Pater's own "Poems of William Morris." Pater may be trying to distance himself from the perception that he holds sympathy with certain schools of aestheticism.

Before leaving the company of Ronsard, the poet, "anxious for his intellectual furtherance" (35), writes him a letter to hand to Michel de Montaigne recommending his acquaintance. Gaston's intellectual furtherance is marked by his moving on from modernism to the home of Montaigne, where he will learn "of the Greek and Latin masters of style" (35).

Significantly he visits Montaigne alone because the essayist epitomizes the sanction of the egotist, as Gaston is now led towards the coming Renaissance, with "the old Gaulish desire to be mentally enfranchised by the sprightlier genius of Italy" (40). The narrator relates two desires of Montaigne: his emphasis on the individual, supported by the ideas of the ancients:

In those earlier days of the Renaissance, a whole generation had been exactly in the position in which Gaston now found himself. An older ideal, moral and religious, certain theories of man and nature actually in possession, still haunted humanity, at the very moment when it was called, through a full knowledge of the past, to enjoy the present with an unrestricted expansion of its own capacities. (42-43)

This return backwards in time, in order to expand the individual at present explains why he must separate from his friends, who represent modernity, to meet Montaigne. Although Montaigne's presence is strong and current, Pater persuades us that the writer's spirit, though ostensibly modern, results from his classical reading. His intellectual progress is empowered through accessing thought from the past.

It would seem that Montaigne strongly influences Pater's understanding of Platonism. He mentions Montaigne in "Joachim du Bellay" (1872) while discussing the author's ability to convey an "intimacy of sentiment" (*Renaissance* 173), and again in *Gaston* he sees an immediate relationship between a poet and Montaigne, an aspect of shared style. And the sentiment of Montaigne can be found dyed into the

fabric of the “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance* where we find the disgust for those who slavishly follow public opinion and the insipidity of those who abide too much with the custom of habit.

Montaigne’s Plato

Whenever Pater read Montaigne he surely would have found the thought of Plato among the ancients most often quoted, with Plutarch and Seneca, who are ever “at his elbow” (45 *Gaston*). With perhaps the exception of Cicero, Plato is referenced in the *Essays* more than anyone; and if we include Socrates as an extension of Plato, the philosopher is only the second leading figure to Montaigne himself. He several times refers to him as the divine Plato (I.51.223; II.12.400),³⁵ and he claims for Socrates the most perfect soul (II.11.308). The goal of the entire *Essays*, “to know thyself,” he always attributes to the goal of Plato, and of Socrates through Plato (I.3.8; II.5.275; III.13.823). Like Pater, Montaigne holds a capacious view of Platonism as a tendency, and denounces those who held the philosophy to be doctrinal. In “Apology for Raymond Sebond” (II:12), for example, he writes that Plato “makes no certain prescriptions” (339). In *Plato and Platonism*, Pater aligns himself with this mode of thinking, especially in consideration of Plato’s metaphysics, that “it is not so much a doctrine or theory, as a way of regarding and speaking of general terms” (150). Montaigne loosens traditional ties on Platonism, by indicating the many interpretations of the philosopher:

Moreover, some have considered Plato a dogmatist, others a doubter; others, in certain things the one, in certain things the other. The leader of his dialogues, Socrates, is always asking questions and stirring up discussion, never concluding, never satisfying; and says he has no other knowledge than that of opposing. . . . From Plato arose ten different sects, they say. And indeed, in my opinion, never was teaching wavering and noncommittal if his is not. (II.12.377)

³⁵ We reference Donald Frame’s translation of *The Complete Essays of Montaigne* (1976).

Pater does not hold Platonism so loosely, but Montaigne would have expanded his view of Plato's teaching. It might also be through reading the *Essays* that he considers Plato's interest in sensuality. Neoplatonism of the Renaissance focused on the mystical and spiritual longing in Platonism, but Montaigne declares, "Plato is much more Socratic than Pythagorean, and it becomes him better" (III.13.850); that is, more concerned with conduct and action. Pater concurs that "Socrates brought philosophy down from heaven to earth" (*Plato* 81), quoting Montaigne. Most importantly, it is from reading Montaigne no doubt that Pater develops a dual-stranded tradition of Platonism set forth in *Plato and Platonism*. On the one side he gives us the idealistic Platonists, such as Aristotle, Aquinas and the Schoolmen, Spinoza, Hegel, and the Neoplatonists from Proclus to Schelling. These thinkers focus upon the theory of Ideas and the vision it requires. On the other side he gives us the sceptical tradition, where Montaigne encamps, along with Lucian, Cicero, and Abelard. It may be Montaigne who leads Pater to the notion that Cicero is ever practising Academic doubt (II.12.370). Montaigne is really the representative type on the sceptical side of Platonism: "It is like the very trick and impress of the Platonic Socrates himself again, in those endless conversations of Montaigne—that typical sceptic of the age of the Renaissance" (*Plato* 194). By seeing Plato as an early practitioner of sceptical thinking Montaigne helps reveal Plato's relevance to the modern world:

And the sceptical philosopher of Bordeaux does but commence the modern world, which, side by side with its metaphysical reassertions, from Descartes to Hegel, side by side also with a constant accumulation of the sort of certainty which is afforded by empirical science, has had assuredly, to check wholesomely the pretensions of one and of the other alike, its doubts. (*Plato* 194)

The importance of Montaigne to Pater's understanding of Platonism, then, should not be underestimated. He helps provide a second leg for Plato without which he would not have stood so sturdily as the Abraham figure behind all other great philosophers.

Pater establishes Montaigne's motto for this side of Platonism: "*Que sais-je?*" it cries, in the words of Montaigne; but in the spirit also of the Platonic Socrates, with whom such dubitation had been nothing less than a religious duty or service" (*Plato* 195). The scepticism of Montaigne is not a profane doubt, but rather a suspension of certainty which clears space for hope to reside. In the *Essays*, when Montaigne reveals his motto to us, it is not surprising that it is revealed in a passage discussing Plato in "Apology for Raymond Sebond" (393). Plato is his exemplar of someone who lives by his motto, and Socrates is wiser for knowing that he does not know.

Accordingly the fifth chapter, which deals with Montaigne's influence on Gaston, is titled "Suspended Judgment." Montaigne, like all good teachers, teaches Gaston a method, of reserving judgment, in the manner of the Platonic Socrates:

And that new light was sure to lead him back very soon to his "governing method, ignorance"—an ignorance "strong and generous, and that yields nothing in honour and courage to knowledge; an ignorance, which to conceive requires no less knowledge than to conceive knowledge itself"—a sapient, instructed, shrewdly ascertained ignorance, suspended judgment, doubt everywhere. Balances, very delicate balances:—he was partial to that image of equilibrium, or preponderance, in things. . . . To Gaston there was a kind of fascination, an actually aesthetic beauty, in the spectacle of that keen-edged intelligence, dividing evidence so finely, like some exquisite steel instrument, with impeccable sufficiency, always leaving the last word loyally to the central intellectual faculty, in an entire disinterestedness. (*Gaston* 53)

This description in *Gaston* is similar to Pater's explanation of dialectic in *Plato*. In the chapter leading up to "Suspended Judgment," where Gaston first meets Montaigne, "Peach-blossom and Wine," the narrator makes an immediate connection between the essayist and Plato: "For him, as for Plato, for Socrates, whom he cites so often, the

essential dialogue was that of the mind with itself" (*Gaston* 44). Thus it is so important to "know thyself," because internal dialogue is the method to knowledge. And both *Gaston* and *Plato* qualify that the dialogue with oneself is contributed to by conversations with others. And yet, Pater does not dramatize conversation between Montaigne and *Gaston*. It is as though influence from a person comes rather in hindsight, as if one were re-reading their words. Pater's method of forming the characters of these historical figures, through his own literary interpretation, seems to render the actual meeting of *Gaston* with them rather superfluous, for he might have gained as much through reading his *Essays*.

The view of dialectic that Pater sees shared by Plato and Montaigne is a form of scepticism, but a qualified form of scepticism. The judgment being suspended is not the affirmation, but the denial. It is the suspension of disbelief. Pater emphasises Montaigne's religious nature:

The irregular, the unforeseen, the inconsecutive, miracle, accident, he noted lovingly: it had a philosophic import. It was habit rather than knowledge of them that took away the strangeness of the things actually about one. How many unlikely matters there were, testified by persons worthy of faith, "which, if we cannot persuade ourselves to believe, we ought at least to leave in suspense.—Though all that had arrived by report of past time should be true, it would be less than nothing in comparison of what is unknown." (*Gaston* 51)

Pater's reproof of blind allegiance to habit takes a new direction here than that of the "Conclusion" perhaps. Where habit there dulls one from the attention of beauty and what is real, habit here dumbs us to religious phenomena that give faith. In both, habit keeps us from recognizing what is real. The statement's counsel towards hope reminds one of Pater's letter to Mrs Humphry, or Mary, Ward in 1885, where he speaks of a sort of religious hopefulness as "a great factor in life." "To my mind, the beliefs, and the function of the world," we writes, "of the historic church, form just one of those obscure but all-important possibilities, which the human mind is

powerless effectively to dismiss from itself; and might wisely accept, in the first place, as a workable hypothesis” (Evans 64). He gives a fuller articulation of this idea to a review of *Robert Elsmere* (1888) by Ward—a friend and neighbour—owing the religious sentiment, as he does in *Marius*, to a philosophical method:

Robert Elsmere was a type of a large class of minds which cannot be sure that the sacred story is true. It is philosophical, doubtless, and a duty to the intellect to recognize our doubts, to locate them, perhaps to give them practical effect. It may be also a moral duty to do this. But then there is also a large class of minds which cannot be sure if it is false—minds of very various degrees of conscientiousness and intellectual power, up to the highest. They will think those who are quite sure it is false un-philosophical through lack of doubt. For their part, they make allowance in their scheme of life for a great possibility, and with some of them that bare concession of possibility (the subject of it being what it is) becomes the most important fact in the world. The recognition of it straightway opens wide the door of hope and love; and such persons are, as we fancy they always will be, the nucleus of the Church. Their particular phase of doubt, of philosophic uncertainty, has been the secret of millions of good Christians, multitudes of worthy priests. They knit themselves to believers, in various degrees, of all ages. (“*Guardian*” 67-68)

In order to comprehend the importance of doubt to the philosophical imagination we ought to consider the very strong wording that accepting the possibility “becomes the most important fact in the world.” The choice of the word “fact,” meaning deed or act, gives it a concrete and positive existence, rather than being an open space, like an absence, with the possibility of being filled by something in the future. This concession for possibility is not to be replaced necessarily by a more certain future state of mind, but is itself an entity of faith that may already sustain one.

In the manner Pater sees Montaigne as the key practitioner of hopeful scepticism, Montaigne places the Platonic Socrates in the role of always willing to claim ignorance in the largest matters. Such a method Montaigne more fully explains in “Apology for Raymond Sebond”: “His is a blank tablet prepared to take from the finger of God such forms as he shall be pleased to engrave on it. The more we cast

ourselves back on God and commit ourselves to him, and renounce ourselves, the better we are” (375). Pater sees this lesson as Montaigne’s enduring influence on Gaston. When Gaston first approaches the essayist he gains a conventional opinion of Montaigne, even in Pater’s day, that he is a relativistic thinker and therefore dangerous; but this is later overturned in hindsight.

The narrator of *Gaston* declares there are two great surprises in Montaigne’s life: the reading of classics and Etienne de la Boétie, his great friend. His two loves are of course not unrelated for Pater, for his classical reading is as intimate to him as knowing a person: “But the classical reading, which with others was often but an affectation, seducing them from the highest to a lower degree of reality, from men to women to their mere shadows in old books, had been for him nothing less than personal contact” (*Gaston* 50). Montaigne travels in the opposite direction, to a greater “degree of reality,” not to mere shadows, but rather to the person. He ascends through reading.

The intimacy of his style, perhaps even for its sake, for Pater calls him “a lover of style” (*Gaston* 44), allows the reader to witness some of the intimate charm upon which his friendship with Etienne de La Boétie was built, one of the literary world’s great friendships. And it is after all a literary friendship, for Montaigne is drawn to La Boétie’s through reading the latter’s *La Servitude Volontaire* (I.28.136). Such was his habit: “And every day I amuse myself reading authors without any care for their learning, looking for their style, not their subject. Just as I seek the company of some famous mind, not to have him teach me, but to come to know him” (III.8.708). Through the written word first he traced his way back to that soul who was the great intellectual fortune of his life, a friendship, he said, we might see once in three centuries. Like the interpreters in Plato’s *Ion*, he is drawn to the author’s soul with

“magnetic” force. “For once, his sleepless habit of analysis had been checked by the inexplicable, the absolute,” writes Pater: “amid his jealously guarded indifference of soul he had been summoned to yield, and had yielded, to the magnetic power of another” (51 *Gaston*). The irrationality of soul before the dominion of another’s resembles the irrationality of an artist when he is truly inspired by that enthusiasm for the Muses. Montaigne’s “sleepless habit” is broken and his soul is touched by another in an act of Platonic love.

Pater recalls this Platonic notion as key to Montaigne’s thought: “As Plato had said, ‘twas to no purpose for a sober-minded man to knock at the door of poesy,’ or, if truth were spoken, of any other high matter of doing or making” (*Gaston* 49). Montaigne undergoes the *mania* of the lover in the *Phaedrus*. Although the Platonic fury instilled in one typically reveals itself through poetry, Pater expands the occurrence to suit prose:

In art, as in poetry, there are the “transports” which lift the artist out of, as they are not of, himself; for orators also, “those extraordinary motions which sometimes carry them above their design.” Himself, “in the necessity and heat of combat,” had sometimes made answers that went “through and through,” beyond hope. The work, by its own force and fortune, sometimes out-strips the workman. And then, in defiance of the proprieties, whereas poets sometimes “flag, and languish in a prosaic manner,” prose will shine with the lustre, vigour and boldness, with the “fury,” of poetry. (*Gaston* 51-52)

The writer of prose for Pater being susceptible as much as poets to Platonic transports does not surprise us, but it is specifically important that he sees Montaigne espousing this view also, for he is the preeminent essay writer, the form Pater claims as best suited to replace dialogues. His artistic inspiration is described as a sort of religious faith, “beyond hope.”

Pater practises this literary sympathy himself in writing of Montaigne, and recreating his person in *Gaston*. Although *Gaston* reads Ronsard before he meets him,

the reverse occurs with Montaigne. Gaston meets Montaigne and converses with him long before he reads him, for his essays during that time were still to be composed. In fact, influence is supposed to run the other way, for rather than meeting an artist whose best work is behind him, Gaston now influences, to a moderate degree, the future work ahead of an artist. Like many readers who invest much in Montaigne psychologically, Gaston takes residency with him literally, to convey a deep sympathy. Pater reminds us that he “wrote for companionship, ‘if but one sincere man would make his acquaintance’; speaking on paper as he ‘did to the first person he met.’—‘If there be any person, any knot of good company, in France or elsewhere, who can like my humour, and whose humours I can like, let them but whistle, and I will run’” (*Gaston* 44). It seems Pater would answer Montaigne’s call. Pater exhibits the same skill for which he praises Montaigne, the strength of imagination to personally understand someone through his writings. “Those essays, as happens with epoch-marking books, were themselves a life, the power which makes them what they are having accumulated in them imperceptibly by a thousand repeated modifications, like character in a person” (43). It is the subtle motions of the individual soul, their tempers, which interests Pater, which he may recognize in the manner they express themselves in writing. And with Gaston Pater tries to create a character that would perhaps interest Montaigne, with a rich internal life. Montaigne reveals this preference, writing, “Now those who write biographies, since they spend more time on plans than on events, more on what comes from within than on what happens without, are most suited to me” (II.10.303). Pater would have seen in Montaigne also the Platonic perception that one’s essence is more than what one does, not the conventional Aristotelian character, but something deeper, a pith of being, beyond the physical world, for when speaking on conscience the essayist writes, “It is not my

deeds that I write down; it is myself, it is my essence” (II.5.274). Pater shares a similar view when he says it is not *doing* which is important but *being*, in his Wordsworth essay.

To discuss another aspect of Montaigne’s relationship with Etienne de La Boétie, it is compared to one of the Platonic models of love from the *Symposium*: ““We were halves throughout,”” Pater quotes Montaigne, ““so that methinks by outliving him I defraud him of his part. I was so grown to be always his double in all things that methinks I am no more than half of myself. There is no action or thought of mine wherein I do not miss him, as I know that he would have missed me”” (*Gaston* 51). The speech of Aristophanes in the *Symposium* describes how men, women, and hermaphrodites, were split in two by the gods for their impiety (190e), causing these split beings to search for their other halves, where, if they again find each other, they embraced futilely until they perished. When Zeus took pity on the poor divided beings he provided them parts for copulation with one another so they could reproduce (191b-c 141). “Thus anciently is mutual love ingrained in mankind, reassembling our early estate and endeavouring to combine two in one and heal the human sore” (191d Lamb). The men who pursue men are said to have the finest and “most manly nature,” and be best suited to a public life. They want to be joined in the closest possible union, as long as they live, so that they share one life, are in fact one, rather than two (192b-e). In order not to be separated again we must now revere Love and try to find our favourite, whose nature is exactly to our mind (nous). The god will restore us to our ancient life, heal us and help us into the happiness of the blest (193 a-d). Pater’s criticism might be modelled on this union of souls—love might provide motivation for some of his critical appreciations. One mind can really know a person through reading, and thus intellectually unite with them in sympathy.

The idea of getting back something lost, an inheritance of knowledge returned to oneself, through acquaintance with another, which is really one's self, a return to wholeness, as we see in Winckelmann, through the uniting of two souls, may explain the importance of Montaigne's intimacy of style.

Gaston stays a very significant nine months with Montaigne. And again, in our search for influence between the fictional character and the author himself, we find evidence that points to Plato. Montaigne reminds us of how Plato uses the metaphor of gestation for philosophy:

Socrates used to say that the wise women, on taking up the practice of making others give birth, abandon the practice of giving birth themselves; that he, by the title of wise man that the gods conferred on him, has also done away, in his virile and mental love, with his faculty of begetting, and contents himself with aiding and favoring with his help those who are in labor, opening their organs, greasing their conduits, facilitating the issue of their offspring, judging it, baptizing it, nursing it, strengthening it, swaddling and circumscribing it; exercising and employing his skill upon the perils and fortunes of others. (II.12.377)

In the long daily conversations the essayist has with Gaston, we may see a similar maieutic method at work. The opening of organs in order to attain a deeper sort of knowledge is especially aligned with Pater's language of learning. We can again turn to the influence of the *Symposium* on Montaigne, for the explanations of love found there. Socrates explains that Love is a seeker of wisdom (204b), and that "love loves the good to be one's own for ever" (206a Lamb). He explains that all men are pregnant, and engendering is a divine affair, so when they feel themselves in the presence of the beautiful, "its possessor can relieve him of his heavy pangs" (206c-e Lamb). This pregnant feeling comes from wanting to give birth in beauty forever and to partake of immortality (208b). Though everyone is in love with immortality, he explains that those teeming in body give birth with a woman and are therefore amorous (ερωτικοί), but those who are teeming in soul want to give birth in prudence

(φρόνησίν)³⁶ and virtue (αρετήν) in general, and these begetters (γεννήτορες) are the poets (ποιηταί) and craftsmen (δημιουργων) called inventors or discoverers (ευρετικοί). The word we translate as craftsman, demiurge, is highly revered in Platonism, and thus exalts the role of artist.³⁷

In this instance the offspring of these more noble begetters, poets and craftsmen, are not children but works of art. In the “kindled and enkindling words on love and friendship in the *Symposium*” (120), as Pater calls them in his book on Plato:

when a man’s soul is so far divine (ψυχήν θεϊος) that it is made pregnant with these from his youth, and on attaining manhood immediately desires (επιθυμη) to bring forth and to beget, he too, I imagine, goes about seeking the beautiful object (περιων το καλον) whereon he may do his begetting, since he will never beget upon the ugly. . . . and straightway in addressing such a person he is resourceful in discoursing of virtue and of what should be the good man’s character and what his pursuits; and so he takes in hand the other’s education (επιχειρει παιδεύειν). For I hold that by contact with the fair one and by consorting (του καλου και ‘ομιλων αυτω) with him he bears and brings forth his long-felt conception (μεμνημένος), because in presence or absence he remembers him fair. Equally too with him he shares the nurturing of what is begotten, so that men in this condition enjoy a far fuller community with each other than that which comes with children, and a far fairer friendship (φιλίαν βεβαιοτέραν), since the children of their union (κεκοινωνηκότες) are fairer and more deathless. Every one would choose to have got children such as these rather than the human sort—merely from turning a glance upon Homer and Hesiod and all the other good poets, and envying the fine offspring they leave behind to procure them a glory immortally renewed in the memory of men. (209b-d Lamb)

This maieutic process involves recollection (*memnesis*), for with the help of another you can articulate your soul. Gaston feels that Ronsard articulates thoughts he has yet to say, but Montaigne is his greater companion because his communion helps him articulate his own. Montaigne is also familiar with this idea of a literary child, writing at one point, “I do not know whether I would not like much better to have produced one perfectly formed child by intercourse with the muses than by intercourse with my

³⁶ This may also be translated as “wisdom”—Arnold would say soberness.

³⁷ In *Timaeus* the maker of all things, who is often substituted as God in Christian terms, is called the demiurge. The Demiurge is also called *Nous* or the Divine Mind.

wife” (II.8.293). The muses perhaps help generate his *Essays*, but without Etienne de La Boétie they should never have been fully born. The man changed Montaigne’s temper, as Pater remarks in quoting him: “Actually, we may think, the ‘sweet society’ of those four years, in comparison with which ‘the rest of his so pleasant life was but smoke,’ had touched Montaigne’s nature with refinements it might otherwise have lacked” (*Gaston* 51). And it was a role nobody else could have fulfilled in quite the same way for Montaigne: “In the friendship I speak of,” writes Montaigne, “our souls mingle and blend with each other so completely that they efface the seam that joined them, and cannot find it again. If you press me to tell why I loved him, I feel that this cannot be expressed, except by answering: Because it was he, because it was I” (I.28.139).

We may ask now how much Pater’s writing of *Gaston de Latour* is an engendering of his contact with Montaigne. Speaking of dialogue in *Plato*, in relation to Montaigne, Pater declares his *Essays* also reflect conversations “with the dead through their writings” (194), as does *Gaston*. In the pattern of de La Boétie or de la Montaigne, de Latour, or “de la tour,” may be understood as “of the tower,” Montaigne’s tower specifically, where he did all his reading and writing, and where Gaston spent much time with him. His tower is also like an ivory tower, where one secludes himself from the world. Our modern use of the term was first used by one of Pater’s favourite critics, Charles Sainte-Beuve, in “Pensées d’Août, à M. Villemain” (1837) (O.E.D), in order to describe the more quiet habits of the poet in comparison with the more socially active Victor Hugo. “*Tour*” also means turn, and may allude to one’s temperament and the choices one makes in life that determine character. *Gaston* the character is partially the offspring of this union, whose name roots him ever to a shared place, as the novel seeks to explore even the physical influence of landscape

upon one. Although said to be from the more northern region of La Beauce, “Gaston” means a man from Gascony, the region wherein lies Montaigne’s home, Bordeaux. He is a stranger in his own land, then, for the name Gaston de Latour makes him more properly the son of Montaigne. The other father is Pater. Pater at least will return again to Montaigne to discuss a shared influence in *Plato and Platonism*. The sympathetic understanding of Platonism is what makes this literary engendering possible, for it is the model beneath their work, upon which one can imagine the union. It is the model and indeed part of the sympathy.

“Suspended Judgment” is the last chapter of *Gaston* that Pater approved for publication. In many ways the book ends there. But to what does Gaston give birth? The chapters that follow “Suspended Judgment” after Pater’s death are like a strange child, of Pater’s paternity, but not quite brought to maturity.

Wisdom Literature

Gaston leaves Montaigne’s tower. Unfortunately he must now go out to make his own mistakes in the world. His education, originally religious, formed within grand cathedrals, poetic under the influence of Ronsard, philosophical under the influence of Montaigne, seems complete. “The Shadows of Events” seem to be the consequence of the thought then present, yet the manifestation of the savagery on the Eve of St Bartholomew 1572, where Catholics kill thousands of Huguenots in Paris and the provinces, seems unexplainable. While influence cannot be traced in the madness of the time, Gaston’s own actions are mirrored in the actions of the larger world. Personally, Gaston suffers misery when he is called home to the bedside of his ill grandfather the night of the murders, leaving behind a vulnerable woman carrying his child, a Huguenot, left to survive for herself among the onslaught. Although he is coerced into marrying her, their relationship is described as a “vagrant love” (65). The

woman's name, "Columbe," meaning dove, signifies peace, but his treatment of her would deny him any for long into the future. Perhaps the narrator has another engendering in mind during these chapters where he is trying to move the plot, expanding it out to the society. The ideas of individuals have an effect on others, as Gaston's frivolousness with the woman results in both life and abandonment of life.

Yet the story quickly loses its materiality, as though a mere foray was made so that the narrative could endure. The epigraph to chapter seven, "The Lower Pantheism," to reflect the spiritualization of the material world, is from Heinrich Heine's "Mountain Idyll" "The Harz Journey" (1824), wherein the speaker declares he puts all his "faith now / Firmly in the Holy Ghost" (*Gaston* 179). The influences on Gaston are now more like the far off influences of his religious youth, from beyond, for they are not concrete and resound rather with the mystical Books of Wisdom, specifically the Song of Solomon:

The gracious Pentecostal fire seemed to be in alliance with the sweet, warm, relaxing winds of that later, securer season, bringing their spicy burden from unseen sources. Into the close world, like a walled garden, about him, influences from the remotest time and space found their way, travelling unerringly on their long journeys as if straight to him, with the assurance that things were not wholly left to themselves; yet so unobtrusively that a little later the transforming spiritual agency would be discernible at most in the grateful cry of an innocent child, in some good deed of a bad man, or unlooked-for gentleness in a rough one, in the occasional turning to music of a rude voice At times it was as if a legion of spirits besieged his door: '*Open unto me! Open unto me! My sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled!*' And one result, certainly, of this constant prepossession was that it kept him on the alert concerning theories of the divine assistance to man, and the world,—theories of inspiration. (69-70)

The repetition of the word "influence" in this passage reveals that Pater is trying to offer a third possibility: neither one's philosophy as guide, nor the people who surround one, but a mystical presence that may harmonize both the material and immaterial realm: a spiritualism in things' very being. The references to the Song of

Songs carry much meaning for the following chapters. The mystical religious book is a difficult narrative of chasing one's desire, at once visceral and metaphorical. In Christian hermeneutics it is often supposed to tell of the relationship between God and the Church. The "close world, like a walled garden" described above resembles the beloved's cry that "I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers: then was I in his eyes as one that found favour" (Song 8:10). It symbolizes the shelter he seeks for his soul. We must also not overlook the call of, "My sister, my love, my dove," which unmistakably recalls Columbe, a dove, alluding to her as sororial rather than a lover. Perhaps Pater is establishing an analogy here between the Catholic Gaston's "vagrant" though "official" love with the Huguenot girl, and his relationship with the Church.

The Platonism of Giordano Bruno

The fluidity of life and literature is of course a major component in Pater's fiction. In August of 1889, he published an essay on Giordano Bruno in *The Fortnightly Review*. Although Pater never finally approved its publication in the novel, Charles Shadwell included it with "Shadows of Events" as the last two chapters of the book published in 1896. The chapter in Gaston reads so much like a work of criticism that you forget you are reading a novel. Yet it is not what you would expect: that the chapter came from the earlier essay; in fact the reverse is true, it was originally written for the novel, so Pater states in a letter (Evans 102). The article was cut out from the unfinished chapter on Gaston. This implies he intends the effect he achieved: the reader is absorbed with the thought of Bruno, while Gaston is out of view. To show the strong influence of Bruno on Gaston, readers would experience it for themselves. Yet although the chapter on Bruno, and Montaigne to a much lesser extent, may read like stand-alone essays, they were written under the motivation of

moving *Gaston's* narrative. And as we see in *Marius*, many parts of the novel that read like literary essays aim to move the plot internally, within the characters' mind.

Like we see in *The Renaissance* with Pico della Mirandola, Bruno's story is special in itself. His thought and personal narrative are inseparable. The story of Giordano Bruno, though told, in effect, to explain his thought's influence upon Gaston, exists also as a shorter parallel narrative. He and Gaston have similar beginnings, having been drawn from a young age into the religious life. Like Montaigne and Gaston, Bruno is likewise nursed on the old pagan writers: "this curious youth, in that age of restored letters, read eagerly, easily, and very soon came to the kernel of a difficult old author, Plato or Plotinus" (72). Pater seems to capture supremely Bruno's Platonism by "Plato or Plotinus," for in his mind, as in many Neoplatonists, the two really complement each other. Bruno's *De Umbris Idearum*, one of the two works Pater lists, holds the philosophers in a single system. Although Plato supplies the foundation, Plotinus becomes an extension of him, with such liberties it is difficult to say whose philosophy is being followed. Plotinus' philosophy has the goal of attaining mystical union with the One, God, through Beauty. Yet to show how foundational Bruno's actual Platonism is in Pater's opinion, Bruno is also influenced by those who, in *Plato and Platonism*, greatly influence Plato, "Empedocles, for instance, Pythagoras, Parmenides, above all, that most ancient assertor of God's identity with the world" (72). He describes Bruno growing strong, even prideful, with these ideas, his vision of God in the world all around him, with Platonic "winged," enthusiasm: "Winged, fortified, by that central philosophic faith, the student proceeds to the detailed reading of nature, led on from point to point by manifold lights, which will surely strike on him, by the way, from the intelligence in it, speaking directly, sympathetically, to a like intelligence in him" (76). Pater

interestingly sets “faith” beside “philosophic” here, extending his discussion of Montaigne’s Suspicion of Judgment—the wisdom of maintaining space for the divine. “Point to point” is another marker of the Platonic figure, which we saw in our first chapter regarding the diaphanous soul and “Winckelmann,” who holds up a light in his age and creates a connection of like souls that raise up culture throughout history. A lover of Platonic souls might be led throughout history from point to point in intellectual enthusiasm. “And by such a philosophy, Bruno assures us, it was his experience that the soul was greatly expanded: *con questa filosofia l’anima mi s’aggrandisce; mi se magnifica l’intelletto!*” (73).³⁸ His literal “enthusiasm,” his thoughts actually being “God *in* man,” in the monotheism of Christianity makes him seem puffed-up with pride. The narrative is strikingly similar to Mirandola’s, the talented youth that falls to hubris, that narrative Pater is so fond of exploring, like the Romantic Prometheus or Phaethon, the Platonic Alcibiades, or the very Adam of the Garden. Bruno’s pantheistic doctrine may unknowingly advise one to “eat freely of all the trees of the garden of Paradise, with the voice of the Lord God literally everywhere” (78). Gaston, too, sees himself as fallen by this chapter, “The Lower Pantheism.” But what makes Bruno especially interesting to Pater is his aesthetic progression from physical beauty towards intellectual beauty. Like Winckelmann, who is “lover and philosopher at once,” Bruno reminds Pater, “*À filosofia è necessario amore*” (Love is necessary for philosophy) (76). “From those first fair days of early Greek speculation,” writes Pater:

love had occupied a large space in the conception of philosophy; and in after days Bruno was fond of developing, like Plato, like the Christian Platonists, combining something of the peculiar temper of each, the analogy between the flights of intellectual enthusiasm and those of physical love, with animation which shows clearly enough the reality of his experience in the latter. (75)

³⁸ “With this philosophy my mind was enlarged and the intellect increased,” (qtd. in Monsman 182).

His narrative appeals to Pater because it is not a straight progression, but includes setbacks. The very form of *The Heroic Furies* (*De gli eroici furori*), an alternation of poetry and prose, gives itself, at least initially to physical love, so that a later intellectual gloss can correct one's direction, and help the narrative ascend. "Yet if it is after all but a prose comment," writes Pater

it betrays no original lack of the sensuous or poetic fire. That there is no single name of preference, no Beatrice or Laura, by no means proves the young man's earlier desires to have been merely Platonic; and if the colours of love inevitably lose a little of their force and propriety by such deflection from their earlier purpose, their later intellectual purpose as certainly finds its opportunity thereby, in the matter of borrowed fire and wings. (75)

Again Pater is trying to include prose among inspired writing, as we saw in his portrait of Montaigne. Progression is a dual motion, and in a way the passion is usurped by abstraction. Pater also emphasizes the restraint of scholarship, the reign of second-thoughts upon impulse: "A kind of old scholastic pedantry creeping back over the ardent youth who had thrown it off so defiantly (as if love himself went in now for a University degree) Bruno develops, under the mask of amorous verse, all the various stages of abstraction, by which, as the last step of a long ladder, the mind attains actual 'union'" (75). The personification of Love suggests there is something in its nature that is given to become intellectualized, as here it might go in for a university degree. In Bruno's Neoplatonic conception of love it must absolutely become intellectualized, and increasingly by yearning for the immaterial because it longs for nothing but union with God. As man is created by God, he wants to return to his creator (75). As a lover and philosopher the physical and intellectual grow together: "There would be degrees of progress therein, as of course also of relapse: joys and sorrows, therefore. And, in interpreting these, the philosopher, whose intellectual ardours have superseded religion and physical love, is still a lover and a monk" (76).

The lapse after the climb and recovery is the theme in *Gaston*, acted out much more than in *Marius*. But similar tendencies are repeated, as we saw in the monk and lover in *The Renaissance*. We ought to remark also that, as in *The Renaissance*, Pater does not distance his subjects by calling them “Neoplatonic.”

Bruno’s *De gli eroici furori* (1585) tells the tale of a soul striving to ascend to its supreme unity in the One. “For, as with the purely religious mystics,” Pater explains “‘union,’ the mystic union of souls with one another and their Lord, nothing less than the union between the contemplator and the contemplated—the reality, or the sense, or at least the name of such union—was always at hand” (*Gaston* 75). The contemplated is God and the contemplator is the seeking lover. And the same model, according to Pater, allows fellow souls to have union with each other. The term “hero” as Bruno understands it is said to derive not only from its accepted origin, from Homer, ἥρωες, the great warriors of which he sang; but also ἔρωες as described by Plato in the *Phaedrus* (251d), as a sort of love-sickness that rages within one and pains them. Early Greek medical texts and Constantine’s *Viaticanus*, a fourth-century codex of the Greek Bible, translate ἔρωες as heroes in descriptions of love’s malady (Memmo 17). Plato himself believes ἥρωες comes from ἔρωες in the *Cratylus*. Socrates says: “Why, they were all born because a god fell in love with a mortal woman, or a mortal man with a goddess. Now if you consider the word ‘hero,’ also in the old Attic pronunciation, you will understand better; for that will show you that it has been only slightly altered from the name of love (Eros) (ἔρωτος), the source from which the heroes spring, to make a name for them” (398d Fowler). The tradition continues, with Bruno, and Marsilio Ficino, like “Bernardus Gordonius of Montpellier [1258-1318] and John of Gaddesden of Oxford [circa 1280-1360] both term the love malady, *amor heroycus*, *heroic love*, and treat its causes, signs, prognosis and cure” (Memmo 17-

18). The belief can even be seen in the *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) by Robert Burton, a one-time student at Brasenose College, who discusses love-sickness and its cure (Memmo 17).

Some of these ideas are important to the narrative of *Gaston*. Gaston may easily fall into this category of hero, as a lover searching for his object, and as an Odyssean pilgrim, like one of Homer's heroes. And he is abject with guilt at the loss of his wife and child, and seems to let life pass by in search for meaning. He is love-sick, because he cannot attain what he desires, and, worse, he does not even know yet what he desires. *Furori*, or frenzies, may be seen in the madness of the time in which he lives, the external influence upon him, in the haematomania of Charles IX, for example, and the lusts of Margaret of Navarre.

Yet there is another sort of frenzy, a gift from the gods. Bruno takes the word from Plato's *Phaedrus* also, originally μαντική, the art of prophecy, combining *mania*, a god-inspired madness (244c). Such madness is said to be required if one seeks contact with the Muses:

This takes hold upon a gentle and pure soul, arouses it and inspires it to songs and other poetry, and thus by adorning countless deeds of the ancients educates (παιδεύει) later generations. But he who without the divine madness comes to the doors of the Muses, confident that he will be a good poet by art (τέχνη), meets with no success, and the poetry of the sane man vanishes into nothingness before that of the inspired madmen (μαινομένων). (245a Fowler)

And of course the madness is empowered always by love. Such "fury" is also ascribed to the prose of Montaigne (52). Pater creates a narrative voice and submits a character, as a gentle soul (άβατον ψυχήν), to the events of history, irretrievable but by posthumous account, and to imagine Gaston's new story interwoven among its ethereal record would indeed require some acceptance of the irrational. Like Bruno he is going over old accounts and, by commenting upon them, making them new; he

combines at least two genres, interspersing fiction and criticism, with a poetic kind of prose.

In *Gaston* Pater weaves two Neoplatonic idioms into his narrative, thereby aligning himself in their tradition. As the goal in the Platonism of Plotinus is for the soul to find “union” in God, or the Divine Mind, *Nous*, which is accessed through the individual soul; as that state, because it is conceived as our origin, is a journey home, a natural analogy can be made with *The Odyssey*. The hero is akin to a warrior, who, for the sake of love, must fight his way back home. Naturally, Circe, as a seducer of Odysseus towards earthly pleasure, comes to represent the distraction of the hero’s soul. Thomas Taylor’s very influential “An Essay on the Beautiful” (1792), a translation of Plotinus’ Ennead 1.6, the first English translation, is a good example of this heroic Platonism. Of what he calls in his introduction, “the ancient Heroes of Philosophy,” Taylor translates a later passage:

“Let us depart from hence, and fly to our father’s delightful land.” But, by what leading stars shall direct our flight, and by what means avoid the magic power of Circe, and the detaining charms of Calypso? For thus the fable of Ulysses obscurely signifies, which feigns him abiding an unwilling exile, though pleasant spectacles were continually presented to his sight; and everything was promised to invite his stay which can delight the senses, and captivate the heart. But our true country, like that of Ulysses, is from whence we came, and where our father lives. But where is the ship to be found by which we can accomplish our flight? For our feet are unequal to the task since they only take us from one part of the earth to another. (37)

In a footnote to this passage Taylor adds that, in Porphyry’s (234-305) *De Antro Nymph*, Numenius the Pythagorean declares that Ulysses represents man in stormy seas whose soul is detained in the cavern of Calypso (*De Antro Nymph*), from whom, with the help of Mercury, the emblem of reason, he will escape and find “the arms of Penelope, or Philosophy, the long lost proper object of his love.” Bruno several times refers to Circe in *The Heroic Fruries*, who, in this regard, “represents the generative

matter of all things” to him (Memmo 75).³⁹ Pater refers to Bruno’s own “heroism” and calls him a “knight-errant of intellectual light” (*Gaston* 79), making the narrative more universal by bearing the Homeric within the mediaeval and changing the goal from victory in battle to knowledge. Although Circe exists in several forms, such as Margaret of Navarre, if we follow the analogy, it seems possible that Penelope will be the Church, either Protestant or Catholic. Even more suitable perhaps would be the possible reunion with his son, whom he generated so long ago in sin, his Telemachus, as Monsman conjectures (“Abandoned Text” 116), whose meeting, we might fancy, means “the end of the fight,” and also marks for him his long desired peace.

Another tradition Pater shares with Bruno is the absorption of the books of Wisdom into the quest narrative of the heroes, especially the Song of Songs. There is an old belief perhaps begun by Alexandrian Fathers that Platonism may be found especially in those works of the Bible ascribed to Solomon (Lange 302). Pater is well aware of the tradition, referring to Pico della Mirandola’s desire to reconcile the Old Testament and Plato in *The Renaissance*, and much later, in “The Age of the Athletic Prizemen” (1894), he refers to “those prophetic words of Wisdom . . . the *sapiential*, half-Platonic books of Hebrew Scriptures” (*Greek Studies* 298-99). We have seen already evidence of the narrator referring to the Song of Solomon, in relation to Gaston’s wife, Columbe, about which Bruno confesses: “to deliver all from such suspicion, I thought at first of giving to this book a title similar to the book of Solomon which under the guise of lovers and ordinary passions contains similarly divine and heroic frenzies, as the mystics and cabbalistic doctors interpret; I wished, in fact, to call it *Canticle*” (Memmo 62). And he from time to time quotes from the Biblical *Canticles*, or Songs. Discussing the goal of Bruno’s heroes Pater explains:

³⁹ Translated by Paul Eugene Memmo Jr.

“To unite one’s self to the infinite by largeness and lucidity of intellect, to enter, by that admirable faculty, into eternal life—this was the true vocation of ‘the spouse,’ of the rightly amorous soul” (*Gaston* 75-76). The spouse is unmistakably an inclusion of the Song of Solomon into the mystical search for union in something greater than oneself.

The Psalms also may be called upon to depict that heroic desire: “Whence that instinctive tendency towards union,” writes Gaston’s narrator, “if not from the Creator of things himself, who has doubtless prompted it in the physical universe, as in man? How familiar the thought that the whole creation, not less than the soul of man, longs for God ‘as the hart for the water-brooks!’” (75). Although this quotation is from Psalm 42, the hart recalls the hunted beloved again in the Song of Solomon, “My beloved is like a roe or a young hart” (2:9). Pater uncharacteristically puns on this same Neoplatonic Biblical image when discussing Bruno’s desire for experience, not wanting to limit “the great stream flowing for thirsty souls, that wide pasture set ready for the hungry heart” (*Gaston* 77). In this sense, the hero is the thirsty hart, thirsty for God ultimately, who, by Bruno’s theory, may be accessed through all things. The “great stream flowing” reminds us of literally what influence is, from *fluere*, to flow into. According to Plotinus, everything flows from God.

Bruno actually brings *Gaston* to Oxford, for the Italian spent two years in England from 1583 to 1585 and, by his own account, lectured at the University. Perhaps the relation between Bruno and Montaigne is more natural than first appears, as, while in England, Bruno befriended John Florio, the first translator of the *Essays* into English (1603). In *Cena de le ceneri* (1584) Bruno declares he became embroiled in a fierce debate with a doctor of theology and was banned from giving further lectures at Oxford. Frances A. Yates has explained how this dispute was due to the

entrenched Aristotelianism then at the University (227). Aristotelianism amounted to a scholastic orthodoxy then from which any vagrancy could get one accused of Popism (Pellegrini 308). Bruno said he preferred the metaphysics of mediaeval Oxford, before the Reformation, to the grammar of Renaissance Oxford (Yates 233). Something of his opinion may be seen by a comment he makes in *The Heroic Furies*, that, “by the favor of the ignorant multitude (to whose wit they more conform) these grammarians can so well give the final blow to the letters and observations of Aristotle, just as Aristotle himself was the hangman of other divine philosophers” (Memmo 219). The divine philosophers are specifically Plato and those who influenced him, such as Pythagoras, Parmenides, Socrates, and the Presocratics.

Although Pater places Bruno in “Paris: 1586,” as he subtitled his article, he discusses a similar conflict between the institution’s slavish Aristotelianism and the both old and new learning that considered metaphysical matters:

So much of a Platonist, for Plato’s genial humour he had nevertheless substituted the harsh laughter of Aristophanes. Paris, teeming, beneath a very courtly exterior, with mordant words, in unabashed criticism of all real or suspected evil, provoked his utmost powers of scorn for the ‘Triumphant Beast,’ the ‘Installation of the Ass,’ shining even there amid the university folk—those intellectual bankrupts of the Latin Quarter, who had so long passed between them so gravely a worthless ‘parchment and paper’ currency. In truth, Aristotle, the supplanter of Plato, was still in possession, pretending, as Bruno conceived, to determine heaven and earth by precedent, hiding the proper nature of things from the eyes of men. (*Gaston* 81)

At this moment Pater seems to pick up again an old quarrel, in sympathy with Bruno, resounding, if not his first than his loudest cry as a scholar and artist, writing under the aegis of the University, whose members can be myopic when it comes to asserting one philosophy over another. Yet Pater also alerts the reader here to what is Bruno’s great fault—his blatant taste, or, rather, tastelessness. The coarseness of his humour or temper may be seen in his substituting Plato’s more subtle humour for the harsh

laughter of Aristophanes. We hear the flow of the sentiment in the “Conclusion” return, in the stentorian voice of Bruno, louder than its more rhythmically balanced original. “‘Habit’—that last word of his practical philosophy—indolent habit!” the narrator relates: “what would this mean in the intellectual life, but just that sort of dead judgments which, because the mind, the eye, were no longer at work in them, are most opposed to the essential freedom and quickness of the spirit?” (*Gaston* 81). We can compare Bruno’s complaint here, as depicted by Pater, with his own argument in the “Conclusion.” It may shed greater light on the “Conclusion” by extension. It is very significant that Platonism is the spontaneous recognition of spirit in things—which is hidden from the eyes of most. We may revisit the “Conclusion” again to hear that his aesthetic prescription is really for a select few—and it is also an example of hiding within, “an essential freedom and quickness of spirit,” which may be difficult to interpret. Platonism, for Pater, once again, is an awareness that heightens reality.

Apart from Bruno’s person, Gaston is influenced by Bruno’s form of Platonism. He hears him deliver the discourse *De Umbris Idearum, On the Shadow of Ideas*, professing that in the world around one are the shadows of the Divine Mind. The trouble with the way Gaston received the theory, the narrator reports, is that, according to Bruno, no distinction need be made between shadows and that which casts them: “According to the doctrine of ‘Indifference,’ indeed, there would be no real distinction between substance and shadow. In regard to man’s feeble wit, however, varying degrees of knowledge might constitute such a distinction” (81). The new doctrine makes him behave in the manner that the narrator ascribes to the doctrine’s effect upon Spinoza, of whom it is said, “with a hold on external things naturally faint, the theorem that God was in all things whatever, annihilating their differences, suggested a somewhat chilly withdrawal from the contact of all things

alike” (77). Gaston seems to withdraw from the world, becoming a watcher more than anything else. The narrator indicates a danger in this belief: the likelihood of it turning into “antinomianism” (74). If all things are infused with the presence of God, then what may we call evil? “In proportion as man raised himself to the ampler survey of the divine work around him, just in that proportion would the very notion of evil disappear” (82). All the influence is imbibed without discretion, without caution. Bruno, in effect, would turn poison into food. The narrator seems hardly to care about Bruno’s heresies that resulted from his thought, and which took him away from Rome, to England and France; though he is aware that evil does exist, and there ought to be a means to recognize it, a means to recognize evil for avoidance and to recognize good among us.

Ultimately, what weakens Gaston’s fealty to the philosopher is the matter of taste. His ideas do not offend him so much for how they may be applied to church doctrine, but for how they may manifest themselves in his literary style. In this the Neoplatonist falls far short of Plato. Here indifference in matters of good and bad would surely surface. “If Bruno himself was cautious not to suggest the ethic or practical equivalent to his theoretic positions, there was that in his very manner of speech, in that rank, unweeded eloquence of his, which seemed naturally to discourage any effort at selection, any sense of fine difference, of *nuances* or proportion, in things” (82). Style is the means through which his virtue, or want of, may be seen, in his very selection of words. Of course Pater can only judge this by the dissonance of his writings. He continues by listing the ways Bruno strays from his prescription in “Style”: “The loose sympathies of his genius were allied to nature, nursing, with equable maternity of soul, good, bad, and indifferent alike, rather than to art, distinguishing, rejecting, refining. Commission and omission! sins of the former

surely had the natural preference” (82). The careful selection and omission that Pater demands of an artist are neglected by Bruno, and the consequences for Pater amount to an ethical failure. In Book III of *The Republic* Plato declares that in craft “there is grace (ευσχημοσύνη) and gracelessness. And gracelessness and evil rhythm and disharmony are akin to evil speaking and the evil temper” (401a Shorey). Thus, in a very influential passage for aesthetics, Plato writes:

“But we must look for those craftsmen who by the happy gift of nature are capable of following the trail of true beauty and grace, that our young men, dwelling as it were in a salubrious region, may receive benefit from all things about them, whence the influence that emanates from works of beauty may waft itself to eye or ear like a breeze that brings from wholesome places of health, and so from earliest childhood insensibly guide them to likeness, to friendship, to harmony with beautiful reason.” (Shorey 401c-d)

We can see how important this section of *The Republic* is to Pater and Oxonian Platonism. In *Plato*, Pater follows this line of thought, when he writes in the final chapter, “Plato’s Æsthetics”: “such a piece of traditional Platonism we find in the hypothesis of some close connexion between what may be called the æsthetic qualities of the world about us and the formation of moral character, between æsthetics and ethics” (*Plato* 269).

Pater also shares with Plato the fear that gracelessness in words makes their influence dangerous:

And how would Paolo and Francesca have read this lesson? How would Henry, and Margaret of the *Memoirs*, and other susceptible persons then present, read it, especially if the opposition between practical good and evil ran counter to, or did not wholly coincide with, another distinction, the “opposed points” of which, to Gaston for one, could never by any possibility become “indifferent”—the distinction, namely, between the precious and the base, aesthetically; between what was right and wrong in the matter of art? (82-83)

The allusion to Dante recalls an artist who will judge ethically, from whom we gain benefits directly in his art. And the lack of selection in the notoriously licentious

Memoirs of Queen Margot seems to erase the distinction between ethics and literary criticism.

“The Lower Pantheism” is the final chapter in Shadwell’s 1896 edition of the book, perhaps because it finally offers a harmonization of ethics and art. But the transcendence which is promised in Shadwell’s introduction has not yet taken place. It is but the first analogical unification in the novel of the physical and spiritual world, in artwork. The unification in Gaston’s life is yet to come. The five remaining chapters in Monsman’s edition of the book, based on Pater’s manuscripts, continue the struggle with the question of ethics and art. If good and bad art are moral distinctions, they seem to suggest how this rule might be applied to Gaston’s life.

In Dialogue with Oscar Wilde

Chapter eight, “An Empty House,” offers an intimate discourse on art’s role in our life, and the consequences of the Aesthetic Movement’s mode of living. Partly because in manuscript its epigraph was “Live up to your blue china,” and later effaced, critics such as Monsman have seen the chapter as written to speak to Oscar Wilde. It is a very important chapter in Pater’s work, as d’Hangest has noted (116), for Pater rarely addresses the value of the ideas with which he has been so often associated. Monsman believes that after the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) Pater began working again on *Gaston*, having left it for two years, and that the novel would now be a “caveat” for Wilde (xl).

Pater now seems inextricably tied to Wilde. He extolled him publicly and privately and imitated Pater to the point of emulation. As early in his writing career as “L’Envoi,” a preface to Rennell Rodd’s *Rose Leaf and Apple Leaf* (1882), Wilde was repeating Pater’s aesthetic ideas, such as how all art aspires to music. Some of those ideas went into lectures such as “The English Renaissance of Art” (1882), where he

borrows more from Pater and includes their favourite philosopher, Plato. When Wilde refers to Plato he mentions Pater or Paterian subjects, especially in “The Critic as Artist,” as though they are linked together. Wilde and Pater have Plato in common, of course, as Wilde succeeded in Oxford’s *Greats*, graduating in 1878, while Pater had established himself as a lecturer and critic by then in careful prose. Wilde knew Plato thoroughly enough for his degree to be double first, and he seems able to call readily upon him in his writing. In the manuscript for “The Critic as Artist,” for instance, where it is eventually written, “It is Criticism, as I hope to point out myself someday, that makes the mind a fine instrument” (201), Wilde originally wrote, “as Plato pointed out,” rather than “as I hope to point out” (Guy xlv). There is a strong sense in his writing that Wilde sees himself as an expostulator of Platonism, applying to the modern world the ancient philosopher he so absorbed, even extending ideas sometimes where Plato left off. He treated Pater’s ideas in a similar way. There is no doubt Wilde was a careful reader of Pater, for he coned his rhythm and lexicon in parts of *Dorian* expertly, but he tended to exaggerate ideas that Pater expressed in a much milder tone. Wilde himself may not have denied his tendency to exaggerate, for he writes in “The Decay of Lying”: “Art itself is really a form of exaggeration; and selection, which is the very spirit of art, is nothing more than an intensified mode of over-emphasis” (85). And what of Pater’s Wilde selects can be very revealing. As Evangelista has shown in “Lovers and Philosophers at Once” (2006), the two writers share a Platonism that emphasizes aesthetics, and upon this mutual plane they communicate similar ideas (243). But they also part company through their interpretations of Plato.

“The Portrait of Mr W. H.” (1889) takes several ideas from Pater, beginning with the title. As Wilde declares in “The Critic as Artist” Pater practises criticism

through fiction and called some of it *Imaginary Portraits* (189). When Wilde significantly extends the work for publication, purportedly around 1893 (Holland xi), though not published until 1921, he adds several passages that bind his work to Pater's. The mention of 'Pater', 'Plato', 'Oxford' even, 'Montaigne', or 'Bruno', does not appear until the later version of the portrait. After establishing his theory of a boy actor as Shakespeare's muse in the Sonnets, therefore, he recalls the influence of Ficino's translation of Plato during the Renaissance, a cause which Pater believes motivated artistic genius in fifteenth-century Florence in his essay on Pico. Wilde, speaking often of Platonic reminiscence and enthusiasm in "Mr W. H.," focuses on Diotima's theory of Love from the *Symposium*:

the goddess who presides over birth, and draws into the light of day the dim conceptions of the soul: when he tells us of the "marriage of true minds," and exhorts his friend to beget children that time cannot destroy, he is but repeating the words in which the prophetess tells us that "friends are married by a far nearer tie than those who beget mortal children, for fairer and more immortal are the children who are their common offspring." (43)

Unlike Pater in *The Renaissance*, who is interested in how Platonism affected Mirandola's writing and personal narrative towards spirituality, Wilde is specifically concerned with friendship. Wilde must have had *Gaston de Latour* in mind, while writing "Mr W.H." because his fictional criticism moves from the Platonic Montaigne to the Platonic Bruno. Wilde is interested in how the two men view friendship. Although Pater is concerned with Montaigne's idea of friendship, especially with Etienne de La Boétie, he does not speak of friendship in relation to Bruno. We may observe again that even when Pater discusses friendship in Montaigne it is really the essayist's reflections on the subject, alone, and the magnetism he tries to dramatize between Montaigne and Gaston is mostly established in hindsight, whereas in person their connection is very strained.

Wilde takes hold of a phrase of Bruno that interests Pater, “A filosofia è necessario amore,” adding that these “were the words ever upon his lips, and there was something in his strange ardent personality that made men feel that he had discovered the new secret life” (“Mr W. H.” 46). When Pater cites the words in “The Lower Pantheism” and in his article on Bruno he speaks of him in isolation, as one struggling towards intellectual union with God, and suffering relapse from time to time—Bruno is a “lover and a monk” (76). Pater might have made something of Bruno’s friendship with John Florio, for example, but did not. Apart from Bruno’s interactions with the University, he keeps him cloistered, like most of his Renaissance artists.

It is easy to see the connection, as was made above, between “A filosofia è necessario amore” and Pater’s “lover and philosopher at once” from “Winckelmann,” and Wilde, as a careful reader, could not fail to do so:

(φιλοσοφειν μετ’ ερωτος!) How that phrase had stirred me in my Oxford days! I did not understand then why it was so. But I knew now. There had been a presence beside me always. Its silver feet had trod night’s shadowy meadows, and the white hands had moved aside the trembling curtains to the dawn. It had walked with me through the grey cloisters, and when I sat reading in my room, it was there also. What though I had been unconscious of it? The soul had a life of its own, and the brain its own sphere of action. There was something within us that knew nothing of sequence or extension, and yet, like the philosopher of the Ideal City, was the spectator of all time and of all existence. It had senses that quickened, passions that came to birth, spiritual ecstasies of contemplation, ardours of fiery-coloured love. It was we who were unreal, and our conscious life was the least important part of our development. The soul, the secret soul, was the only reality. (79)

The philosopher of the Ideal city is obviously Plato; and he tellingly connects him, as the philosopher of the soul, who seems to contemplate all history, to some of the memorable words of Pater’s “Conclusion”—“It had senses that quickened, and passions that came to birth, spiritual ecstasies of contemplation, ardours of fiery-coloured love,” and ultimately the emphasis on the secret reality of things. His use of

the phrase φιλοσοφειν μετ' ερωτος is very protean. It stirs him, but he knew not why until years later. It seems a very self-conscious influence, constructed through the help of hindsight. He blends Pater's "Conclusion," the quickened senses, with the Neoplatonic mythology of the hero hunting his hart, as though in the "shadowy meadows" of Magdalen's deer park. But the beloved, the spouse of the Songs, comes to him rather, at dawn. His soul is submerged into secrecy; while Pater's struggles for the transparency of "Diaphaneitè" (1864), where he first used the phrase "lover and philosopher at once."

And the phrase after all had changed. Pater writes φιλοσοφήσας πότε μετ' έρωτος, which Evangelista believes is translated idiomatically from the *Phaedrus*, (249a), "where Socrates talks about the privileges that are granted to the souls of those who combine the love of boys with the pursuit of wisdom (παιδεραστησαντος μετα φιλοσοφίας)" (238). It might come from this phrase or it might come from just previously in the passage, where Plato writes that the best souls, who with wings rise consistently with the gods, will enter into a man who is "a philosopher or a lover of beauty, or one of a musical or loving nature" (248d Fowler), (φιλοσόφου η φιλοκάλου η μουσικου τινος και ερωτικου). Another strong possibility is a passage further on, when Socrates sums up his speech with the imperative to direct "life with all singleness of purpose toward love and philosophical discourses," (257b Fowler), or "love and philosophical reason," (έρωτα μετὰ φιλοσόφων λόγον), where the Greek is closer to Pater's phrase. The words "lover" and "philosopher" are used so often in the *Phaedrus*, that Pater's paraphrase makes it difficult to know his precise meaning. There are explicit references in Plato's dialogue to touching and kissing boys (255e), without the condemnation one would find in the nineteenth century, and a writer could use this dialogue to suggest pederasty. But the greater message of the dialogue

is to encourage the pursuit of intellectual beauty, above physical. Where Pater uses the phrase in “Winckelmann,” however, he is discussing the eternal cycle of a certain type of soul, a sort of Platonic scholarly hero. Jowett’s explanation in his introduction to the *Phaedrus* (1871) indicates a figure of extreme isolation:

The conception of the philosopher, or the philosopher and lover in one, as a sort of madman, may be compared with the Republic and Theaetetus, in both of which the philosopher is regarded as a stranger and monster upon earth. The whole myth, like the other myths of Plato, describes in a figure things which are beyond the range of human faculties, or inaccessible to the knowledge of the age. (I 557)

As we have seen, the *eros* of the philosopher is an energy that lifts the philosopher out of his historical conditions in ecstasy so that like the ideal philosophy he sees above the age. More than just the negative motivation of escaping the vulgar, however, Pater clearly has in mind a pursuit of the beautiful, as Socrates clarifies in his speech: “My discourse has shown that this is, of all inspirations, the best and of the highest origin to him who has it or who shares in it, and that he who loves the beautiful (ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν καλῶν), partaking in madness, is called a lover (ἐραστής)” (249d-e Fowler).

Against *Phaedrus*, Socrates argues that being a “lover” is preferable to being a “non-lover” even though the lover is insane, for “the greatest of blessings come to us through madness (mania), when it is sent as a gift from the gods” (244a Fowler). Thus the prophets and priests speak truth. Pater often alludes to this frenzy by enthusiasm. Madness not only separates the artist from his contemporaries, but to a certain degree this sort of poetic genius is required by works that hope to endure and educate. Cruzalegui declares that the essence of Pater’s Platonism is based upon “two principles, that of absolute and sought after truth, and that of his desiring *éros*” (380), but these two principles ought to be taken in relation to the each other, with love for the sake of knowledge.

In Wilde's passage which includes the phrase above, his meaning is more mundane: he speaks of himself, on earth. And he also makes his own idiomatic translation of Pater's phrase. Pater forms philosopher and lover as nouns, as a type of person, often found in his texts, with a focus on *being*. But writing "φιλοσοφειν μετ' ερωτος!" Wilde makes philosophy a verb, "to philosophize as a lover." One may even interpret that substantially his soul is not a philosopher, but a lover that will practise philosophy. Then there is the exclamation mark, so different from Pater's tone of the phrase. Wilde's soul is noisier and enters the world of action.

Perhaps level of volume differentiates these two artists most. George Saintsbury has written of Pater's "quietism" when discussing his prose. "Silence is blended with sound," writes Saintsbury, "and the charms of both invade and soothe the ear together" (425). Throughout *Gaston* this is what his hero searches for. The boy's growth is described as "quiet progress" and "a quiet building of character" (8,9), and to this his narrative desires to return. Quiet is his Ithaca. Whenever Gaston experiences comfort the scene is described as "quiet," "still," and "tranquil," while action ever begets heartache and bloodshed. The comfort of first arriving at Ronsard's, for example, is marked by his finding his house and property "quiet, inexpressibly quiet" (31), the disquietude of his departure marked by the notice of the poet's "roving eyes" and "haggard soul," the turbulent weariness of company with a generation of "theatrical make-believe—an age of wild people, of insane impulse, of homicidal mania" (34).

Wilde, on the other hand, as a playwright thrives on dramatic conversation. In fact he seems uncomfortable in silence. In *Dorian Gray* Mr Erskine is ridiculed for falling "into bad habits of silence" during a garrulous dinner party (200). These convivial conversations were added to the book-form of *Dorian*, heightening the

volume of the novel's tone. Pater struggles to write conversation at all. It is difficult to imagine him writing a conversation among more than two people, let alone a Parisian-style repartee. The special friendships of his souls move Platonically between, almost never among. Silence to Wilde not only impedes the playful flow of conversation, of which Lord Henry has mastered as an art, but it marks to Dorian something ominous. Immediately after discovering Sibyl Vane's death and his moral responsibility in the affair, the narrator records: "There was a silence. The evening darkened in the room. Noiselessly, and with silver feet, the shadows crept in from the garden. The colours faded wearily out of things" (256). Again the Neoplatonic myth of the beloved in the Song of Songs walks near, as in "The Portrait of Mr W.H." The hero does not hunt the beloved, but the beloved hunts him. The hero is now prey. The soul to which the narrator awakens in "Mr W.H." is also predatory. "And the soul itself, the soul of each one of us," writes Wilde there, "is to each one of us a mystery. It hides in the dark and broods, and consciousness cannot tell us of its workings" (77). The soul seems here to be rather, as in James Thomson's poem *City of Dreadful Night* (1874), in the unknown shadows, than in the fiery illumination of the Platonists. If the soul is not to be trusted, and yet it is also through knowing the soul that we reach union with God, this poses great psychological difficulty for the narrator and character to attain knowledge.

Having made some observations about the literary relationship of Wilde and Pater in general, we may now say something more specific of Pater's criticism of him in *Gaston de Latour*. Gaston's friend the poet Jasmin de Villebon may be an allusive Wildean type. Returning now to "An Empty House," which Monsman has seen as a message to Wilde, it is quite possible that Pater actually got the idea for the chapter reading *Dorian*, for there he would have read a very similar scene. Chapter IV of the

extended version finds Dorian waiting alone in Lord Henry's house, wherein he spies a familiar text: "On a tiny satinwood table stood a statuette by Clodion, and beside it lay a copy of 'Les Cent Nouvelles,' bound for Margaret of Valois by Clovis Eve, and powdered with the gilt daisies that Queen had selected for her device" (206). Of course this Margaret is the femme fatale of *Gaston*, the woman whose *Memoirs* Gaston helps organize. "Some large blue china jars and parrot-tulips were ranged on the mantelshelf" is the very next description, the same blue china associated with Wilde that Pater originally had as his chapter's epigraph. Was Wilde implying in a subtle way that he shared a house with Pater? As Perry Meisel has discussed (124), the house is very important in Pater's works, representing in some way a person's soul, for instance, in "The Child in the House," and is used often metaphorically in *Plato and Platonism* for one's mind, "a house of thought" (163). Dorian meets Lord Henry's wife first, they briefly chat, then Lord Henry arrives, and Dorian tells him how much he has influenced him. "You have a curious influence over me" (214), he says, using one of Pater's favourite words: "curious." Everything Lord Henry says, Dorian puts into practice. "For days after I met you," explains Dorian, "something seemed to throb in my veins. . . . There was an exquisite poison in the air. I had a passion for sensations [. . .] . I remembered what you said to me on that wonderful evening when we first dined together, about the search for beauty being the real secret of life" (211). One can hear some of *The Renaissance* in Wilde's work again—the "throb," being like Pater's "pulse," the use of the words "passions" and "sensations," and most importantly regarding the method of the "Conclusion," the search for beauty amid the flux.

Gaston sits in a similar empty house, looking around at the decor of Jasmin de Villebon's, awaiting his return. As Pater so often speaks of getting to the soul of an

author through his style, looking around someone's house may be a metaphor for the in depth literary criticism Pater tends to practise. Although to "penetrate," a word Pater uses especially regarding Winckelmann's scholarship, often recalls a sexual meaning, we should keep in mind that the word derives from Latin's *penates*, meaning household gods, ultimately from *penus*, the inner most part of a house. "Emptiness" in the title immediately makes one think the house lacks substance, or the requisite matter Pater requires with form, in order to make a work worthy. Indeed emptiness is vanity. In Jasmin's house Gaston finds an anticipation of the Medicean taste, which to "the trained eyes of that day, eyes, we may suspect, in collusion with certain inward tendencies towards relaxation of the *moral* fibre, it was delightful to see the severe structural lines give way till they vanished, or figured as but graceful pencillings on a quiet surface jealous of all emphatic relief" (84). Speaking of the italicized "*moral* fibre" the narrator immediately emphasizes ethics in his aesthetic discourse. The decoration was conscientiously "*à la mode*," and "It was a world in which all there was had been emphasised in forms of sensation and told as ornament, as visible luxury or refinement besetting one everywhere: plain, white light was no more" (85). So that we do not miss the allusion to the Neoplatonic *Nous*, he mentions Bruno in the next sentence. In *Plato and Platonism* Pater refers to the *Nous*, or Logos, as the "blank white light of the One" (47). The real soul of art, its Logos, is absent.

Among the disparate collection, "in what seemed at first sight to be a very catholic aesthetic taste," Pater questions his own work. Alluding to Winckelmann's new organ he observes, "How these pictures people saw or liked to see things, had determined a new visual faculty, if it were not rather an endemic infection of the eye" (*Gaston* 86). Questioning the sanitation of his own influence is one of the reasons d'Hangest finds this chapter so sincere in Pater's oeuvre (116). Pater even borrows

critical words of advice he gives in his essay “Style” (1888), of which Jasmin’s taste seems a consequence: “Jealous, exclusive, of whatever was not significant of its own humour, there had been, as this place clearly witnessed on nearer survey, all sorts of shrewd rejections”; even harmony is included as requisite to the style of the decor (87).

Yet Pater implies there was something lost in translation, in his metaphorical pathway from soul to style. Gaston picks up a copy of the *Thoughts*, or “sentences” as he also calls it, of Marcus Aurelius, so prominent in *Marius*. It is as though Pater is asking how far the wisdom of that critical novel has penetrated this house. Given the subject, of influences, it is fitting he would include Aurelius as an author who appears, in various degrees of intensity, in his work on *The Renaissance*, through *Marius*, to *Plato and Platonism*, where he is the finest example of a philosopher king. The narrator describes the book’s contents:

In all the disguises of the Euphuism of the day, it had come with all sorts of conscious and unconscious transmutation by the way, through the Spanish from a Latin forgery, and was but a faded product of an age of translations, adaptations, mistranslations. But from its faint pages did emerge for the first time to Gaston’s consciousness, the image of the antique, strenuous emperor in his life-long contention towards the old Greek ‘sapience,’ disinterested, brave, cold. (87)

Here was evidence that amidst this environment, and ornamental prose, there was access to Greek wisdom, if one were a discerning critic, no matter how removed and corrupted along the way interpretations had become. “Well!” the narrator exclaims, “the atmosphere of that lofty conscience seemed absolutely unassimilable by the alembicated air Gaston was here breathing. To conceive of that at all, to keep the outline of it before him, all that was actually around him must be shut out even from the mental eye” (87). The important vision is mental rather than of the things around one; but then the things around one were so distracting. One would think the book had

not been read at all, not truly. But the message indeed was there for those who would search for it. We find another allusion to the rhetorical technique of the “Conclusion,” where knowing the *Thoughts* of Aurelius would situate the dilemma of how best to live within the philosophic tradition.

The remainder of the chapter, struck by the “almost satiric contrast to everything else around” the book, Gaston fills with his own meditations. He asks: does this aesthetic mode of life commit one to an intellectual scheme with unpredictable practical consequences? Is ornament nothing other than a superficial expression to separate the “intellectual aristocracy” from the “vulgar”? Were these men trying to hide their shame under a new profane religion? Was this “expressiveness really beyond anything there was to express?” (88) And “how, in a word, shadow matched substance?” (89). “Shadow and substance recalls Bruno, of whose doctrine Jasmin’s house seemed “a slightly ironic form” (89). Again style reveals one’s ethical disposition. Had one here in Jasmin’s dainty house, in visible presentment, only a slightly ironic form of that doctrine? It was the triumph of art certainly, “though with this consequence, at least in this instance, that the sheath become too visibly more than the sword, or, say, the house than the master, than Jasmin himself, in fact, touching if you found him out of spirits for a moment, enviable, delightful company for half an hour, but surely of no consequence to any one at all” (89). If the form is more than the matter, the narrator asks, and style is the man, then what happens to the man? He will surely lack substance also. This was the consequence of living up to your blue china. It is certainly a damning condemnation of the Wildean type, that is, what Wilde and other aesthetes purported to aspire to. The tone, for Pater, who characteristically eschewed negative criticism, is rather cynical, which perhaps explains why he never saw it published; and it perhaps

depleted his commitment to completing the novel. It serves to distract Gaston from the real matter of his soul, which was presently too difficult to face, and from the voice of his lost son calling out to his conscience. “Surely the near, the visible, the immediate, was prevailing with him over what was distant and unseen” (89). “Yet it was from a great distance, comparatively, that these voices came which had been about him here all day” (90). His worldliness is of no real avail, it only delays his soul’s response to his actions: Gaston’s soul is still called upon.

Unlike Dorian, Gaston does not in the end wait around for the master of the house. As he hears his frivolous steps in the street and surmises on his possible sin, Gaston slips away without meeting him: “he would stay neither to test the impressions nor taste the dainty supper; in effect, he had renewed old acquaintance. Yes! the house, the style, was the man” (91). It is surely significant that knowing the man by his effects Gaston no longer wants to meet the person. Gaston is not drawn to him as he is to Montaigne, for instance. His evident distaste for Jasmin leaves repulses him from knowing him further, a distaste similar to what Gaston eventually felt for Bruno.

Jasmin de Villebon’s name may also reflect this discussion. The jasmine being a flower of largely ornamental value, and Villebon, “good house,” reminding the reader that Wilde’s “House of Beauty,” in the Platonic sense must also be good.⁴⁰ The things around one can even influence one physically, as the narrator reminds us in “An Empty House” that: “If according to the Platonic doctrine people become like what they see, surely the omnipresence of fine art around one must re-touch, at least in the case of the sensitive, what is still mobile in a human countenance” (90). And he speaks in this regard more directly to Wilde’s novel: “Did portraiture not merely reflect life but in part also determine it? The image might react on the original,

⁴⁰ “Ville” may mean town in French, but its etymological root is in Latin’s “villa,” meaning house.

refining it one degree further.” This shows Plato’s concern for the power of art in *The Republic*, that, because of its strong influence on reality, it might be dangerous. Wilde takes this Platonic idea and inverts it so that life may in fact have a dangerous effect on art, as Dorian’s picture in the attic rots in place of his flesh, revealing his soul in consequence of his choices.

Eros and Anteros

Gaston’s transcendence is put on hold while the narrator deals with the Platonic problem of *eros* and *anteros*. Chapter X: “Anteros,” has the same epigraph as Chapter IX: “A Poison-daisy,” “The earth with her bars about me,” from Jonah 2:6, perhaps to show that the hero has made no spiritual advancement. Jonah is a figure who is sacrificed by his peers, and though submerged in the belly of a whale, experiences a resurrection by the will of God, suggesting that Gaston, too, would re-emerge from his conditions and guilt.

Pater attempts in this chapter to deal with a problem of love through fiction.

“The physiology of love,” the chapter begins,

from the days of Plato to our own—the days of Stendhal and Michelet—has had its students analysing, more or less ingeniously, the phenomena of its diseased or healthy action, not always with entire theoretic disinterestedness, yet driving, amid the complexities, the thousand-fold casuistries of what is after all the most practical of subjects, at the very practical distinction of a blessing or a curse in it—Eros and Anteros. (100)

The repetition of “practical” reveals the direction Pater tries to take, though perhaps not gladly. “Eros and Anteros” may be defined as love and love-returned, as Plato discusses them in the *Phaedrus*. “Anteros” is yet another chapter concerned with Plato’s ethics. “Unselfish love, as we know,” writes Pater, “has its flights, its extraordinary passages, and the selfish, even more, its caprices of self-pleasing, of demand on the voluntary yet so ruinous servility of others: their bodily or mental

decrease—their suicide let us say!—as just one grain of incense, consumed, wholly consumed, on the red coal” (100). The Wildean *Jasmin de Villebon* is again at the centre, with Queen Margaret. Pater describes their love as “wolfish-love” bent on the consumption and destruction of its object:

Unkindly or cruel love, the worship of the body, the religion of physical beauty, with its congenial and appropriate fanaticism, a servitude based on the most potent form of that relationship of the weak to the strong, noted by Aristotle as the elementary ground of slavery in human nature itself—most potent because, in effect, the servitude of the insane to the sane—the “impassioned love of passion,” love for love’s sake as a doctrine and a discipline, a science and a fine art all in one. (102)

Pater is making a strong argument against the love that worships the body, because of its lupine corruption of sanity. Love seems not for the sake of love for the narrator, but rather for something higher. Both Margaret and Gaston, who is employed in a clerical position to her, are described as scholars of love.

And they have similar characteristics to Dorian. The characters are indifferent. Hallward notices indifference in Dorian (261), and Margaret’s book on the physiology of love is concerned with “that cruel eagerness to consume the reluctant lover, and then of that cruel weariness of a lover found too facile, which allowed, nay encouraged him to consume, to destroy himself by sacrifice” (103). Not only does Dorian discard Sibyl with disastrous effects, but throughout the novel he is described as ruining others’ lives with his beauty. What interests the narrator in “*Anteros*” is “the entanglement of beauty with evil,—to what extent one might succeed in disentangling them or, failing that, how far one may warm and water the dubious double root, watch for its flower, or retain the hope, or the memory, or the mere tokens of it in one’s keeping?” (104) How does one maintain love’s necessity for philosophy when it can be so destructive?

In “The Platonic Eros of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde: ‘Love’s Reflected Image’ in the 1890s” (2002), Monsman discusses the different portrayals of Platonic love in *Gaston* and *Dorian*. He sees in the terms “eros” and “anteros” the definitions they took in Renaissance Neoplatonism, as “eros” became associated with the more selfish *cupiditas*, while “anteros” became the more virtuous *caritas* (35).

Pater makes the more abstract questions concrete by telling of a homely love for Jasmin by a play-fellow named Raoul, said to be his foster-brother. Raoul, described as a wild-flower with a feminine soul, falls in love with Jasmin, who leaves without a care. Raoul then realizes his enslavement: “A few days ago he would not have understood that thus it could be with him, this dislocation of a part of himself, like a thing in two yet alive still, as Plato fancied, seeking, seeking blindly, to be one again with its fellow, its self” (*Gaston* 107). Although Pater again borrows Aristophanes’ explanation from the *Symposium*, there is here a great disparity between lovers. They are not two halves: Jasmin is master here, while Raoul is love’s slave. He follows Jasmin to Paris, and commits a crime on his behalf, for which he will be “broken on the wheel.” The aesthetic practice of living indifferently is now shown to have real victims.

Monsman believes that Raoul pays the price for confusing “eros” and “anteros” (37), in response to Wilde from whom Pater wished to distance himself (41). Although we can see that Pater is concerned with Wilde’s depictions of love in *Dorian*, especially where it purports to be Platonic, *Gaston* is not such a concise polemic. In the *Phaedrus*, the term “anteros” is used when discussing the beloved, in the sense of loving-back, as opposed to the lover, as lovers with different roles to be fulfilled in the same relationship. Although the narrator clearly disapproves of Jasmin letting Raoul take the fall for him through his slavish love, it is not entirely clear what

his alternative course of action was: unless it was to not engender love in another. The question asked in this chapter, which we must recall is quite an imperfect manuscript, is what we owe to those beyond whom the intellectual love of Plato demands us to ascend. Whereas Pater has previously dealt with personal Platonic narratives in his work, such as Pico's and Marius', he now asks what one's duty is when love narratives collide. He previously considered souls rather isolated, and they ascended like the love story in the *Symposium*, from bodies to minds and to immaterial ideas. Pater considers the theoretical impact of love, rather unsuccessfully, on a too human affair, from which death was the escape. This problem of competing love stories seems to have posed to him a problem and held his interest, because he writes of similar circumstances, with similarly fatal consequences, in one of his last works of fiction "Emerald Uthwart" (1892), to which we shall return in the next chapter.

Gaston's Ending

If Gaston has been searching for a return, the closest he comes is to a renewed interest in Italian art. The museum is now white, "like a physical parallel to the mental relief" (134), much brighter somehow than the refracted sense of light, mediated through water, from *The Renaissance*. If it is a return to earlier subjects, the setting in which he views them seems changed. Gaston attends a church ceremony in the morning and a palatial gallery in the afternoon, as though in this harmony peace might be found. The narrator describes it as "like the later stage of a long education," when old figures return, and embrace a sort of love, first in "the love of visible beauty," linking then familial roles "age to age," to being:

consecrated by indefeasible union with the [Godhead], who looks favourably also on the virginity, the restraint which in fact secures the purity, the ardency therefore, of the creative flame: this was what Gaston found in those untouched revelations of the mind of [Leonardo] and [Michelangelo], those mature Italian masters, promoting still further that increasing preoccupation with the greater unchangeable

interests of life with which he entered upon the coming new and later phase of his own maturer manhood. Here art, according to its proper ministry, had been at once the interpretation and an idealisation of life. (135)

These are *Gaston's* last words. Those bracketed are fulfilled only in Monsman's edition, so we are but certain of the rising direction of the points on Gaston's surging narrative. Yet perhaps the proper nouns matter less in Pater's fictional structure than the relationship of the words between them. The abstract nouns are Pater's, however, the "purity" and "ardency" of the "creative flame," but it is not clear whether it truly marks a return for Gaston, or is just the aspiration for one. Much of the aspiration, frustrated in *Gaston*, will be accomplished in *Plato*.

Chapter Six

The Authority of Affinity in *Plato and Platonism*

From “Style” to *Plato*

In late 1888 Pater’s work as a novelist stalls; but his work as a critic, which can always be seen in his fiction, is renewed. In October he publishes his last installment of *Gaston*, and in December he publishes “Style” in the *Fortnightly Review*, ostensibly on Flaubert’s theory of art, through his correspondence, but it is Pater’s fullest exposition of his own theory on the relation of thought to language and of the craft to which a writer ought to aspire. It is one of the important essays influenced by Pater’s Platonism that leads into *Plato and Platonism*, as though a fuller explanation of the subject was inevitable and would no longer wait. A feeling of the necessity to write “Style” and the essays that follow may be a better reason than creative lethargy for Pater’s leaving *Gaston*. “Style” reveals a very Platonic theory of language, about how a writer can reveal his “mind” and “soul” through words, in one-to-one correlation, as a transcription from the inner thought to the external word, as though manifested. Plato is a paragon prose writer because of his skill in this regard, as recognized by one’s ability to translate him word for word and retain his meaning (14-15). Stating that language is no barrier to our knowing Plato’s innermost thought, for he is as easily rendered into English, is actually removing him from the Ancient Greek world to render him universal.

Pater becomes slightly encumbered with metaphysical distinctions because he is working through discovering a means to separate and explain those who write excellent impersonal prose from those who write still excellent prose marked with their personality. He is really negotiating a justification for the universal writer, over those writers of their own time and conditions. We return to the core idea of Pater’s

early written essay “Diaphaneité” where transparency of soul is sought. In “Style” the transparency of an author’s thought through his writing, without any excess evidence of the conditions from which he writes, will open up to the reader simultaneously the infinite abstract or universal and, paradoxically, the person himself writing. The quality of the refraction of the inward to outward sense depends upon the “purity of this medium” (36). “Style” is so important to Pater that when he includes it in a larger collection it shares the title, *Appreciations, with an Essay on Style* (1889), and begins the book. In the second edition of *Appreciations* a year later he removes his essay “Aesthetic Poetry” (1868), which is the original home of much of his “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance*, and includes instead “Feuillet’s ‘La Morte.’” This may be read as an active statement that he is relinquishing some of his old associations, and positively reconsidering the role of the artist. “Aesthetic Poetry” begins with the explanation of the phrase “transfigured world” in order to describe the transformative power of art on the individual. “Style,” on the other hand, is concerned with the individual’s place within the larger whole. He surprisingly writes at the essay’s close:

if it be devoted further to the increase of men's happiness, to the redemption of the oppressed, or the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to such presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world as may ennoble and fortify us in our sojourn here, or immediately, as with Dante, to the glory of God, it will be also great art; if, over and above those qualities I summed up as mind and soul—that colour and mystic perfume, and that reasonable structure, it has something of the soul of humanity in it, and finds its logical, its architectural place, in the great structure of human life. (38)

It is surprising because it is a frank statement not merely about art’s obligation to life; but a statement that declares that if artists consider their place in the whole and write truthfully, they will not only find favour with God, but they will create better art. It is an ethical statement, and also aesthetical. But it does not really change his early method of creation; rather it arranges it within a broader perspective.

Pater eventually reconsiders the value of art being “impersonal,” a trait for which he praised Flaubert for maintaining in “Style.” He lectures on Mérimée in Oxford and London in November of 1890 and publishes it as an article the following month. Rather than possessing Flaubert’s *vraie vérité*, he portrays a writer merely in possession of empirical facts. He overturns his opinion that Flaubert was impersonal in his works, because, although he tried to be, his very aspiration puts much of himself into them; but Mérimée succeeded in being impersonal, where, now, success is failure. There is in Mérimée, writes Pater, “that singular harshness in his ideal, as if, in theological language, he were incapable of grace” (*Miscellaneous* 36).

Much of his writing bears traces of Plato in 1892, in part because he begins to publish some of his lectures on Plato in chapters simultaneously so the philosopher is even closer at hand than usual. “The Genius of Plato” appears in the *Contemporary Review* of February 1892. This is significant because it indicates that to Pater the individual quality of Plato’s mind, above his age, is emphasized before all else; “A Chapter on Plato,” appeared in May in *Macmillan’s Magazine*, and, again in the *Contemporary Review*, “Lacedæmon” appeared in June. All were eventual chapters in *Plato and Platonism*, but in altered ordering.

His article “Raphael,” also originally delivered as a lecture, was published in October of 1892 in the *Fortnightly Review*, and thematically resembles “The Genius of Plato,” where in comparison he declares Raphael’s genius is the result of “scholarship in the sphere of art” (*Plato* 147). Artists are also influencing his notion of Plato. Likewise, influence continues to run from Plato, as the article on Raphael places him as “one of the world’s typical scholars, with Plato, and Cicero, and Virgil, and Milton” (*Miscellaneous* 38-39). Raphael’s scholarship allows him to translate ideas, which his vision sees so clearly, into visible forms, the method praised in

“Style.” In this regard he is again compared to Plato: “Yet Plato, as you know, supposed a visible loveliness about ideas. Well! In Raphael, painted ideas, painted and visible philosophy, are for once as beautiful as Plato thought they must be, if one truly apprehended them” (*Miscellaneous* 57). “As you know” implies an acquaintance perhaps with more than just Plato, but with Pater’s recent chapter on his genius.

Even more entwined during this period are Pater’s chapter on Plato’s notion of Sparta, “Lacedæmon,” and a short work of fiction entitled “Emerald Uthwart.” “Lacedæmon” and the first half of “Uthwart” were both published in June, and the second half of “Uthwart” followed in July of 1892. As well as for their nearly simultaneous appearance, however, critics have read them together for their similar subject matter. Pater makes very clear references in “Lacedæmon” to public school life in England, and even life at Oxford. He repeatedly refers to the Lacedaemonians as “scholars,” explaining even the word’s etymology by their “unbroken leisure, to perfect themselves for the proper functions of gentlemen—σχολή, leisure, in the two senses of the word, which in truth involve one another—their whole time free, to be told out in austere schools” (216). He reminds his reader that leisure means abstaining from business, for the market is a place “(into which, like our own academic youth at Oxford, young Spartans were forbidden to go) full enough of business—many a busy workshop in those winding lanes” (215). The topography of the city has a “High Street” off of which lead “narrow crooked lanes” (208). They have “playing-fields” for a “sort of football,” “a sport, rougher even than our own, *et même très dangereux*, as our Attic neighbours, the French, say of the English game” (210): here making the analogy that the French are the more effeminate Athenians while England is the more ascetic Sparta. They eat together sitting upright on benches like the heroes of Homer and are given *vivâ voce* examination (222), possessing a “half-military, half-monastic

spirit” (218). The music of the boys’ chanting is “a manifestation of the true and genuine Hellenism, though it may make one think of the novices at school in some Gothic cloister, of our own English schools” (224). And so that no one can possibly miss it, Pater concludes the essay, “like some of our old English places of education, though we might not care to live always at school there, it is good to visit them on occasion” (234). Richard Jenkyns calls it an idealization of a carefully disciplined and controlled community (223). But other critics, such as John Coates, believe that Pater is ironically rebuking the totalitarianism of English public schools (372). Pater’s later conservatism, and allegiance to the text of *The Republic* as a lecturer, leaves no reason to believe that his portrayal of the Spartans is ironic. Germain d’Hangest refers to the chapter as a myth (206), which blends a utopia with nostalgia, enhanced by many recognizable features. Pater includes the chapter “Lacedæmon” to reveal how it became a model for Plato’s Republic, so in that sense it is idealized, but not the ideal city itself. Jenkyns recognizes that “None of his more prominent Victorian disciples, with the weird exception of Pater, shared [Plato’s] enthusiasm for Sparta, but they all knew of it” (*Victorians* 245). This sympathy strongly separates Pater from his contemporary commentators of Plato.

Two influential figures who strongly disapproved of Spartan ways, especially in comparison with modern democracy, were George Grote, both in *A History of Greece* (1846-1856) and his three volume *Plato, and Other Companions of Sokrates* (1865) (I 150), and German classicist Eduard Zeller, whose work was embraced at Oxford, especially *Plato and the Older Academy* (1876) (483-86), originally included with the larger *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* (1844-1852), *The Philosophy of Greeks in their Historical Development*, and later translated by Balliol scholars Evelyn Abbott and Alfred Goodwin, and poet Sarah

Frances Alleyne. Grote and Zeller condemn the Spartans' cruelty, lack of Christian equality, and overall want of democratic principles.

Pater rather seems to enjoy describing Spartan society, and classicist Paul Shorey in his review calls the chapter a "prose-poem": "Thus prepared we pass to the "Republic", the dialogue which the author seems to have studied most diligently – to which the entire book indeed is in a sense an introduction" (qtd. in Seiler 259). Seeing the chapter as preparation for Pater's chapter on *The Republic* contextualizes Lacedaemon in *Plato*, and might be why he selected it as one of the three chapters to publish before the publication of the entire book. As Pater clarifies, the Republic begins where Lacedaemon "left off" (*Plato* 202). But as a stand-alone chapter it also has parallels with his short story "Emerald Uthwart."

The English public school he describes in "Uthwart" contains Dorian discipline similar to that found in ancient Sparta. Sparta is an honour-loving society, which depends upon one's peers to bestow that honour, and is gained by following the institutions of his country, as encouraged through friendship. Pater makes the connection to the Dorian Platonic education explicit in "Uthwart":

The aim of a veritable community, says Plato, is not that this or that member of it should be disproportionately at ease, but that the whole should flourish; though indeed such general welfare might come round again to the loyal unit therein, and rest with him, as a privilege of his individual being after all. . . . A school is not made for one. It would misrepresent Uthwart's wholly unconscious humility to say that he felt the beauty of the *askêsis* (we need that Greek word) to which he not merely finds himself subject, but as under a fascination submissively yields himself, although another might have been aware of the charm of it, half ethic, half physical, as visibly effective in him. . . . Something of that is involved in the very idea of a classical education, at least for such as he; in its seeming indirectness or lack of purpose, amid so much difficulty, as contrasted with forms of education more obviously useful or practical. He found himself in a system of fixed rules, amid which, it might be, some of his own tendencies and inclinations would die out of him through disuse. The confident word of command, the instantaneous obedience expected, the enforced silence, the very games that go by rule, a sort of hardness natural to

wholesome English youths when they come together, but here *de rigueur* as a point of good manners. (210-11)

Emerald need not be aware of the roots of his ideal education, in the manner which the narrator traces for us, for it may enhance his experience to lack self-consciousness as much as the Greeks themselves. The Spartans are like objects of art under this discipline, and their reward for such strict adherence with their peers is to become themselves “a perfect work of art” (*Plato* 232). In this instance Kit Andrews observes that *Plato and Platonism* can feel more like Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* than a work on Plato’s dialogues (449), except, we might qualify, that the Spartans’ aesthetic perfection depends entirely upon their role within a community. In “Uthwart,” however, individuality comes into contention with one’s role in the collective, as though the developing consciousness of living under a literary tradition leads to Emerald’s ruin.

The character’s name itself signals incongruity, as though Emerald is a “jewel athwart,” and has no setting, within a crown or otherwise. His school days are quite successful, as he exhibits all the qualities that make a boy’s life charmed—athletic ability, good looks, and intelligence in the classroom. But the story of his days really revolves around his friendship with an older boy, James Stokes, the school’s prefect. The question is how this friendship can find fulfilment as the boys mature from boyhood to adulthood; but within models of precedence, “None fits exactly” (214). Their only models are from Horace and from such close male bonds of war-heroes in classical literature such as Homer’s Castor and Pollux or Polydeuces, or Virgil’s Nisus and Euryalus, who find glorious deaths in battle. There is a mood of inevitable doom cast over the story, as though Emerald will not be satisfied with anything but death in battle. Through Spartan discipline they become “Victors” of their school, winning the opportunity to proceed to Oxford together. Their love of literature itself is

the answer and denouement to the circumstances in which they find themselves, not in imitating characters in classical literature. “In every generation of schoolboys,” writes

Pater:

there are a few who find out, almost for themselves, the beauty and power of good literature, even in the literature they must read perforce; and this, in turn, is but the handsel of a beauty and power still active in the actual world, should they have the good fortune, or rather, acquire the skill, to deal with it properly. It has something of the stir and unction—this intellectual awaking with a leap—of the coming of love. So it was with Uthwart about his seventeenth year. He felt it, felt the intellectual passion, like the pressure outward of wings within him—ἡ πτεροῦ δύναμις, says Plato, in the *Phaedrus*; but again, as some do with everyday love, withheld, restrained himself; the status of a freeman in the world of intellect can hardly be for him. The sense of intellectual ambition, ambitious thoughts such as sweeten the toil of some of those about him, coming to him once in a way, he is frankly recommended to put them aside, and acquiesces; puts them from him once for all, as he could do with besetting thoughts and feelings, his preferences. (219-20)

It is not quite clear why he is counselled to meet this “intellectual awaking” with such temperance, even denial. The sort of intellectual experience described is after all one “almost for themselves,” implying that boys like Emerald ascend in isolation. The choice of the word “frankly” with the recommendation to put them aside, stirs a recollection of the “Conclusion,” where it is precisely “art” that “comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass” (238). In Emerald’s school there seems an absence of authorial guidance, unless it is likewise art’s “recommendation” that intellectual ambition is not for him, for he feels no call. Richard Dellamora quotes this passage to argue that Pater has quoted the *Phaedrus* here in order to recommend an active love between James and Emerald despite the restrictions of their society (57). But Emerald’s Platonic narrative in this passage is completely singular, and about his own intellectual ascension through reading literature. This passage is removed from any mention of James Stokes by several pages on either side of it, and concerns Emerald in his isolation. The

intellectual awakening makes no mention of the classical friendships he so admired as a boy. Platonism is referred to here as an intellectual goal, where Pater again quotes the power of the wing (ἡ πτεροῦ δύναμις) which we read in “Diaphaneitè” and “Winckelmann.” Rather than comparing only the kinds of Platonic love that we saw in *Gaston’s* unfinished chapter “Anteros,” Pater seems to be questioning the kind of Platonic love suitable in a modern society under the influence of classical literature; and the kind of love that can endure from boyhood through to manhood.

Literature is where “Uthwart” and “Lacedæmon” greatly differ, for the Spartans are not a literary society. “In music (μουσική) as they conceived it, there would be no strictly selfish reading, writing or listening; and if there was little a Lacedæmonian lad had to read or write at all, he had much to learn, like a true conservative, by heart” (*Plato* 223). They also seem to lack the self-conscious awareness of incongruous models by which to guide their lives from which Emerald suffers. We must be chary when a society possesses literature, as Plato commands in *The Republic*, and we are made aware here of the strong influence of literature at the English public school. Who is guiding these boys? No teachers seem present.

At Oxford the earlier impression of distinguishing himself in battle alongside James will not leave him. Still he longs to be an exception in a community “not made for one,” and yet he has no more scholastic ambition than to be a “passman,” not examined for a class, but taking a lighter workload for a simple pass or fail. He appreciates Oxford, but he again does not “exactly fit,” although it is not precisely clear why, except that it is “for those whose occupations are wholly congruous with it; for the gifted, the freemen who can enter into the genius, who possess the liberty, of the place; that it has a reproach in it for the outsider, which comes home to him” (229).

Emerald eventually finds his war, with James, and so set are they on glory that they break orders and fall into disgrace. They are both sentenced to death for “the charge of desertion and wantonly exposing their company to danger” (235). Their story ends not in glory, but in shame. The phrase lingering in the reader’s ear perhaps is that he is not one of the “freemen who can enter into the genius” of Oxford. “Freeman” is of course a phrase that Pater associates with Plato’s *Phaedrus*, (and a term, as we saw in our Wordsworth chapter, that he shares with Arnold). Pater describes “the status of a freeman in the world of intellect,” in relation to Emerald’s possible awakening to literature. He is anything but free, and rather in the bonds of a doomed love-story.

Emerald is a tragedy of misreading—misreading the classical stories to which he aspired, of misreading his opportunity as a freeman of the intellect, for which he showed early promise, of misreading his destiny as a military hero, of misreading the time and place for action. Dellamora declares that Emerald and James’s relationship made them vulnerable to destruction for the sake of national interest (57), but even national interest was compromised by their failure. Society is to blame in their story by being absent rather than by leading them towards a course, absent in the form of a teacher to guide and direct the influences of their desire.

The Book

Plato and Platonism was highly anticipated, with more copies being issued than any other of his first editions (Seiler 17). Critically it was a remarkable success, confirming his established literary reputation (Seiler 33). Insiders and outsiders praised it. Lewis Campbell, a friend of Jowett and promulgator of Plato, claimed in the *Classical Review*: “The matter of the book before us has, much of it, been common property for about forty years, commencing from the time when the historic

method was first seriously applied to criticism. But it is not the less a solid gain to possess this bright and genial exposition of truths which we have long potently believed” (qtd. in Seiler 272). His praise here has the tone of congratulating one not for creating something specifically new, but for executing the perfect performance, as so long practised. Paul Shorey wrote: “I know nothing in Platonic literature at once so sound and so illuminating to the young student” (qtd. in Seiler 261). Readers today will repeatedly find Pater’s name in the footnotes of Shorey’s authoritative translation in the current Loeb Classical edition of *The Republic* (1930). Shorey believes the book is “the first true and correctly proportioned presentation of Platonism that has been given to the general reader” (256). We ought not to be surprised then when Pater said before his death, “If there is anything of mine that has a chance of surviving, I should say it was my Plato” (Benson 162).

Coming at *Plato and Platonism* through Pater as careful writer of impressionistic criticism and fine, sometimes overly refined, fiction, some are surprised to learn the subject of his final book. Yet we might consider him as part of another tradition, with figures such as T.H. Green (1836-1882), R.L. Nettleship (1846-1892), and Bernard Bosanquet (1848-1923), all Balliol graduates who were taught a similar Platonism by Jowett. T. H. Green’s *Prolegomena to Ethics* (1883) was gathered together from notes posthumously and its manuscript was prepared by A.C. Bradley, brother of F. H., with the help of R.L. Nettleship, and Edward Caird. Although Green is often declared to be Hegelian there is much Plato and Aristotle in his work. Actually much of Green’s overall goal seems Neoplatonic, as man tries to transcend his physical conditions and heighten his spiritual relation with God, so that in principle he may become one with Him (215).

We have already discussed in our fourth chapter some of Nettleship's Platonism from his essay in *Hellenica*, on "The Theory of education in the Republic of Plato" (1880). Like Green, like Arnold, Nettleship is concerned with attaining personal perfection through Platonism: not teleological in the grander sense of civilization, but in the personal sense of individual culture. Bernard Bosanquet published his expansive *A History of Aesthetic* in 1892, in which he quotes Pater as an authority for French literature in the Renaissance. Although he calls Plato "the prophet of beauty" (10), and is quite sympathetic to him, he is attempting to write "the history of æsthetic consciousness" (xii), and must find reasons why art has advanced beyond him. In contrast to Pater, Bosanquet is a good example of how someone committed to Hegelian ideas treats Plato in the late nineteenth century. Pater's *Plato* may be seen to answer some of Bosanquet's difficulty regarding whether Plato's enthusiasm was for abstract beauty or beauty of sense-perception (53). Pater was adamantly opposed to such dualism in Plato's aesthetics.

We mark the activity of these important figures educated in Oxonian Platonism in order to reveal what Pater shares with them. With Jowett's career effectively coming to a close in the early nineties, Green's early death in 1883, Nettleship's death on Mont Blanc in 1892, and Bosanquet looking beyond Plato for the moment, it might naturally fall to Pater to publish a book then on Plato for the general reader, based on his many years of lectures.⁴¹ In regard to Pater's lecturing at Oxford from 1864 till 1892, Cruzalegui writes that "in many respects he was Jowett's very special descendant" (613). Shuter has noted the degree to which Pater's Plato is

⁴¹ Nettleship's notes are eventually gathered in *Lectures on the Republic of Plato* (1897) by G. R. Benson (1864-1945), also a graduate and philosophy lecturer of Balliol. Bosanquet also later published *A Companion to Plato's Republic for English Readers; being a commentary adapted to Davies and Vaughan's translation* (1895).

connected with his teaching, by revealing how much of the material is related to examination questions at Oxford from the time his career began (“Pater as Don” 46).

Pater ought to have been encouraged to write about Oxford’s Plato considering that, especially since the death of Arnold in 1888, he is considered one of the best living critics. In reviews of *Plato*, Arthur Symonds calls him the greatest prose writer still writing (qtd. in Seiler 269); and Edmund Gosse calls him Oxford’s oracle (qtd. Seiler 250). His long-practised role of critic actually places him in an advantageous position to ascertain publicly the writings of Plato, as again Platonism, due to its fictional form, has traditionally fallen into the category of literary interpretation. The question of what it means to be a philosopher—its methodologies and forms of expression—, is further expanded by Pater, as it has been throughout his career, in his final book.

From the beginning Pater sets out to first give us Plato, and then his Platonism, though they are also inseparable as mind and thought. In a note at the book’s beginning he explains the leading principles of his doctrine, “which I have tried to see in close connexion with himself as he is presented in his own writings.” The emphasis on Plato’s own writings anchors his perspective in the first-person, in the manner of much of Pater’s work, specifically *Marius*. When he tells us of Plato’s shaping influences, he conveys them in a manner that Plato might have experienced them, so that we may sympathetically experience the development of his ideas.

When he takes the reader through the influences of Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Pythagoras, he follows what by that time is the customary pattern, practised by Hegel, Zeller, Jowett, and Lewis Campbell; and yet he improves the platitude by spending so much time on these thinkers, and explaining just how they affected Plato and why, devoting a chapter alone to each, “Plato and the Doctrine of Motion,” Plato

and the Doctrine of Rest,” and “Plato and the Doctrine of Number,” so a reader becomes dramatically invested in the development. And “Plato” significantly leads all chapter titles, so as we do not lose our grounding, from whose perspective we are learning these ideas. It is not until the fourth chapter that the reader is exposed to Socrates, the most famous influence on Plato, effectively delaying the meeting in Plato’s development for seventy-five pages, so that his impact might be as heavily felt. Plato finds a person rather than just ideas in Socrates, seeing in him a “far-reaching and fervid intellectuality” (76). Socrates is also largely a religious influence upon him, a blend of practicality with “a religious or mystic character”; but the extent to which Socrates is a messiah-like hero is greatly diminished with respect to other commentators of the time. In Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859), he is compared to Christ; A. P. Stanley (1815-1881), close friend of both Jowett and Pater, whose sermons Pater admired from boyhood as much as his lectures at Oxford (Wright I 133, 167) held the view of many liberal Anglicans that Socrates, as “the Prophet of the Gentile world,” was “the first great example of the union between vigorous inquiry and profound religious belief” (qtd. in Turner 298). Pater followed this line of thought to a much lesser degree. Evidence of his respect for Socrates lies in Pater’s saving him from inclusion among the Sophists, to whom Pater’s next chapter is devoted, as a negative influence on Plato. But ultimately, Socrates—although perhaps the greatest influence on Plato—is only a lead-up to chapter six, “The Genius of Plato,” the pivot upon which the book turns, as the next four chapters open up into Platonism.

Whereas all previously has led up to Plato, much of what follows chapter six looks back to Plato. Rather than conceding to the teleology of philosophy in the Hegelian manner, Plato is said to “anticipate” and is even “explained” by later major philosophers. For those who explain the idealist side, associated with “vision,” we

may look to: “Aristotle, and to the Schoolmen of all ages, to Spinoza, to Hegel; to the mystic aspirants to ‘vision’ also, the so-called Neo-Platonists of all ages, from Proclus to Schelling. From the abstract, metaphysical systems of those, the ecstasy and illuminism of these, we may mount up to the actual words of Plato in the *Symposium*, the fifth book of the *The Republic*, the *Phædrus*” (193). We can also note here that Pater associates the dialogues of love, *Symposium* and *Phædrus*, with this ideal side. Explaining the sceptical side of Platonism we may look to the Academic spirit of Lucian, Cicero, in the Middle Age Abelard, and of course Montaigne (194). It is an extraordinary claim that later philosophers do not necessarily make philosophical progress from Plato, but actually serve to elucidate him.

Against Decadence

Although it is to the influence of *The Renaissance* that we mainly owe Pater’s association to the Decadent Movement, *Plato and Platonism* contains more of his thoughts on the subject and is written within the period in England that is most clearly identified with Decadence in the 1890s. His final book portrays a protagonist who wants to stop a society from falling into decline and both reveals and follows Plato’s creative method of philosophy. He places Plato in similar circumstances, in a world, “already almost weary of philosophical debate,” where “Language and the processes of thought were already become sophisticated, the very air he breathed sickly with off-cast speculative atoms” (*Plato* 6). The synthetic philosophy of Plato revivifies this matter into new form, portraying the creative model of Pater’s ideal artists, who possess a divine power to make organic, with an intelligible principle of proportion, atoms that are anarchical in flux. For Pater, Platonism is fundamentally a philosophical method that appreciates the intelligible principle in things, called form, and in turn is able to create anew by instilling artworks with form indistinguishable

from its matter. Every organic being partakes of form and its success will be measured according to its proportion of form and matter, and Pater applies this theoretical standard analogously with ease, from a State, to an individual soul, to a work of art.

As the first philosopher of history, Plato divides ages by declining States of government in Book VIII of *The Republic*.⁴² The perfect State is an aristocracy, from which Plato declares Athenians have already lapsed; the next best is Lacedaemonian, which, as a timocracy, strives for honour. Hence, the State declines into oligarchy, democracy, and, finally, tyranny. These lapses in State occur because sons grow worse than their fathers, by not caring for culture (*paideía*), the Platonic education of music and gymnastics (546d). One of *The Republic's* main arguments is that the governance of a State is determined by the education of its citizens, so that the quality of authority is deserved. As nearly a commentary on that dialogue Pater's *Plato* also devotes itself to the education "of some young students of philosophy," as declared on the opening page.⁴³

It is crucial that Plato already sees his society in decline, and therefore embraces the model of Lacedaemon, the ascetic Spartan State, as an ideal. "His actual purpose," in *The Republic*, notes Pater, is therefore "at once reforming and conservative" (238). This self-conscious corrective, mainly in education, is imitated by Pater in his idealization of Lacedaemon, for having a reforming effect on the excessively free democratic tendency of Athenians. Aristocracy can no longer be returned to. "It is, in truth," writes Pater, "to a city which has lost its first innocence . . . that we must look for the consciousness of Justice and Injustice; as some theologians or philosophers have held that it was by the 'Fall' man first became a really moral being" (246). The Spartan State is the next best government for which citizens can

⁴² Plato is one of Vico's main authorities in *Scienza Nuova* (1725), where he conceives cycles of history.

⁴³ *The Republic* gets mentioned in *Plato* more than the other dialogues combined.

hope, as oligarchy is slavery and the excessive freedom of democracy causes wanton softness and idleness. The State in Plato's *Republic* is an analogy of the soul, where tyranny occurs individually when it experiences a democratic lapse into the despotic rule of appetites (573c); so remedies of State are also applicable to the individual.

Plato and Platonism can be seen as a radical aspiration towards authority, radical in the sense of going back to the root. Monsman sees Pater's final work as an "indirect critical effort to align aestheticism with Platonic epistemology, a project many years in the making ("Platonic Eros" 41). Although Pater makes it most explicit in *Plato*, we would only qualify the statement by adding that Plato's epistemology was all along behind Pater's work, though perhaps more evident as his career progresses. But the success of the aspiration will be revealed in conservation and preservation rather than in a return to a golden age. It aims rather at stasis. This salvific tendency is already practised by Plato, so that a return to Platonism is effective by this conservative method. When Pater declares this Doric quality in Platonism to be "the very conscience of art, its saving salt, even in ages of decadence" (282), he understates the conditions in which Platonism thrives, because its temper often defines itself as the pursuit of a few amidst the ignorant decline of the rest. Platonism is always a struggle for authority amidst decadence.

Pater pursues authority in two related senses: authority by writers for the ability to express what they mean to convey—in this sense he seeks an ontological ground where language has foundation, ultimately in Logos itself. And he seeks authority in the State, or analogously the individual soul, that its members know their business and keep to their functions, so that the whole may function harmoniously—this pursuit may also be understood as the aspiration towards form, so that organisms are balanced (literally "organized") and well-proportioned for the sake of health and

beauty. Both senses of authority are corrected and preserved with “Justice,” the alternate title of *The Republic*. Pater defines Justice in *Plato* as a commitment “to that self-concentration of soul on one’s own part, that loyal concession of their proper parts to others, on which such order depends, to a love of it, a sense of its extreme æsthetic beauty and fitness, according to that indefectible definition of Justice, of what is right” (241). Justice is the application of a law, *jus*, into practice. For justice to exist in art, artists proportionately form their material; for justice to exist in society each element of society must play its role, according to the governing class; for justice to exist in an individual the intellect or mind rules over the spirited and appetitive parts of the soul.

The ideal city will have the same harmony of parts and order that will make a composition of prose beautiful. Pater borrows this idea from Plato, who applies the principle of justice to craftsmen doing good work also in *The Republic* (443c). And characteristically he applies the rule to his own day. Not only does Plato anticipate many of the great philosophers in the millennia that follow, but he “anticipates the modern notion that art as such has no end but its own perfection,—‘art for art’s sake’” (268). Pater then roots the idea within a passage of *The Republic* (341d), providing the phrase associated with aestheticism with Plato’s authority.

One of the major debates in the British interpretation of Plato in the nineteenth century was the portrayal of the Sophists in the dialogues. George Grote, beginning in *A History of Greece* (1846-1856), and continuing in *Plato, and the Other Companions of Sokrates* (1865), declares that Socrates was a Sophist, and that Plato himself was little different from the Sophists Protagoras and Gorgias whom he portrays. He means to elevate the status of the Sophists as professional teachers rather than to diminish Plato; but Grote’s apology for the Sophists was not well received at Oxford. Oxonian

Platonists, such as Jowett and his students Alexander Grant (1826-1884) and Lewis Campbell, refuted Grote in this regard.⁴⁴ The difference between Socrates and Plato on the one hand, and the Sophists on the other, was a division Academic Platonists were keen to maintain.

Pater maintains this division, for the Sophists directly threaten a writer's authority. "With them art began too precipitately, as mere form without matter; a thing of disconnected empiric rules, caught from the mere surface of other people's productions, in congruity with a general method which everywhere ruthlessly severed branch and flower from its natural root—art from one's own vivid sensation or belief" (*Plato* 117-18). This image of the flower recalls writers associated with the Decadent Movement, where form, seen ornamentally, like a flower's petals, might be mistakenly valued as the whole. A mere flower on a lapel is severed from its natural root, and therefore the artificial would not be greater than nature. Pater is not praising nature as Wordsworth would, extolling the natural world around one, even "the meanest flower," but rather encouraging a method of composition that a critic might witness in Wordsworth: a method of artistic sincerity—"sincerity counting for life-giving form" (*Gaston* 46), he has said—wherein a writer's language is connected to something greater than itself. Form, being an intellectual principle, must agree with reason or Logos in the larger sense, and be balanced with a comparable degree of matter, such as a worthy idea. The language of the Sophists is detached, "superficial," somehow hollow. As we saw last chapter, in "An Empty House," Pater summarises the problem of writing without authority by declaring that "the sheath became too

⁴⁴ Alexander Grant, a Balliol graduate, refuted Grote's view of the Sophists in *The Ethics of Aristotle* (1857). After Grote's influential volumes on Plato appeared in 1865, Jowett immediately condemned Grote's opinion in his introduction to his own edition of the *Dialogues* (1871), the last year of Grote's life. Lewis Campbell engaged in a more sustained refutation of Grote's argument, in an appendix to his second edition of the *Theaetetus* (1883).

visibly more than the sword” (89). There must be matter sufficient enough for form to render it indistinguishable.

The basic problem of language for Pater arose from its detachment from what is real, and was therefore fundamentally an epistemological crisis,⁴⁵ of knowing what is real and worth representing.⁴⁶ He displays this anxiety in *Plato and Platonism*, as in much of his writing, frequently using “real” as a noun and adjective, and relying on the adverb “really” to govern his verbs throughout. The philosophies of Heraclitus and Parmenides are subsumed by Plato, and transcended, for just this reason, from opposite extremes, for amounting to an “unreality in things” (22). He again uses the metaphor of ground, wherein we would find a root of language and knowledge, both the “solid earth itself from beneath one's feet” for Heraclitus (15), and the “standing-ground” for Parmenides (35), give way.

Socrates is not a Sophist because he attains “that intellectual ground of things” (116). Authors are defined by their ability to attain this ground of truth. “That you yourself must have an inward,” writes Pater, “carefully ascertained, measured, instituted hold over anything you are to convey with any real power to others, is the truth which the Platonic Socrates, in strongly convinced words, always reasonable about it, formulates, in opposition to the Sophists’ impudently avowed theory and practice of the *superficial*, as such” (116-117). One who speaks, then, will first *know* of what he or she speaks. But in order to have knowledge one must believe in an ontological ground of things, a principle or law that explains its being, and which

⁴⁵ Ian Small’s *Conditions for Criticism: Authority, Knowledge, and Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1991) has a more complicated thesis, for he argues that there were many competing epistemologies; and he sees Pater as trying to redefine his own intellectual authority. In contrast, I see the epistemological crisis between having one or none, and Pater as trying to maintain the traditional Logos at the root of Western Civilization under the threat of anarchy.

⁴⁶ Linda Dowling argues in *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (1986) that the crisis of language was brought on by new linguistic theories such as Max Müller’s. But Pater seems not to forsake the traditional language theory of logos—belief in the essence for which a word signifies.

language can represent. Pater sees a superficial levity in the Sophists which might also be inherited by writers in ages of Decadence, when authority is undercut.

The loss of authority reveals itself in the loss of order. Many critics have discussed Paul Bourget's contribution to the Victorians' conception of decadence with *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883).⁴⁷ Bourget writes that decadence is the result of individual cells within the singular organism of society not subordinating themselves to the whole, so that anarchy ensues (25). Bourget applies the same law analogously to literature, so that the unity of the book is overthrown by its smaller units—the page, the independence of the phrase, and finally the independence of the word—, as parts grow too large for the whole.

Pater sees in this excessive desire for independence the Ionian, centrifugal tendency that breaks up a State. He calls it “inorganic” (104), and that “which has rent Athens into factions ever breeding on themselves” (254-55). Following Plato's *Republic*, which decries the evils of democracy, Pater gives the centrifugal effect to the cause that Matthew Arnold terms “doing as one likes” in *Culture and Anarchy*. Plato is a common reference for Pater and Arnold, especially in the notion that anarchy befalls a society in want of culture. Pater is even more devoted to Plato, for whereas Plato and St Paul represent Hellenism and Hebraism for Arnold (131), Plato commands both tendencies for Pater: the Ionian and the Dorian. Of the Ionian, centrifugal temper, Pater writes that it disrupts the element of order, a novelty noticed in them by St Paul (*Plato* 23). So Pater follows Plato in encouraging the Dorian tendency, and he moves easily among Plato's analogies, adapting the State to the

⁴⁷ Dowling's *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (1986), Richard Gilman's *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (1979), R. K. R. Thornton's *The Decadent Dilemma* (1983), Dennis Denisoff's “Decadence and aestheticism.” *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*. (2007) 31-51. Liz Constable, Denisoff, and Matthew Potolsky's *Perennial Decay: On the Aesthetics and Politics of Decadence* (1999), to name some. Bourget is likely to have impressed Pater, as Arthur Symons tells us, for Pater's cat tore up the relevant essay, “Charles Baudelaire” (102).

individual—“The soul, moreover, the inward polity of the individual, was the theatre of a similar dissolution” (24-25)—and adapting the soul to the creation of artwork helps us understand his emphasis on stringent control, and why ethics and aesthetics conjoin. To lose sight of the whole for the parts causes ruin. Required is “a full consciousness of what one does, of art itself in the work of art, tenacity of intuition and of consequent purpose, the spirit of construction as opposed to what is literally incoherent or ready to fall to pieces, and, in opposition to what is hysteric or works at random, the maintenance of a standard” (*Plato* 281).

Many years before *Plato*, in “The Marbles of Aegina” (1880), Pater had already adopted some of the remedial terms required for healthy organisms, extolling the “sanity” and “proportion” of the centripetal, Dorian tendency in artwork, as opposed to the centrifugal, Ionic. Plato’s Dorian tendency leads us towards “the universal light of the understanding” (*Greek Studies* 252). And like the idealized State of Lacedaemon the religion and music is that of Apollo, with gymnastic training (*Greek Studies* 262), “of the sanity of soul and body, through the cure of disease and of the sense of sin; of the perfecting of both by reasonable exercise or *ascésis*; his religion is a sort of embodied equity, its aim the realisation of fair reason and just consideration of the truth of things everywhere” (*Greek Studies* 254). “Fair reason” indicates a rational principle, so that the beauty of the body has its origin in submitting itself to rule. Human mind is central to Pater’s criticism of artwork, for, as “the most absolutely real and precious thing in the world,” it is the basis of Plato’s metaphysics, where mind as the ruling part of the soul is in contact with Forms—the ontological principle in things. As we saw in our chapter on myth, in Platonism light symbolizes knowledge, metaphorically in the sun or in Apollo, or, privately, as a vision within the mind’s chamber. The Socratic method helps one “to flash light into

the house within" (*Plato* 120); whereas in the sophistic aesthetic of *Gaston's* "An Empty House," the "plain, white light was no more" (85).

"Sanity" remains very important in *Plato*, where the Dorian tendency reveals a "religion of sanity."⁴⁸ It is a rather Platonic notion, referring to the mind, yet *sanus* literally means "health" in an organism. It is naturally opposed to the epithet "*malsaine*," which Bourget associates with the decadence of Baudelaire (*Essais* 12). Pater shows that Justice in the State occurs when the parts of the organism are subordinated to the whole, and divides the ideal State,—borrowing a medieval Christian model of society—into the productive class (artisans), executive (military), and the contemplative and spiritual order who govern. As the three classes are analogous in the person, the governing class, like "military monks" will be the mind: "those who have capacity, a vocation, to conceive thoughts, and rule their brethren by intellectual power. Collectively of course they are the mind or brain, the mental element, in the social organism" (*Plato* 244). Subject to the intellectual and spiritual element of the State-person model, is the army, which acts as the "armed conscience," and the productive class, which in a person are the appetites, like hunger and desire. "The productive, the executive, the contemplative orders, respectively, like their psychological analogues, the senses, the will, and the intelligence, will be susceptible each of its own proper virtue or excellence, temperance, bravery, spiritual illumination" (254). Justice in the State requires each part fulfilling its business, according to "Plato's rule of right—εἰς ἓν κατὰ φύσιν" (*kata physin*) (245), that is, "according to nature," where nature here corresponds to a healthy or sane organism.

The "according to nature," might oppose J. K. Huysmans's *A rebours* (1884), so crucial to our understanding of literary Decadence, where the protagonist is a

⁴⁸ U. C. Knoepfelmacher discusses this term, but is ultimately pessimistic about Pater's belief in it (188), in *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel: George Eliot, Walter Pater, and Samuel Butler* (1965).

dilettante, not aware of his single business, who retreats from society, growing grotesquely solipsistic and miserable. Huysmans's *Des Esseintes* lives out the insanity of Decadence.

When an organism is healthy and just it moves as a whole unit in harmony: "See them, then, moving in perfect 'Justice' or 'Rightness,' to their Dorian music, their so expressive plain-song, under the guidance of their natural leaders, those who can see and fore-see—of those who know" (*Plato* 254). Music exists under strict Dorian rule, when the mind governs the body, and helps solve the fragmenting problems of decadence, redeeming harmony both in society and in a person. The ring of Discipleship in the phrase "of those who know" expresses that the Platonic society will have the few intellectual and spiritual govern the rest.

Although it is certainly ruthless, we might view the Lacedaemonian murder of their slaves, which was not tolerated by Pater's contemporaries, such as Grote, slaves with the same "good Achæan blood," who would grow too tall, or handsome, or fertile, "to quite feel like a slave" (*Plato* 205), as Pater describes, as an analogy of the soul wherein the mind must rule over, and sometimes suppress, the lower order of appetites. It is a shocking image, but aligned, it seems, with the personal violence required for Plato's own sanity, for the sake of which "the final harmony of his nature had been but gradually beaten out" (136).

Music

As music helps order an organism, it also informs a work of art, for art, too, is seen as an organic whole. We often associate Pater's musical aesthetic theory with *The Renaissance*, where in "The School of Giorgione," he writes that "*All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music*" (*Renaissance* 135). In this essay he alludes to classical harmony in artwork, but, furthermore, to a principle in artwork

otherwise known as “form.” In “Postscript” to *Appreciations*, earlier known as “Romanticism” (1876), he calls this “proportionate form” (257). The crisis of authority for a writer is just how to access and express this form, the evidence of mind.

A writer of “mind,” as he writes in “Style,” will adequately represent the vision within. The “just proportion” sought, is one-to-one, between word and idea. This idea of justice as the perfect union of form and matter goes back to “On Wordsworth,” as we read in chapter two, of whom Pater wrote, “when the really poetical motive worked at all, it united, with absolute justice, the word and the idea; each, in the imaginative flame, becoming inseparably one with the other, by that fusion of matter and form, which is the characteristic of the highest poetical expression” (*Appreciations* 58). The balance sought in an organism, which is conceived of also as the relationship of form and matter, exists in the very unit of the word, revealing that the author who selects the correct word is a just arbiter of various sane organisms. The ability to conceive of organisms analogously, as artworks, souls, or states, is one of the reasons ethics and art are inseparable to Pater.

In “Style,” Pater praises musicality in prose, that of Newman and of Cicero, for examples, because he wants ultimately to include prose under the universal art form which he had labelled music. Intellectual literature will be equal with music, by making its form indistinguishable from its matter, by “the absolute correspondence of the term to its import” (*Appreciations* 37). And he calls this achievement the “indispensable, very intellectual, beauty of literature,” “perfect justice” (30) and “absolute justice” (33), sharing the term which would figure so prominently in *Plato*.

He describes the writer’s practise as the perfect translation from the inward vision to the outward word. In this sense it is an “inspired translation” (*Appreciations*

34). As much in this essay, this phrase “inspired translation” recalls Newman’s lecture on “Literature” (1858) in *The Idea of a University*, which Pater cites as an authority in “Style.”⁴⁹ He shares with Newman’s essay that the idea and the word, reason and speech, must be one, for they are united in Logos (*Idea* 208). This “two-fold Logos,” declares Newman, is what distinguishes man from other forms of life. The craft of the writer may be the highest calling, because it most openly exhibits this skill. The two-fold Logos is a clear reference to the beginning of St John’s Gospel, which tells of God’s translation from idea to phenomenon. Yet it also fits into the Platonic framework of the Logos, thought by the Divine Mind, as the principle of things that exist in particular instances.

Music, as it is associated with form, Logos, or reasonable cosmos, reveals a way out of solipsism in *Plato and Platonism*, allowing knowledge to be possible. Pater explains how the theories of Heraclitus and Parmenides amounted to instability; until the teaching of Pythagoras showed Plato a way beyond. Music, he writes, “which though it is of course much besides, is certainly a formal development of purely numerical laws: that too surely *is* something, independently of ourselves, in the real world without us, like a personal intelligible soul durably resident there for those who bring intelligence of it, of music, with them” (52-53). Pater’s understanding of music, and his association of it with numerical laws, as things fixed beyond us, invites an acceptance of “being” beyond the self and senses. Music may help lead one to this “being” which acts as an ontological root. Knowledge, then, will not be limited to a state of subjectivity. Platonic mania, or enthusiasm, which so interests Pater from “Winckelmann,” or even “Diaphaneité,” through to *Gaston de Latour* and “Emerald Uthwart,” lifts one out of oneself, in a desire to commune with the Muses. Actual

⁴⁹ David DeLaura especially has discussed Pater’s debt to Newman’s “Literature.”

musicians are rather absent in a critic who speaks so highly of music because he means it in its larger Hellenic sense. The whole value of education, he explains regarding *The Republic*, is to achieve harmony, under which even gymnastics falls (*Plato* 71). Gymnastics represents *ascesis* and economy of means, all the character of reserve that good prose requires, the Dorian harmony and proportion which allow organisms, be they States, persons, or compositions, to function as a whole, as he showed working in “Lacadæmon” and finally in “Plato’s *Æsthetics*.” Music, writes Pater, accounts for “all those matters over which the Muses of Greek mythology preside,” “all productions in which the *form* counts equally with, or for more than, the *matter*” (270). It puts us in accord with something beyond ourselves. *Mousiké* is so integral to the idea of Platonic education that it often gets translated into English as the whole of “culture.” This is crucial in Oxonian Platonism. While a student in *Greats* in the late-seventies, Oscar Wilde recorded in his “Commonplace Book,” beneath the heading “Beauty”: “he says the end of music is the love of beauty (δεῖ γὰρ τελευτάντα μουσικὰ εἰς τὰ τοῦ καλοῦ ἐρωτικά)” (*Oxford Notebooks* 145), from *The Republic* (403c).⁵⁰ Pater has the same phrase written on a note among his manuscripts: “δει που τελευταν τα μουσικα εἰς τὰ τοῦ καλοῦ ἐρωτικά. – the doct. of the love of the beautiful,” adding a padeuetic index (folder 1 bMS Eng 1150 23). The education of music allows one to recognize beauty, which, in turn, leads a lover of knowledge to truth at its reasonable source: to Logos.

The Pythagorean appreciation of musical law helps resolve both the epistemological crisis and the breaking up of an organism: “To realise unity in

⁵⁰ Shorey, for example, translates *mousiké* as “culture,” in this passage: *dei de pou teleutan ta mousika eis ta tou kalou erotika*, as it reads in the Loeb edition, “for surely the end and consummation of culture be love of the beautiful” (403c). Smith and Helfand, editors of *Oscar Wilde’s Oxford Notebooks* (1989), have noted Wilde’s slight variation γὰρ for που (197), with no change of meaning. Like some of Pater’s misquotations, it leads one to think the phrase was recorded by memory or a personal copy rather than from a text.

variety,” writes Pater, “to discover *cosmos*—an order that shall satisfy one’s reasonable soul—below and with apparent chaos: is from first to last the continuous purpose of what we call philosophy” (*Plato* 52). “And accordingly, in education,” he writes in “Plato’s *Æsthetics*,” “all will begin and end ‘in music,’ in the promotion of qualities to which no truer name can be given than symmetry, æsthetic fitness, tone. Philosophy itself indeed, as he conceives it, is but the sympathetic appreciation of a kind of music in the very nature of things” (267). This “sympathy” to the form of an organism, addressed here in musical terms, helps one recognize the rational principle in things, where “the invisible show[s] through” (69).

The epigraph to the whole of *Plato and Platonism* is “Ὡς φιλοσοφίας μὲν οὔσης μεγίστης μουσικῆς” (because philosophy was the greatest kind of music), from the *Phaedo* (61a),⁵¹ explaining further Pater’s lifetime interest in the philosophy. The phrase derives from a scene with Socrates in prison, after his fetters are removed, when he is visited by Cebes, who reminds Socrates of his hymn to Apollo and asks why he writes poetry no more. Socrates responds that although his dreams tell him “to make music and work at it,” he has realized that he is already making music, “because,” which Pater quotes, “philosophy was the greatest kind of music,” and he is working at that. Platonism argues that there is beauty in things which possess a rational principle, as evident in their form, and the recognition of this is the aim of culture.

The reference to this scene here also alludes to the customary development from poetry to prose that interests Pater. Plato follows the same stylistic path, for although Plato had been in his “early youth a writer of verse” (147), writes Pater, Socrates made Plato “the most serious of writers” (98). Jowett is said to have inspired

⁵¹ This quotation is also inscribed on Pater’s memorial in the antechapel of Brasenose College.

Pater to the same progression (Wright I 197-98), to which several of Pater's characters, such as Marius, advance. Pater turned both Wilde and Symons onto prose in a similar development (Symons 99). It is not that poetry merely falls away, for it remains in good prose: Plato is often called poetic by Pater and Jowett, and Arnold. Indeed, poetry helps develop the prose writer. The music of prose may be less obvious, but it remains. Rather, Pater opposes a "lax verse to staid and temperate prose. With him, the rhythm, the music, the notes, will be felt to follow, or rather literally accompany as ministers, the sense,—ἀκολουθεῖν τὸν λόγον" (akolouthein τὸν λόγον) (*Plato* 281).

This focus on music in *Plato* recalls Plato's *Laws*, a late dialogue, which, because of its subject being largely education, centres around *Mousiké*.⁵² Poets are found to be very important in *Laws*, for they teach people how to be just and harmonious (660e), as education is said to owe its origin to Apollo and the Muses (654a). Again the Dorian State is the model. And again Plato uses the soul-State analogy, although he simplifies the parts into two, where the ruling element of the soul is Reason (noûs, λόγος), and in the State Nόμος (law). In discussing law's evidence in society Plato repeatedly relies on the double sense of νόμος as meaning both law and "chant" or "tune," or "melody."⁵³ English has inherited the word "nome," meaning an ancient Greek "song or hymn sung in honour of the gods" (OED).

Pater represents this law of music as that "unity of principle (ἀρχή) in the dominion of number everywhere, the proportion, the harmony, the music, into which number as such expands. Truths of number: the essential laws of measure in time and

⁵² The authenticity of *Laws* was debated in the nineteenth-century: Grote judging it as spurious, but Jowett, though disliking it and ranking it very low amongst the dialogues, found it to be authentic. Pater's library records show Jowett's volume of *Laws* in 1892, when he was likely preparing *Plato* (Inman 28).

⁵³ R. G. Bury edition in the Loeb Classical Library of *Laws* (2 vols.), II 41 (cp. 700b, 722d, 734e)

space” (*Plato* 52). Adding *arché* to the Pythagorean principle of music recalls the opposite of anarchy in society, which is hierarchy. As the opposite to anarchy for Arnold was culture, we might associate culture or music as the hierarchical principles for these two authors. For Pater the word “hierarchy” is especially suitable to Plato, as it breaks down into *arché* (rule) by *hierós* (sacred), rule by the sacred, such as priests, or, as Pater elects, rule by military monks.

Pater associates a religious order with Pythagoras, ascribing to them a “monkish discipline” (*Plato* 58) As in *The Renaissance*, speaking of Florentine Platonism (37), he gives again the etymology of mysticism: “*Mysticism*—the condition of the initiated—is a word derived, as we know, from a Greek verb which may perhaps mean to close the eye that one may better perceive the invisible, but more probably means to close the lips while the soul is brooding over what cannot be uttered. Later Christian admirers said of him, that he had hidden the words of God in his heart” (*Plato* 58). This association of vision to the words is remarkably informative of Pater’s philosophy of writing, of how he sees the task of a writer. It is also essential to how Pater understands Platonic dialogue. Hieratic writers distinguish themselves by a visionary ability to recognize music in things and within their own minds, the latter requiring minds which obey the Socratic imperative to “know thyself.”

Affinity

The Platonic dialogue was for Pater, as it was for Jowett, essentially a conversation with the self, in search for what really “is.” “Now it is straight from Plato's lips, as if in natural conversation, that the language came, in which the mind has ever since been discoursing with itself concerning itself, in that inward dialogue, which is the ‘active principle’ of the dialectic method as an instrument for the

attainment of truth” (142). The method actually imitates the process Pater describes in “Style,” of the author searching for the corresponding word to match the idea. The definitive word is sought to apply perfectly to the idea. “The thought was to be adjusted,” Pater explains, “first, to the phenomena, to the facts, daintily, to the end that the said thought might just cover those facts, and no more. To the thought, secondly, to the conception, thus articulated, it was necessary to adjust the term; the term, or ‘definition,’ by which it might be conveyed into the mind of another” (*Plato* 178). The purpose of Plato’s dialectic is really for the sake of expression, for the sake of manifesting evermore refined ideas into words.

The visible world is never dismissed by Plato, declares Pater, despite making us “freemen of those solitary places” in the abstract (143). In “The Genius of Plato,” Pater writes: “Yes, the visible world, so pre-eminently worth eye-sight at Athens just then, really existed for him: exists still—there’s the point!—is active still everywhere, when he seems to have turned away from it to invisible things” (126). Discussing the Ideal side of Platonism, he writes “all true theory is indeed ‘vision’” (193), referring to the etymology of “theory” coming from the Greek *theorós*, a spectator or onlooker, from the verb *theāsthai*, “to look,” or to view, and to contemplate (OED). Indeed the Platonic notion of “Idea” is not removed from sight, as *idéa* (form) comes from the Greek *ideîn*, “to see” (OED). The very roots of these words connect the immaterial to the sensible in vision. And Pater especially associates a lover with a seer. The sensuous lover is sensuous mainly with the eye or ear, and though ascending into the abstract, remains led by an attraction of person to person.

Repeatedly Pater urges that a philosopher’s knowledge is towards persons:

The sensuous lover becomes a lover of the invisible, but still a lover, after his earlier pattern, carrying into the world of intellectual vision, of θεωρία, all the associations of the actual world of sight. Some of its invisible realities he can all but see with the bodily eye: the absolute

Temperance, in the person of the youthful Charmides; the absolute Righteousness, in the person of the dying Socrates. Yes, truly! all true knowledge will be like the knowledge of a person, of living persons, and truth, for Plato, in spite of his Socratic asceticism, to the last, something to *look* at. (146)

Although one might immediately judge Pater to be praising the physical world, his sense being visionary, he is actually converting the sensuous world into the abstract paradoxically by a sort of personification. Associating abstract qualities with characters reminds one of the critical formulas Pater employs to describe the subjects of his essays. Even in the “Preface” to *The Renaissance*, Pater, describing the critic’s task, uses the phrase “disengage this virtue” (x), and calls it the “active principle” (xi), essentially synonymous for form. It is not the body of the subjects he is describing, but the person.

Platonically, persons are identified with the ruling part of their soul, their mind; for minds are thought to be our highest part which distinguishes man from other creatures. Of course the word “person” was not used by Plato, but in describing Platonism Pater relies heavily upon it, even in its adjectival use as “personal,” or more abstract sense of “personality.” A. E. Taylor suggests that although Plato does not use the word “personality” the idea is omnipresent in the dialogues, and he notes that our ethical definitions of the person derived from theological debates regarding the Person of Christ and the Trinity (74).⁵⁴ The standard definition of person became that of Boethius (480-524): “*persona . . . est naturae rationabilis individua substantia*” (the individual substance of a rational creature) (*Contra Eutychen* IV. 20). Boethius there refers to the Latin meaning of *persona*, being a mask, through which one literally makes sound (III.9-10). But person is also thought to derive from the Greek *prosopon*, meaning face, which St Augustine associates with the Trinity, coming from *pros* +

⁵⁴ Alfred Edward Taylor (1869-1945) obtained his first-class in Oxford’s *Literae Humaniores* in 1891 as a member of New College.

ops (ὄψ), being face, or eye (OED), from the future of “to see” (ὄψομαι from ὀράω) (Liddell and Scott). To gather these definitions shines light on what Pater might suggest when he uses the word “person,” referring towards what the lover of knowledge seeks; for the word includes sight, sound, face, and, ultimately, reason or mind. Through reading, one’s acquaintance of a person writing might be no more than a vision representing his or her absence, but that reading itself leads critically to a kind of personification.

Pater selects the word “affinity” to describe this relationship of person to person—“by some law of affinity between the seer and what is seen, the knowing and the known” (170)—referring to Plato’s affinity argument in the *Phaedo*, that like draws to like. Several times Pater represents this law also in the Greek, of “that Platonic law of affinity, so effectual in these matters—ὁμοῖον ὁμοίῳ” (184). Socrates uses the affinity argument to persuade of the immortality of the soul. It states that our souls have knowledge of the Forms; and in order to have knowledge of something, the knower has to be in communion with the known, and communion must be of things that are alike; since the Forms are immaterial and eternal, the soul must be like the Forms, and therefore also immaterial and eternal. The divine, immortal, and intellectual part of us it must be that recognizes the Forms when we see them (80b). The soul is attracted to the good and wise god (80d). Knowledge proceeds by a kind of enthusiasm. Only the “soul itself sees that which is invisible and apprehended by the mind”⁵⁵ (83b). But in Platonism, as Pater portrays in *Marius*, all worthy knowledge primarily requires a clarity of soul, which binds knowledge to ethics—the things we do or do not, the influences we seek or avoid. “No one who has not been a philosopher and who is not wholly pure when he departs, is allowed to enter into

⁵⁵ Translation by Harold North Fowler’s Loeb Classical edition (1914).

communion with the gods, but only the lover of knowledge” (82b-c Fowler). Pater uses this model of how a lover of knowledge may make acquaintance with a god, in his criticism, so that a critic may commune with the mind of the author he reads. In this sense Pater’s criticism can be conceived as soul to soul, like Newman’s double-Logos. In the immediate sense the writing conveys a mind, but in a deeper sense, a double prosopopoeia occurs in good criticism for it fundamentally portrays the union of two souls. As Wilde articulates, criticism will reveal the critic no less than the art or artist as subject, so that we may witness a double personification in the meeting of minds, in Paterian criticism at least. Pater’s critical appreciations perform a kind of Platonic knowledge.

It would be absurd to bring out this teaching of Plato unless Pater himself used these terms. Not only does he use these terms, but he adopts the notion of Platonic persons in regard to knowledge, which greatly affects his criticism. Although difficult, writes Pater—“of various degrees of difficulty, it must be observed, to various minds” (152)—he describes the object of Plato’s knowledge as “but little short of living persons, to be known as persons are made known to each other, by a system of affinities, on the old Eleatic rule, ὁμοῖον ὁμοίῳ, like to like—these persons constituting together that common, eternal, intellectual world, a sort of divine family or hierarchy, with which the mind of the individual, so far as it is reasonable, or really knows, is in communion or correspondence” (*Plato* 153). It is through affinities that like souls will know each other across ages.

So as not to fall into the sort of dogmatic explanations that Pater declares to abhor, it seems fair at least to say that Pater sees Platonic knowledge as the relationship between mind and mind, and holds a strong tendency to model his dialectic as a person’s mind in search of logos, or, analogously, the word. Mind and

logos overlies each other and he rather gestures towards them than makes his critical framework dubiously explicit. His use of person allows those of us who are distrustful of metaphysics to conceive of persons as they would. Platonic dialogue shows him a shared critical and creative method, as his understanding of the person reveals to him what ought to be known—or perhaps what only could be known.

The manner that Pater conceives a critic accessing a person's mind is modelled on the way a mystic conceives of his communion with God. The search for knowledge is guided by music and powered by enthusiasm, the literally being filled with a god, and as Pater reminds us in *Plato*: “if philosophy is anything at all, it is nothing less than an ‘escape from the evils of the world,’ and ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ, a being made like to God” (264), referring to the ideal philosopher of the *Theaetetus*. Of Plato's musical laws, he writes, they are, “to be known on the favourite Platonic principle of like by like (ὁμοῖον ὁμοίῳ) though the incapable or uninstructed ear, in various degrees of dulness, may fail to apprehend it” (53). Knowledge seems to require an initiation of sorts, only available to a few. Criticism is the appreciation of music, and the product of Platonic dialectic, of the conversation of the self, in the pursuit to get outside the self.

Writing of Socrates' corrective influence over Plato, Pater writes, “‘Many are called, but few chosen’: Ναρθηκοφόροι μὲν πολλοί, βᾶκχοι δὲ τε παῦροι” (97-98), combining the gospel of Matthew with Plato's *Phaedo* (69c). He would have read of the same union in Jowett's edition of the *Dialogues*, where Jowett translates Plato's phrase more literally as “Many are the wand-bearers but few are the mystics,” and in parenthesis beside writes “Many are called, but few chosen.” Pater's use of the term, however, for it focuses on the writer Plato, rather than Socrates. Despite Pater's clarifying at the book's opening that, “By Platonism is not meant Neo-Platonism of

any kind,” he does now and then project Christianity onto Platonism, with the words of the Bible. “*Sitivit anima mea,*” writes Pater of the religion of Socrates, “*in Deum, in Deum vivum*” (86), from the Vulgate (Psalms 41:3), by memory it seems, because the quotation is inexact. “My soul hath thirsted after a strong living God” is changed by Pater to “My soul hath thirsted in God, in a living God,”⁵⁶ giving the Neoplatonic sense of one uniting within God, rather than *ad*, towards God.⁵⁷ And the lengthy passages he translates from Plato emphasize this hope. Translating the *Symposium*, for example, he writes, “And having begotten virtue (virtue is the child that will be born of this mystic intellectual commerce, or *connubium*, of the imaginative reason with ideal beauty) and reared it, he will become dear to God, and if any man may be immortal he will be” (123).

As we discussed Pater’s use of “imaginative reason” in our chapter on Wordsworth, he uses it here synonymously with “nous” in his translation of the *Symposium*, for that which sees the beautiful. Meaning mind, *nous* is used both for the individual mind, and for the Divine Mind of Plato’s *Timaeus*, also known as the Demiurge, or Craftsman, who gives form to the elemental matter in creating the world. *Nous* enables the highest kind of knowledge in Platonism, so it is not uncharacteristic of Pater to equate it with the critical term “imaginative reason.”

Pater is aware that the intellectual goal of Platonism might not be reached. He emphasizes that temperament and peculiarity of mind in a person leads to the attainment of truth, and is beyond one’s control, depending upon even a certain grace

⁵⁶ Oscar Wilde writes in his notebook: “ερωϛ is the beginning of the mysticism of neo-platonism: it is like the fruitio Dei of the mediaeval saint, or Dante’s love of Beatrice, or the hunger and thirst after righteousness—”([204] 149). The editors of his notebooks, Smith and Helfand, see as its source Jowett’s introduction to the *Symposium* (II 18).

⁵⁷ Pater’s gravestone at Oxford’s Holywell Cemetery reads from the Psalms, “In te Domine Speravi,” emphasizing “in”: “In You, Lord, I have hoped.”

beyond one. Although one might be taught the method of dialectic, it seems a matter for the few chosen:

Yet, in spite of all that, in spite of the demand he makes for certainty and exactness and what is absolute, in all real knowledge, he does think, or inclines his reader to think, that truth, precisely because it resembles some high kind of relationship of persons to persons, depends a good deal on the receiver; and must be, in that degree, elusive, provisional, contingent, a matter of various approximation, and of an “economy,” as is said; that it is partly a subjective attitude of mind:—philosophic truth consists in the philosophic temper. (187)

“Economy” is a term used similarly to “dispensation” by Christian writers in post-classical Latin (OED). Newman uses this word in its theological sense in *Arians of the 4th Century* (1833) and *Tracts for the Times* (1841), as a truth given, or dispensed, by a higher power and formatted to fit the prejudices of a people or person so that it may be better received. Pater modifies the meaning of the term, and uses it here to explain how the same truth is interpreted differently and therefore changed by individual tempers in its articulation. Even the most careful writer stands to be misconstrued.

Thus Platonism has a sceptical side, where judgment is suspended for the last word:

“a Dialogue of search”:—every one of Plato's Dialogues is in essence such like that whole, life-long, endless dialogue which dialectic, in its largest scope, does but formulate, and in which truly the last, the infallible word, after all, never gets spoken. Our pilgrimage is meant indeed to end in nothing less than the *vision* of what we seek. But can we ever be quite sure that we are really come to that? By what sign or test? (192)

We might recall the final scene in *Marius* here, where the reader cannot be certain of Marius' state of mind. Pater's doubt here resides in the authority of a writer to represent his vision, indeed it goes deeper; it derives from struggling to maintain the value of individual, personal knowledge, even when it is non-representational. Visionary knowledge is necessarily first-person and might not be communicable to others—but the task of authors is to convey their vision in words. This vision is

reached through the method of dialectic, akin to scaling from the many to the one. How one manifests an *aperçu* into words is the key question of authority. The dialogue of search is towards the source of authority, towards knowledge, of the Logos, of the word, of the critical apprehension of a writer's mind: of one's own mind in creating, of another's mind in appreciating. In "Style" Pater counsels "the reader to catch the writer's spirit, to think with him, if one can or will" (8). And a good writer, such as Pascal, through expression, because he pursues Authority, will enable a critic to reach him—as though all roads lead to Rome.

Newman writes in "Literature" that "since the thoughts and reasonings of an author have, as I have said, a personal character, no wonder that his style is not only the image of his subject, but of his mind" (210). Pater's criticism presents a similar belief. "There are some to whom nothing has any real interest, or real meaning, except as operative in a given person; and it is they who best appreciate the quality of soul in literary art," writes Pater in "Style"; "They seem to know a *person*, in a book, and make way by intuition" (*Appreciations* 27). An author's style is so important because it is evidence that one is in contact with what really "is." Philosophical criticism attains its goal by tracing words back to the mind from which they were conceived; and in so doing will "reproduce the portrait of a *person*" (*Plato* 125).

Readers of Pater will recall how rarely he portrays dialogue among characters, and almost never as a means to discover something important in the narrative, unlike Wilde's genial and ideal depictions of conversation. For Pater, meaningful dialogue takes place in reflective conversations with one's self. Even when translating large passages of Plato's dialogues, we get almost no sense they were written with multiple characters. This is why Pater can easily see the essay, the thoughts of a single person, as the natural modern form of Plato's dialogues. The Platonic dialectic is "by a

method . . . a circuitous journey” (178), and dialogue “is essentially an essay” (176): it better imitates a conversation with the self than other forms of writing. Its spirit as trying, essaying, more closely imitates Plato’s dialogues of search. In Pater’s critical essays we may witness a person’s attempt to commune with another person. If writing to him becomes the best way that persons can represent their vision, then an author’s craft becomes an epistemological necessity for man, and criticism is an act of love capable of uniting intellects.

The “style” of a writer will eventually be the “man.” And yet the authority sought is an affinity, which implies both closeness and separation. It draws persons together, but, as the word emphasizes, it maintains boundaries, is but an approach to a border (*fin*), from where one can appreciate another and develop the self.

Pater pursues a return to the source for the sake of his own authority; but it is an authority within a greater Authority (otherwise failure could not be possible). His style was “extravagant,” as Yeats wrote of him, because he was searching for that affinity, and perhaps the search gave him his authority. Of the Impressionist and Symbolist in “The Decadent Movement in Literature” (1893), Arthur Symons writes: “What both seek is not general truth merely, but *la vraie vérité*, the very essence of truth—the truth of appearances to the senses, of the visible world to the eyes that see it; and the truth of spiritual things to the spiritual vision” (99). When Symons revises his theories in the introduction to *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899), he sounds even more Paterian, writing “That something more serious has crystallised, for the time, under the form of Symbolism, in which art returns to the one pathway, leading through beautiful things to the eternal beauty” (4)—he might, despite himself, through Pater, be translating the *Symposium*. How much of the mysticism which the generation who followed Pater came to seek, we might ask, of the Symbolists, as

understood by Symonds,—of Yeats and the Rhymers' Club—is just this imitation of Pater's search for authority, in things, of the soul, of his Platonically conceived artistry, and the real authority he generated also for critical affinity?

From perhaps an historical term in *The Renaissance* suggesting decay after the rebirth of the Hellenic spirit upon the artistic temper in Europe, decadence develops into a more permanent and personal force in *Plato and Platonism*, against which a soul must struggle in effort to attain culture. Plato reveals a tendency indeed, intellectually, ethically, and artistically, and the pursuit for authority amidst decadence becomes the true trial of Pater's Platonic education.

Conclusion

On the reverse sides of Pater's manuscript essay on Pascal, the work which he was writing when his life went out of him in 1894, are notes and translations of Plato. Up unto the last, evidence shows that Plato formed such a large part of his creative environment. There is something especially meaningful about Pater writing an essay on one of the great Christian thinkers on the reverse of what appears to be lecture notes on Plato. Indeed Plato's name in essays and translations can be found on many of his manuscripts, but the Pascal manuscript serves as a physical reminder to us of how Plato is often literally behind much of his work, and never far from his writing desk. Perhaps the continual proximity of Plato made it convenient for Pater in the essay to compare Pascal's tone to Socrates' in the *Apology* (*Miscellaneous* 66-67). On the reverse of page 27 Pater writes of the character Cephalus, from the beginning of *The Republic*, who as an old man is pleased to no longer have the appetites of youth, because it is easier now to be virtuous.

Such a coincidence both separates two events or things and unites them. In "Style" Pater would use Pascal to exemplify the subtlety of the "line between fact and something quite different from external fact" (*Appreciations* 8), "an expression no longer of fact but of his sense of it, his peculiar intuition of a world, prospective, or discerned below the faulty conditions of the present, in either case changed somewhat from the actual world" (8-9). The awareness of a real intellectual distinction between external fact, and "his peculiar intuition," without loss of verity in the latter, and more enduring than present, "faulty conditions," is a fundamental awareness that associates Pater with Platonism.

The Pascal manuscript may be a symbol of the appeal towards intuition in criticism: just as we have the external fact of the Plato notes on the reverse of the

Pascal essay, it indicates something more, some characteristic ameliorative conjunction perhaps, of subjects viewed within a pervading Platonic framework in Pater's mind. The external fact is not diminished, but acts as a step towards some higher knowledge.

If we had to trace an overarching narrative in the writing of Pater's career we might say it was similar to the old story, that Pater followed a Platonic narrative from a concern with the mysterious and strange, and finished with a concern for clarity and sanity, these terms of course not being mutually exclusive on either end. His references to Christianity in *Plato*, for instance, maintain much of the mystery with which he shaded *The Renaissance*. It is an old story because it is shared by the Bible, by Plato, by Dante, and by Milton: that "long is the way / And hard, that out of hell leads up to light" (II.432-33).

Pater reminds us that the way is hard: as he emphasizes in his early essay on Wordsworth, those who have passed through "this difficult way, are like people who have passed through some initiation, a *disciplina arcani*" (*Appreciations* 42). Ever combining ethics with his art, he stresses the difficulty of the journey to become a consummate writer of prose, on the final page of *Plato*: "Χαλεπὰ τὰ καλὰ [beautiful things are difficult]—he is faithful to the old Greek saying. Patience, 'infinite patience,' may or may not be, as was said, of the very essence of genius; but is certainly, quite as much as fire, of the mood of all true lovers" (*Plato* 283). Love empowers this journey lest we forget art's importance in personal development, that perfection may satisfy us emotionally; and that in art, as in ethics, critical reserve, moderation, and suffering—as patience, like passion, derives from Latin's *patior*, to suffer—are also qualities for success by tempering love's mania. Perhaps Pater's teaching was not so arcane.

Pater also seems ever ascending up to light: as the literal meaning of education is “to be led up by” something, from a worse to a better place, his concern, without pedantry, for life-long education in order to enrich lives informs much of his work. If his is a narrative of knowledge, however, it is not evidently to a pure source. The motto of the university in which he lived and worked, and to which he is inevitably associated, is *Dominus illuminatio mea*, from Psalm 27, The Lord is my light. The sentiment may also suit Platonism, as the Good, in which Beauty shares, enlightens us, in the manner of the sun. Apollo and his music might conceptually hold the place of the *Dominus*. These two great strands of the Western tradition, if they remained distinct, seemed to entwine and become simplified in Pater’s focus. Benson writes in Pater’s biography: “Indeed he read less and less as time went on; in later years, apart from reading undertaken for definite purposes, he concentrated himself more and more upon a few great books, such as Plato and the Bible, which he often read in the Vulgate; he made no attempt at any time to keep abreast of the literature of the day” (23). We might find in Pater’s later reading habits, the reflection of the intellectual tendency to flee the world, and to be assimilated with God, or at least sympathetic, in the manner of the ideal philosopher and freeman, we saw in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, or the lovers in the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, or the man who leaves the cave in *The Republic* to see the light directly.

In “Pascal,” Pater remarks on the narrow scope of Pascal’s reading, mainly of Montaigne quite significantly and the Vulgate (*Miscellaneous* 72), while in Pascal’s writing Pater witnesses, “the conversation of the writer with himself, with himself and with God, or rather concerning Him, for He is, in Pascal’s favourite phrase from the Vulgate, *Deus absconditus*, He who never directly shows Himself” (75). Dialectic, as the conversation with the self in pursuit of knowledge, tries to unite the immaterial

self with what is worth knowing, and privileges the truth beyond external fact. The invisible would explain the visible, thus Pascal is also an example of one preoccupied “in the spiritual order by a demonstration of this other invisible world all around us, with its really ponderable forces, its movement, its attractions and repulsions, the world of grace, unseen, but, as he thinks, the one only hypothesis that can explain the experienced, admitted facts” (76). We find in “Pascal” yet another example of Pater using Platonism as a philosophical basis for interpreting the mind of an author. The similarities between Pater and Pascal are not those that argue Pater is extremely Christian, but rather they express once again a deep sympathy with his subject through Platonism that unites them together in a common conceptual authority.

Light imagery plays an important part in Pater’s thought, as something essentially visible yet intangible. His interest in the lasting continuity of thought and art would encourage the source of the wisdom of Hellenism, envisioned as light itself. By the imagery in his writing he seems to draw closer to light as time goes by. Although Leonardo’s vision, in *The Renaissance*, seems to be “faint light,” passing “through deep water” (111), whereas the final image of *Plato* is of “a dry light,” or Plato’s “dry beauty” (283), the Logos, they share a constant source of luminescence. The “hard, gemlike flame,” like which he asks us to “always burn” in the “Conclusion,” not for the mere moment, yearns for something longer lasting. We may find this image again, accomplished, in *Plato*, where he compares the philosopher’s soul to the pilgrim-poet: “For him, as for Dante, in the impassioned glow of his conceptions, the material and the spiritual are blent and fused together. While, in that fire and heat, what is spiritual attains the definite visibility of a crystal, what is material, on the other hand, will lose its earthiness and impurity” (*Plato* 135). The hard, gemlike flame, however, as hard as crystal, loses its colour, becoming

translucent, in the ability to pass light through like a clairvoyant or the diaphanous soul in “Diaphaneité.” The beauty, for which he asks his reader to burn in the “Conclusion,” is maintained, and as it loses its colour it also loses its “earthiness,” in a Platonic catharsis towards moral purity, every bit as beautiful, as the “gemlike flame.” Pater called such ardour in the “Conclusion” an “ecstasy,” a Platonic “coming out of body,” which is a similar desire to losing one’s earthiness. But by *Plato*, the same passion is tempered so that it may longer endure. It seems the excess chemicals that make a flame burn blue or green will burn-up, so that the light of the flame becomes dry and white.

The perfect form was already there in “Winckelmann,” within the statuary, “That white light, purged from the angry, bloodlike stains of action and passion, reveals, not what is accidental in man, but the god in him, as opposed to man’s restless accidents of life” (*Renaissance* 213); but the Greek repose came to seem more plausible in man by *Plato*. Hermione might magically melt “from her stony posture” in “Winckelmann” (184), as the statue come to life in *The Winter’s Tale*, but through something of Spartan discipline, *Plato*’s students might themselves become truly a living work of art. Pater’s narrative, though resembling the traditional, is his own individual journey, enacted in his writing.

Being and knowledge are rather entangled in Pater’s writing, as they are in Platonism, but we need not disentangle them so much as acknowledge the tendency. Pater’s care for beauty made him appreciate the respect of *being* as much as *knowing*, so that it was not his actually fulfilling the aspiration to be like God that consoled him in Platonism as much as the aspiration itself. Such an aspiration intensified for him what it means to be a person. Platonism taught him to be not only a knowing person, but a loving person, with the love perpetuating knowledge. The state of lover and

philosopher was not quite enough for him. His enduring idealization for beauty led him to the creating life, so that he too might be read as a source of loving knowledge. The final touch of Pater's Platonic education is that the lover of knowledge seeks not only light, but actually becomes the light, by identifying with it, and may in turn be seen by others in his light. The diaphanous soul may be closed-in upon itself, and sexless, but the beauty of its work will engender further creation: so the beauty born in Pater will be, through our reading, Platonically born again.

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