# THE PATER NEWSLETTER
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EDITORS NOTE

This issue of The Pater Newsletter, you will notice, is a bit slimmer than other recent issues, and arriving quite out of season. The reasons for both these distinctions are partly economic and partly transitional. We are still working hard to encourage submissions and greater participation among all IWPS members so that the journal continues to grow. In the interest of gathering a dynamic range of essays on our previously announced special topic, "Pater and Cosmopolitanism," our next publication will be a double issue (Spring/Fall 2009). We have extended the submission deadline (to August 31, 2009) and are also actively seeking contributors. Please refer to the last page of the issue for our updated call for papers.

Another significant work in progress is the development of a website (www.paternewsletter.org) that, in its present state, finally allows for easy, secure, and currency-friendly subscription management. It also features a hypertext version of Lesley Higgins' indispensable Pater Webliography. This page – accessible by clicking the "Resources" tab on the home page – provides active links to every entry provided in the Spring 2008 print version, as well as clearly outlined subject headings and subheadings for easy navigation. For now, we can use the website to announce the current and forthcoming issues of the journal, our call for papers, conference announcements, and other Pater "news." Eventually, we would like to make the site much more interactive and active. Our aim is to create a true resource for all things Paterian, a real must-see for scholars of the author or the era. Importantly, we still envision the website as complementing the print journal, not replacing it. As always, input and opinions from everyone are welcome, in this endeavor and all others.
This issue was also supposed to announce the upcoming Conference of the International Walter Pater Society, scheduled for summer 2010 in Venice, Italy – but those plans have been put on hold for a year. In the months ahead, however, both The Pater Newsletter and the website will feature updates, as the organizers refine the details, and the call for papers. “Venice in 2011” should provide an excellent opportunity for Pater studies.

Thanks to everyone for excusing our dust, so to speak, as we seek ways to improve The Pater Newsletter, and to facilitate the exchange of both information and ideas among the members of the International Walter Pater Society and beyond.

Megan Becker-Leckrone
HE DEVELOPMENT OF REASONABLY CHEAP, on-demand printing has been both a boon and a bane for scholars working on Pater and other late nineteenth-century figures. Books that would, in most cases, need to be ordered via interlibrary loan from a major research collection, can now be found in inexpensive reading copies through just about any on-line retailer. A quick search of Amazon.com yielded well over a dozen copies of Marius the Epicurean, including large-print versions (no small thing for those who have burned through eyeglass prescriptions trying to read Ian Small’s Oxford World’s Classics edition). This bounty has its downsides, however. Apart from aesthetic issues (the covers are often ridiculously inappropriate, and the print poor), these editions are typically reprinted from whatever public domain copy the publisher can get his or her hands on – often not standard editions – and they are neither edited nor annotated.

Valancourt’s new edition of Marius the Epicurean, edited by Gerald Monsman, is, in this regard, a very pleasant surprise. Valancourt is a micro-press operating out of Kansas City, Missouri, which specializes in rare Gothic fiction, but also makes available rare Victorian and fin-de-siècle works. The books are in most cases edited by well-qualified scholars, and include original introductions and notes. Based on the evidence of my review copy, Valancourt’s editions are nicely designed, and printed on good paper with readable type.
(small quibble: the painting reproduced on the cover is not credited anywhere). While not up to the scholarly level of Broadview editions, these books are an attractive option for both teaching and research.

Monsman’s edition is valuable for another reason as well. While comparable editions of *Marius the Epicurean* (Small’s Oxford, and Michael Levey’s Penguin, both from 1986, and both apparently out of print) use the 1892 third edition of the novel as their text, Monsman chooses the 1885 first edition. The changes from the first to the third edition are not major – mostly small stylistic fixes, which Monsman argues are not always salutary, at least cumulatively, and the removal of a scene of cat-immolation that was not well received by Pater’s first readers. Monsman blames Pater’s 1889 essay “Style” for most of the small alterations, and claims that the 1885 text is truer to the historical moment in which Pater was writing than the revised edition. This kind of choice – whether to take the first publication or the last version the author revised as most authoritative text – has long divided editorial theorists (as well as Paterians). Monsman is no ideologue in this regard, and makes a good case for following the 1885 text here. His choice, I suspect, will (and should) be tested by further scholarship.

Monsman’s introduction and annotations will be fine for most readers, though they hardly match his edition of *Gaston de Latour* (to be fair, the two novels present very different editorial challenges, as Monsman readily acknowledges), and not quite as extensive or detailed as Small’s. Monsman also includes the text of the *Pervigilium Veneris*, as well as an excerpt from Edmund Gosse’s essay on Pater, two contemporary reviews of the novel, and an excerpt from Monsman’s book *Pater’s Portraits* discussing how Pater responded to one of the reviews. The real value of the edition, though, lies in its making available, in a reliable and affordable text, the 1885 edition of the novel.

*University of Utah*
Though only one fine chapter in this excellent and scholarly book is devoted exclusively to Walter Pater, his presence is felt in at least eleven of the remaining thirteen, vanishing from view only when we leave the Victorian period. Paul Barolsky announces Pater's appearance in the foreword to the book by pointing out that Pater's "influence on our understanding of the Italian Renaissance is still poorly understood." This collection goes some way to improving that understanding and sets Pater alongside Ruskin as ill-assorted foundations upon which the Victorian idea of the Renaissance was based.

Inevitably Pater plays an important part in Adrian S. Hoch's account of Botticelli through the eyes of Victorian aesthetes. This subject has been treated before of course, but Hoch adds a number of important factors. First he shows just how much had been written before 1870 when Pater composed his "fragment" on Botticelli; guide books, histories, reviews had all touched on Botticelli and his work but, as Hoch points out, no writer in English had previously devoted a whole piece to the artist. Though Hoch mentions Swinburne and Rossetti, however, he throws no real light on the reason for Pater's choice of subject. The fact is that a number of painters and collectors were interested in Botticelli's work before 1870. As early as 1859 the young Burne-Jones copied some of Botticelli's paintings, and in 1863 the Ashburtons...
bought two Botticelli versions of the Venus Pudica. These were so admired by Rossetti that in 1867 he paid £20 for what he thought was Botticelli’s portrait of Smerelda Bandinelli. Rossetti also admired Fuller Maitland’s Mystic Nativity and in 1868 stopped off in Leeds on his way to Scotland to see it. Simeon Solomon had seen the Botticells in Florence in 1866-7 and Botticelli immediately became a strong influence on his work. All this would have been enough to fire up Swinburne and both he and Solomon were closely in touch with Pater. In other words, the taste for Botticelli was coming out of a strongly avant garde group of practicing artists in the 1860s, and in his “fragment” Pater was recording not only his own responses but echoing those of the aesthetic enthusiasm that he felt in the London milieu.

Unlike any of his contemporaries, however, Pater stresses what he sees as the curious moral ambiguity of Botticelli’s work: “neither for God nor his enemies,” and Lene Østermark-Johansen’s essay devoted to Pater himself is a finely incisive and scholarly account of the “fluidity” of Pater’s mode of writing. In this inventive and arresting argument Østermark-Johansen ingeniously points out the connections between Pater’s shifting, lambent style and his love of liminality, fusion, crossover, flux, and those “movements in which opposites merge” (88). This she attributes to the influence of Heraclitus, and she demonstrates the strong presence of Heraclitan thought not only in the Renaissance itself, but in a revival of interest in the nineteenth century. Like Leonardo’s Mona Lisa, Pater, too, claims she is a “diver in deep seas,” and Østermark-Johansen points out how “the words ‘impression’ and ‘expression’ appear with equal weight in the essay some seven or eight times, as if to suggest the flux and reflux of the human mind” (89). Immediately instances of ebb and flow in Pater’s work spring to mind, but it is likely that his undoubted attachment to Heraclitus is more of a symptom than a cause. Heraclitus appealed to Pater, because Pater was possessed of a fluvial temperament and for some profoundly psychological reason the shifting and the merging of ideas, objects, and sensations gave him a peculiar personal satisfaction.

Nineteenth-century historical writing did not favour the merging of opposites, however, and one of the central issues that Barolsky raises in this book is the nature of Pater’s historiographic influence on his contemporaries. Many of those contemporaries realized that Pater was simply not writing history and remained puzzled and hostile. As Hilary Fraser points out, Emilia
Dilke was one of the most vociferous critics on these grounds since for “her historicism was pivotal” (168). For similar reasons, John Addington Symonds found *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* distasteful, and as John Law tells us, was hugely relieved at Pater’s own warm reception of *The Renaissance in Italy* (156). In Vernon Lee’s case, however, the influence was positive, and Alison Brown shows how throughout her career “Pater’s aestheticism exercised a powerful influence over her” (187).

Again and again one comes across the sense that though Pater may have been little known by general readers he was a strong and controversial figure both within Oxford and throughout the British intellectual community. D. S. Chambers, writing about the Oxford historian Edward Armstrong points out how, when in 1884 Armstrong managed to introduce the Renaissance as an Italian Special Subject into the Oxford syllabus, he deliberately surpassed the word “Renaissance” in the title. This, Chambers tells us is because “it had associations with the literary aestheticism of Walter Pater and would have been taboo to most members of the History Faculty Board” (215).

What emerges from this book is the persistence and pervasiveness of Pater and his influence. There are some new figures here in the British nineteenth-century historiography of the Renaissance and Armstrong is one of them. Some are missing, including Oscar Wilde and his “English Renaissance of Art,” or later Roger Fry, one of whose ambitions was to secure a place in art criticism similar to that of Pater. But this is a fascinating group of essays. They are well considered and make a fine addition to our understanding both of the idea of the Renaissance that we inherited from the nineteenth century and to Walter Pater’s part in it.
Ruskin and Pater on Michaelangelo: A Turning Point in Criticism

"He read it to me just after he had written it, and as I went home I wanted to drown myself in the Surrey Canal or get drunk in a tavern – it didn't seem worth while to strive any more if he could think it and write it."¹

While not many modern readers are likely to feel so strongly about Ruskin's attack on Michelangelo as Edward Burne-Jones, they probably would not regard "The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret" as among its author's most winning performances. After reading the lecture to his friend early in 1871, Ruskin went on to deliver it in the Sheldonian Theatre in June of that year. It was not well-received by several senior members of the University. Ruskin "troubled his audience" (Hilton 483) by accusing Michelangelo of pride and sensuality and by what seemed to many of them to be a gratuitously slighting reference to J. C. Robinson, the scholar who, the previous year, had catalogued Oxford University's collection of Michelangelo's drawings. Whatever the misgivings of "mature academic minds," undergraduates who attended Ruskin's Oxford lecture of 1871 had no doubt that they were "in touch with a great consciousness" and being offered "learning by inspiration." Ruskin's musical voice, manner of a "rarified actor" (Hilton 482), and habit of introducing extemporary emotional passages into his discourses enthralled his younger audiences. Most of the undergraduates were too awed to notice the speaker's odd gestures and eccentric asides.
When "The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret" was delivered, Ruskin was "close to his first mental breakdown" (Hilton 487). His "frustrated despair" at the state of his relationship with the young Rose La Touche and his misgivings at his cousin Joan's marriage produced an emotional disintegration.

"Revolted by adult physical relationships" (Hilton 486-7), Ruskin was disquieted by those of his cousin and her future husband. A month after his lecture on Michelangelo and Tintoretto, he suffered a complete collapse characterized by "exhaustion, high fever and delirious dreams" (Hilton 489).

Any examination of work produced by a distinguished writer at a time of distress, and which does so little justice to his abilities, looks mean-spirited. It would be ungrateful to the author of The Stones of Venice and Unto This Last to use the remarks he made on Michelangelo in 1871 as the basis for any final judgment on him. However, Ruskin's lecture deserves to be explored for another reason. "The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret" was followed some five months later by the publication in the Fortnightly Review (November, 1871) of Walter Pater's article "The Poetry of Michelangelo." Pater's piece on Michelangelo came after his essay on Pico della Mirandola, which had appeared the previous month in the same periodical. The record of borrowings from Brasenose College Library, showing that Pater was taking out works on Pico between September 1870 and March 1871, suggests that he was working on the first essay in the winter of 1870 and the spring of the following year. Although the evidence is not decisive, it seems likely that he turned his attention to Michelangelo around the time of Ruskin's lecture. However, the proof that he wrote in response to Ruskin lies in the details of Pater's article.

The lecture and the article mark a precise moment in the history of nineteenth-century aesthetics and art criticism. For Pater, "The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret" displayed, in a particularly blatant form, the prevailing weaknesses of one way of discussing art. Ruskin's lecture showed the need, and offered the opportunity, to replace one kind of aesthetic discourse by another.

For Pater's own development this implicit yet sharply-drawn confrontation was of great importance. As yet, he had published little. "Coleridge's Writings" and "Wincklemann" announced a program which asserted the claims of aesthetic culture against the older and narrower forms of religious life and proclaimed the need to renounce a taste for metaphysics if we were to mould
our lives to artistic perfection. The study of Botticelli is an appreciation of a painter as yet little known in Britain. The essay on Leonardo seeks to move away from areas, such as his interest in science or occultism, which Pater sees as unhelpful in understanding him, to reach the essence of his inspiration in a particular attitude to the feminine. Once the connection with Ruskin’s lecture is appreciated, it is clear that “The Poetry of Michelangelo” is far more direct in its break with earlier aesthetic canons and critical methods.

Ruskin was impelled to choose the subject of his lecture by the recent appearance of a catalogue of Michelangelo’s drawings. It is his duty, he says, to show how “those collections may be useful or dangerous to my pupils.” Somewhat irritably, he remarks that no student has “ever asked [him] a single question respecting these drawings, or, so far as I could see, taken the slightest interest in them” (236). From the outset, Ruskin establishes a distinctive tone and register. His vocabulary is heightened and extreme. Michelangelo’s drawings are “dangerous.” Several of the sketches “ought never to be exhibited to the general public” (238). At the same time as he presents himself as a moral guide, he offers his help to a (not particularly bright) set of students. As well as protecting his flock from moral contamination, he provides them with mnemonic devices to retain basic information (“Recollect, first, the great year 1480. Twice four's eight - you can't mistake it” (242)). Ruskin’s choice of tone and manner cannot be separated from the way he looks at art.

Quite apart from their moral defects, what vitiates Michelangelo’s drawings for Ruskin is that they are imperfect, unfinished or experimental. As such, it is improper for us to look at them. “Incipient methods of design are not, and ought not to be, subjects of earnest enquiry to other people” (238). Based upon a particular view of the dignity of art, such a dogma leads to the view that the only fit subject of aesthetic contemplation is the finished product its creator has chosen in that form to exhibit. There is something intrinsically objectionable in looking at the processes by which a work has, or has not, been brought to birth. Michelangelo’s drawings “fitting muscle after muscle, and bone after bone” are, at best, only “idly experimental” (237).

Such a reverence for the artist’s dignity, excluding unfinished work or other forms of personal revelation, belongs on the other side of a divide in the history of aesthetics. It reflects the cast of mind similar to that displayed in the suppression or doctoring of Shelley’s texts or in protests, like those of Wilde,
at the publication of Keats’ letters. We have only to recall what, in our view, a student would miss by not reading (say) the first drafts of Yeats’ “Sailing to Byzantium” to register the difference between current sensibility and that to which Ruskin was appealing.

What is surprising is not so much Ruskin’s dislike of unfinished work; many of his contemporaries would have agreed with him. What is unusual is the violence of his distaste and his willingness to use Michelangelo’s unfinished or experimental sketches as grounds for a moral indictment. Most of the drawings have clearly been “executed in times of sickness or indolence” (237). One of them, in its “weakness and frightfulness,” suggests “mental disorder” (238). The product of an enervated mind, another sketch has been “scrawled in the feverish languor of exhaustion, which cannot escape its subject of thought” (238). Even if one accepts that an escape into detachment is always desirable, there is a lost opportunity for investigation here. What exactly could Michelangelo not escape and why was it impossible for him to do so? An attempt at sympathetic understanding might (if one took Ruskin’s view of the artist’s drawings) reveal something useful about him. For Ruskin, however, such an imaginative exploration could not be successful. It is impossible to reconstruct the state of mind which produced this work: “These drawings have nothing whatever to do with present life, with its passions or with its religion” (238).

Ruskin’s certainty about this matter is based on his historical scheme, a narrative of rise, achievement, and decline which is of universal application: “Among all nations of the world that have practised it successfully,” art goes through “three great periods” (239). This moral progression of peoples, moving from primitive savagery through a well-balanced society to inevitable corruption and decay shapes the history of their art. In the first stage, their consciences may be “undeveloped” and “their condition of life in many ways savage” (239). Nonetheless, their actions are in harmony with whatever conscience they possess. In the second stage, they discover “the true laws of social order and personal virtue” and make a “sincere effort to live by such laws” (239). During this period, the arts “advance steadily” and “are lovely, even in their deficiencies, as [are] the buds of flowers” (239-240). With the third stage, the nation “finding it painful to live in obedience to the precepts it has discovered” (240) softens or evades their demands. For a while, spending the
moral capital previously accumulated, artists continue to produce outwardly magnificent work. Soon, however, as the nation “resigns itself to hypocrisy” and endeavors “to make its religion pompous” (240) art falls into hopeless decay and becomes extinct.

One may allow something for the need Ruskin felt, when addressing an undergraduate audience, to present a simple map of the subject. Yet, the general reader, then as now, would be bound to find so rigid and schematic a historical pattern unsatisfactory. The map is altogether too simple. Even those with a fairly limited knowledge of the history of particular societies and the art they produced might find Ruskin’s three stages trite and threadbare. There are just too many exceptions to such a pattern, in the fluidity of events, the unexpected revivals of cultures seemingly far-gone in decay, or in the instances where social and political disorder has accompanied artistic efflorescence.

Doubters might have felt, too, that, in the production of art, there were other factors at work than purely moral ones. Where moral language was appropriate it needed to be more tentative and enquiring. The moral, emotional, and psychological lives of individuals and societies are far too nuanced and diverse, swayed by too many disparate or contradictory motives, and issuing in too many subtle shades of feeling or expression, to be accommodated to so harsh and rigid a scheme as Ruskin’s.

After the three stages through which art inevitably passes, the speaker offers a contrast between northern and southern Europe in the sixteenth century. Where the “Northern temper accepts the scholarship of the Reformation with absolute sincerity” (241) the Italians “seek refuge from it in the partly scientific and completely lascivious enthusiasms of literature and painting” (241). As a result, we “in the north, produce our Shakespeare and Holbein; they their Petrarch and Raphael” (241). Quite apart from the easy dismissal of Petrarch and Raphael, there are problems with such a statement. Perhaps one may reject as a mere rumour the story that Shakespeare “died a Papist,” but no critic of any standing and few readers have found in his plays evidence that his imagination was kindled by fervent Protestantism. In Ruskin’s time, as in our own, the general view was that Shakespeare’s religious opinions were enigmatic and perhaps (given his dangerous times) intentionally difficult to pin down. However, if assertions about his spiritual affiliations could ever be helpful, then the judgment of Carlyle with whom it is “reasonable to ally
Ruskin" (Hilton 456), that Shakespeare represented the consummation of medieval Catholicism, seems somewhat more plausible.⁶

The case of Holbein, Ruskin's other exemplar of northern Protestant virtue, requires equal critical caution. After illustrating Luther's Bible, Holbein fled from Germany, where the iconoclasm of the Reformation denied him his earlier employment in painting altar-pieces. Through the help of Erasmus, Luther's opponent in theological controversy, he found a patron in the fervently Catholic Sir Thomas More, and later became Henry VIII's court painter. Such commonly known biographical facts point to a story which may be difficult to interpret but which certainly does not suggest a straightforward Protestant faith.

Ruskin's cultural and historical frameworks do not help him to unravel the idiosyncrasies of a Holbein or a Shakespeare. Even when he discusses a state rather than an individual such schemes flaw his judgment. In his view, for example, it was the moral decline of Venice in the sixteenth century, consequent on its refusing the doctrines of the Reformation, which "polluted and exhausted the arts she already possessed" (243). Her decadence was manifest in "her iridescence of dying statesmanship and her magnificence of hollow piety" (243). These striking phrases ignore economic and political facts of which most educated readers would be aware. After its medieval heyday, Venice faced insuperable economic problems resulting from the loss of her trade-routes following Vasco da Gama's voyage to India (1497-8) and the Ottoman conquest of Egypt (1516). To have maintained its independence through centuries of unavoidable economic deterioration and in the face of the Spanish domination of Italy clearly required political and moral qualities of courage and tenacity.

Ruskin's moral scheme gives a particular value to "sincerity." He observes that he does not condemn Counter-Reformation painting out of "opposition to the Catholic faith" but because such work was an attempt to support faith by "art and eloquence." Everyone who "honestly accepts and acts upon the knowledge granted to him by the circumstances of his time, has the faith God intends him to have" (242), whatever its theological doctrines may be. There is, of course, nothing discreditable in admitting that one lacks sympathy with certain aesthetic conventions. The best approach for a critic who wished to proceed further would involve humility before the subject and an imaginative
effort to grasp what such art meant in its own terms. How can we be sure that work done within, say, the Baroque (which the English have proverbially found alien) is “insincere”? It is hard enough to assess the sincerity of another person’s beliefs, let alone those of a whole culture. The matrices of artistic inspiration and the details of its subsequent execution cannot be explored by such unprovable (and presumptuous) criteria as “honesty” and “sincerity.” If it is difficult to judge the sincerity of alien peoples or cultures, it is even harder to know what religious faith God intended them to have. We are clearly dealing with matters that cannot be proved or quantified.

Some of Ruskin’s audience and first readers may have been repelled by his overwrought, melodramatic vocabulary. Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian “bring about the deadly change” in art but Michelangelo is “the chief captain in evil” (245). Tintoretto “stands up for a last fight” but Michelangelo “strikes him down and the arts are ended” (245). All these confrontations, battles against the odds, scenes of final defeat and ruin, might engage the attention of (some) undergraduates but finer points of motive and treatment could never be discussed in all this sound and fury. Extremes of condemnation are accompanied by extremes of praise, sapping one’s confidence in both: “The Venetians and Correggio reverse Michael Angelo’s evil and vanquish him in good” (273). There is more “intellectual design” in the “waves of hair” of one of Tintoretto’s figures than in “all the folds of unseemly linen” in Michelangelo’s ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Tintoretto’s Paradise is “the most precious work of any kind whatsoever now existing in the world” (282).

Ruskin’s intemperance is less significant than the limitations of the aesthetic standard by which he makes his judgments. He adopts the axiom that “calmness is the attribute of the entirely highest class of art: the introduction of strong or violently emotional incident is at once a confession of failure” (247). Inner repose and the absence of emotional trouble of any kind are the marks of a high aesthetic value. As well as “faultless workmanship and perfect serenity,” art at its best should compel “you to think of the spirit of the creature, and therefore of its face, more than of its body” (247). In that face, moreover, “you shall be led to see only beauty and joy:—never vileness, vice or pain” (247).

What Ruskin calls “the four essentials of the greatest art” — serenity in state and action, emphasis on the face rather than the body, an expression without any trace of vice or pain, and “faultless and permanent workmanship”
all derive from a particular view of the relationship between physicality and the spiritual. In several ways it is an odd and partial view. Certainly, there are examples of calm joy in European religious art but such a note is by no means dominant. The reason is obvious. The western imagination does not focus on the contemplative Buddha but on the tortured Christ. By any standard, the Crucifixion was an example of the “strong or violently emotional incident” Ruskin deplored (247). If introducing it was “at once a confession of inferiority,” then uncounted European painters have been content with a lower rank than they might have enjoyed (247).

The standard of “faultless workmanship” denies any value to incompleteness, to movement physical or mental from one state to another or to development, aspiration or yearning. Some emotional or spiritual conditions are all the more arresting because they are not rounded off. Lack of finish or of “faultless workmanship” in art may be a deliberate strategy of expression rather than a sign of weakness.

Ruskin’s criteria suggest an unease with the body, and with the physical nature of human life. Michelangelo offends because of his “labyrinths of limbs and mountains of sides and shoulders” (249). Distaste for the corporeal fuels the accusations Ruskin makes (“hasty and incomplete workmanship ... [making] the body and its anatomy the entire subject of interest” (249); “vice and agony as the subject of thought” (250)). Ruskin stresses the connection between these supposed artistic faults and Michelangelo’s defective moral nature, in a way which closes down other (fairly obvious) lines of enquiry. A general reader might ask, for instance, if there was some connection between the violent physicality and anguish of some of Michelangelo’s painting and the ravaging of Italy by foreign armies between the French invasion of 1494 and the sack of Rome in 1527. Did they reflect the spiritual turmoil produced by the Reformation and the Catholic reaction?

Throughout Ruskin’s account of Michelangelo, it is impossible to escape the sense that moral language has flowed over its boundaries, obliterating all other modes of discourse and types of enquiry. It is, perhaps, impossible to imagine “value-free” criticism, to envisage a way of discussing art from which even the faintest moral implication has been removed. (Certainly, Pater’s verdict on Michelangelo is not, in that sense, “value-free”). However, to be worthwhile, judgments involving a moral element, however fugitive, need to be
made discretely and advisedly, in full knowledge of the facts, and employing extreme language, if at all, only with the clearest possible justification. Ruskin's lecture sounds as if it had been written on the theory that the best proof of critical seriousness was to be as angry as possible.

He presents Michelangelo as a man tormented by vanity whose work was almost always an attempt "to execute something beyond his power, coupled with a fevered desire that his power may be acknowledged" (250). Matching himself continually against "rivals whom he cannot forget," his pride is never "at peace" and his melancholy never deep enough "to be raised above petty pain" (251). Of course, one might ask how many human beings, artists or not, have ever achieved the serenity Ruskin reproaches Michelangelo for failing to reach. Certainly, Ruskin himself does not exemplify it.

More significantly, Ruskin makes no attempt, in his summary verdict, at a sympathetic understanding of Michelangelo's temperament, an exploration, in detail, of his social situation and the relationships he had with patrons or other artists, and the technical problems he may have faced. Instead, we are offered an artificial contrast between Michelangelo's baseness and Tintoretto's "well-founded pride, infinitely nobler" (252). Tintoretto's claim to nobility rests on Ruskin's assertion that the painter was "entirely unconcerned respecting the satisfaction of the public" (251). He conformed to an ideal of the artist, sublime in his creativity and indifferent to the pleasure of most people to whom his relation "is exactly that of a tutor to a child" (253). The facts of Tintoretto's career lend such a view of him little support.7

Anyone interested in Michelangelo would be likely to consult the chief source of information, Vasari's Life. Not easy to interpret, the account escapes any kind of glib summary. Ruskin's view that "Michael Angelo lived in a world of court intrigue" engrossed in "petty irritation" or "the pleasures of mean victory" (253) does not begin to cover the disparate, even contradictory information in Vasari's record. It may well be difficult to make overall emotional sense of the artist's violent rages, insulting treatment of some of his patrons, bouts of depression, generous acts of charity, fervent religious devotion, habitual reclusiveness, and intense affection for particular individuals. However, one can certainly say that if Michelangelo was the careerist actuated by vanity Ruskin portrays, then he certainly did not adopt the techniques by which, in most fields, advancement is generally obtained.
Ruskin's treatment of the grotesque in Michelangelo's work is, perhaps, the oddest feature of "The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret." He contrasts the "undisturbed peace and simplicity" with which the ancient Greeks endowed the "type of face for beautiful and honourable persons" with the snub noses they gave to "dishonourable persons, especially satyrs, fauns, and sensual powers" (268). To his indignation and amazement Michelangelo breaks down this aesthetic division by presenting "the nose of the Greek Bacchic mask, treated as a dignified feature" (269). For Ruskin, such perversity must stem from the artist's psychological derangement. Michelangelo, when a young man, had his nose broken in a fight and "the personal bodily injury he had himself received passed with a sickly echo into his mind" (268). There is no warrant in Vasari for such assertions. The *Life* praises Michelangelo's representations of powerful, even ferocious faces. Such contemporary endorsement of the artist's interest in the grotesque might at least seem worth exploring. Instead, Ruskin brushes it aside. Mr Robinson, the cataloguer, quotes, with reference to a grotesque face, the view that "the head was in truth one of the 'teste divine' and the hand that executed it the 'mano terribile' so enthusiastically described by Vasari" (270). Ruskin repeats the phrase "teste divine" or "divine head" with heavy sarcasm and then remarks that Michelangelo's "ostentations display of strength" has "a natural attraction for weak and pedantic persons" (271). This might snub poor Robinson but it does not dispose of the worthwhile point he raised.

There are other and perhaps greater oddities in Ruskin's handling of this subject. Why does he set aside Victor Hugo's work on the grotesque, which twenty years before, he had substantially accepted? Rather than Hegel's *Essay on the Grotesque*, it is Victor Hugo's *Preface to Cromwell* (1827) which provided nineteenth-century English readers with their most effective definition and defence of grotesque art. Hugo sees the grotesque as part of a necessary and desirable moral and social development, an extension of human sympathy connected with a new, more complex way of seeing life. In *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3), Ruskin had accepted the grotesque, in its "noble" form, roughly along the lines Hugo had laid down, as a result of the Christian contradiction between flesh and spirit. In "The Relation between Michelangelo and Tintoret" he withdraws from this position. Instead, his discussion of Michelangelo endorses the rigid aesthetic (linked to social) categories against which Hugo had protested.
Ruskin's lecture on Michelangelo and Tintoretto brings sharply into focus the problems inherent within a particular mode of aesthetic discourse. It illustrates the extremes to which an ethical approach to art may run. Bringing one's capacity for moral indignation to the boil and keeping it simmering is not a helpful way to detect artistic nuances. In a tone which brooks no opposition, Ruskin imposes on the artist dogmas such as the rejection of unfinished work and a special valuing of serenity or sincerity. Fragile and arbitrary in themselves, such tenets present a barrier to potentially interesting avenues of enquiry. Ruskin's understanding of history seems equally rigid and restrictive, turning complex processes into simple patterns of moral rise and decline.

Some commentators have seen Pater's move away from Ruskin's method of art criticism as regrettable. For them, Pater rejects Ruskin's appeal to a shared, healthy moral consensus and severs the link his predecessor had established between art and social conditions. Instead of these, Pater offers a self-indulgent, hazy subjectivism, expressed in mannered prose. Comparison of what the two critics had to say about Michelangelo in 1871 suggests that other issues were involved and that such a view of Pater is deeply flawed. One can easily imagine that, acquainted with Ruskin's lecture, the young Pater might feel that a particular way of talking about art had run its course.

The beginning of Pater's "The Poetry of Michelangelo" sets out to establish a completely different tone and frame of reference. He offers a series of relaxed generalisations: "Critics of Michelangelo have spoken ... verging as great strength always does on what is singular and strange ... strangeness ... an element in all true works of art." Pater invites his readers to stand back and view the artist's work and the comments it has evoked in a wider context. Our (assumed) familiarity with both should produce a certain easiness of temper in which rigid categories and the controversies they arouse look jejune. Rather than sharply opposed, a critic in such a state of mind would see aesthetic qualities such as strength and sweetness as blending, combining and supporting each other. Pater's reference, here, to Samson's riddle ("ex forti dulcedo" (73)) is an effective supporting allusion in a culture still widely familiar with the bible.

The opening premises that "all true works of art" have "a certain strangeness" is unanswerable. One need only think of the alternative proposition that the mission of art is to soothe and to confirm us in what we already think we know. Comparison of the "lovely strangeness" of the highest art to the "blossoming of
the aloe” (73) implies that, while it may be rare, such strangeness is not forced or recondite but a natural product of the human spirit. Pater then reinforces this suggestion of naturalness, applying it specifically to Michelangelo. The artist’s “sweetness and strength, pleasure with surprise [and] energy of conception” recovers the loveliness “found usually in the simplest natural things” (73). The opening paragraph of Pater’s essay gently subverts all Ruskin had been saying about Michelangelo’s grotesque oddity, exhibitionism, and possible mental imbalance.

Next, Pater touches on one of his major themes in the essay, the connection between Michelangelo and his medieval predecessors. Far from breaking with the noble traditions of the past (as Ruskin asserted) Michelangelo “sums up the whole character of medieval art” (73). “In lower hands,” admittedly, this energy becomes “merely monstrous or forbidding” (74) but at its best it possesses “a subdued quaintness or grotesque” (74). In a few sentences, Pater dissolves the moral and aesthetic categories within which Ruskin had sought to operate. Pater also places Michelangelo in a different historical alignment, connecting his art with the “convulsive energy” of Gothic work. The simple and unanswerable point that, like any artistic style, the grotesque may succeed or fail in particular cases, allows discussion to proceed.

Having laid down the markers which will define his exploration of Michelangelo, Pater touches on the relation between the artist and Victor Hugo. Mentioning Hugo at this point serves two purposes. It reminds readers of the conceptual and fictional explorations of the grotesque, in the Preface to Cromwell and in Notre Dame de Paris. (Those who had not come across the former would probably know Hugo’s popular novel). In recalling Hugo’s work, it reaffirms interest in a type of art Ruskin had dismissed, by encouraging readers to remember the pleasure they had found in it. Secondly, Pater approaches qualities in Michelangelo’s work which may be unfamiliar through analogies in Hugo’s work which would be better known. At the same time, he sharpens his readers’ awareness by pointing out the differences between the two. Hugo allies strength and sweetness by “accidents and accessories” while Michelangelo’s “austere genius” operated on a deeper level than “incidental” techniques produced by an “inventive brain” (74).

The paragraph contains an example of one of Pater’s favorite and most effective rhetorical devices, the glancing remark or casual aside which dismisses
a whole way of thinking or feeling. The "lovely accidents" of Hugo's novels have "sometimes relieved conceptions of merely moral or spiritual greatness." That "merely" is suggestive. Pater does not dismiss moral values but reminds us of a distinct aesthetic field of concern. There is a hint in the word "conceptions" that, in a culture which values moralizing language so highly, intentions may be taken for achievement. Solemn generalities may seem profound when an arresting beauty is far rarer and more valuable.

Pater grounds his account of Michelangelo in a definition, negative and positive, of the artist's vision; what it is and is not. In order that we will not come with the wrong expectations, we need to understand the particular features of Michelangelo's imagination. The cadence and vocabulary of Pater's prose point the contrast between the more immediately appealing qualities of other artists and what Michelangelo offers. Blake "frames his most startling conceptions" in a "fretwork of wings and flames" (75). Light alliteration here contrasts with heaviness of the repeated word "blank." Michelangelo, for his backgrounds, offers "only blank ranges of rock, and dim vegetable forms as blank as they" (75). It is up to us to take up the challenge presented by the denial of easy satisfaction.

Next and crucially, Pater identifies the central theme in Michelangelo's work. Ruskin's moral strictures might seem pointless once the viewer had seen, and if possible accepted, the distinctive way in which the artist's imagination worked: "It belongs to the quality of [Michelangelo's] genius thus to concern itself almost exclusively with the creation of man" (75).

The discovery of a central motif in "this creation of life - life coming always as relief of recovery ... is in various ways the motive of all his work" (76)) - explains and justifies Michelangelo's lack of harmony and balance. By putting it in a historical context, Pater denies Greek art of the fifth century B.C. that absolute authority Ruskin's lecture had given it. The Adam of the Sistine Chapel is as "fair as the young men of the Elgin marbles" but "lacks their balance and completeness" (75). However, the qualities of the Greek sculpture embody a particular social and historical ideal. Their "self-contained independent life" may be praiseworthy but it is not, after all, very common, depending, as it does, on specific social and economic conditions. Pater contrasts the "mere expectation and reception" of Michelangelo's Adam with the "balance and completeness" of the Elgin marbles. Created in response to
other religious and social conditions, Michelangelo’s vision is not inferior to the ideals of classical Greek art. It is entirely different and must be explored in its own terms.

Pater invites us to look more closely at what Ruskin had dismissed as turbulent, exhibitionist physicality. Although the Sistine Adam is “rude and satyr-like,” he is also “languid,” with “hardly enough strength to lift his finger” (75). The effect of the figure is, in fact, a complex one. It blends the promise of a future animal vitality with the weakness of the just created. Choosing, as elsewhere, to explain the unfamiliar through analogies with the known, Pater likens the feeling with which the Adam is imbued to the “recovery of suspended health or animation” (75).

Locating Michelangelo’s deepest inspiration in the “creation of life” has another effect (76). It explains the “incompleteness” in Michelangelo’s work, of which Ruskin had complained. Rather than a sign of bad workmanship or carelessness, this quality is “surely not always undesigned” (76). (In one of his typical, glancing asides, Pater adds “and which I suppose no one regrets,” an airy dismissal, without naming him, of Ruskin’s moral rages.) The “incompleteness” is that of life just appearing, as in the Christian Resurrection or “Michelangelo’s favourite Pagan subject,” Leda “breaking out of the egg of a bird” (76). In such cases, Michelangelo “trusts to the spectator to complete the half-emergent form” (76). This last point is crucial. Michelangelo takes the risk of relying on the viewer’s imagination to work with him in a way in which Ruskin, in his emphasis on painstaking workmanship, does not seem to envisage.

In touching on Michelangelo’s love of the material in which he worked (“with him the very rocks have life” (76)), Pater offers another way in which the artist’s “incompleteness” or “carelessness” may be approached. Michelangelo’s love of the innate qualities of stone, shown by his desire in David to “maintain its connexion with the place from which it was hewn,” is radically different from the detailed proficiency and finished art Ruskin praised in Bellini (77). Pater’s calm inclusiveness beckons his readers to accept what is, simply, another way of working.

Pater handles Michelangelo’s life (77-80) by recalling the diverse and contradictory traits and incidents recorded in Vasari and other early sources. He does not attempt any premature (and perhaps inevitably banal) synthesis of this information. What is intentionally clear from his account is that
Michelangelo's quarrelsomeness ("he knew how to excite strong hatreds" (78)) is only one characteristic among several others. Michelangelo showed a reverent interest in the work of previous artists ("the sweetest works of the early Italian sculptors" (78)). He was influenced by "the most placid master Florence had yet seen, Domenico Ghirlandajo" (78). The young man, who had his nose broken in a fight, delighted a magistrate in Bologna, who rescued him from a legal entanglement and kept him for a year as a guest, "by reading from the Italian poets whom he loved" (78). Through these and other anecdotes, Pater suggests that, contrary to Ruskin's view, Michelangelo did not turn his back on earlier Italian culture and art. Rather, he was rooted in, and drew his strength from it. Later in the course of "The Poetry of Michelangelo," Pater elaborates upon this point. Michelangelo is "the last of the Florentines, of those on whom the peculiar sentiment of the Florence of Dante and Giotto descended" (90). It is up to him to ensure that the "tradition of sentiment is unbroken" (91). The fact that Michelangelo "receives from tradition" the "central conception" of his Creation in the Sistine Chapel is a sign of his "medievalism" (92). Incidentally, by locating Michelangelo as the culmination of an artistic tradition rather than a falling away from it, Pater diverts attention, which he clearly feels is profitless, from the artist's (supposed) personal feelings.

Lying at the heart of his essay, Pater's attempt to probe the recesses of Michelangelo's personality is a model of sensitivity and tact. In itself, it is an implied rebuke to Ruskin's blustering rush to judgment. Pater first points to a "discordant note" in the artist's life, evidenced in bursts of violent aggression, suicidal impulses, and "harsh untempered incidents" (80). Grief recurs throughout his work. The "passionate weeping" of the "mysterious figure" in "The Creation of Adam" is disturbing. Coming with "the forms of things to be, woman and her progeny," it hints at some essential pessimism about human existence (80-81). It is impossible not to feel that the artist "had within the depths of his nature, some secret spring of indignation and sorrow" (87).

Pater finds the cause of Michelangelo's bitterness in the problems of his erotic life. What little is known of the artist's youth indicates "the vehemence of its passions" (81). Without being explicit, Pater points at the direction Michelangelo's desires took and the nature of the unhappiness they caused. His poems offer the best evidence. Compared with them "his letters tell us little that is worth knowing about him - a few poor quarrels about money
and commissions" (82). (Pater clearly does not think such routine bickerings, which might occur in any life, have much significance.) The "songs and sonnets" which Michelangelo wrote "at odd moments, sometimes on the margins of his sketches" (82) tell us far more about him than the squabbles of which Ruskin made so much. In saying this, Pater again asserts the merit of the "unfinished" (82). Michelangelo's poems are valuable as documents arresting "some salient feeling or unpremeditated idea as it passed" (82).

Beneath their "Platonic calm" the poems reveal a "deep delight in carnal form and colour" (87) which apparently troubled their author since some of the verses "have the colour of penitence" (81). Clearly, Michelangelo had "not been always, we may think, a mere Platonic lover" (81).

Not wishing to shock his readers (as would probably have been the case in the 1870's), Pater is circumspect. He places pieces of evidence together, allowing inferences to be drawn. The repeated use of the word "Platonic" is significant, as is the denial that most of the poems were addressed to Vittoria Colonna. This was something "the old conventional criticism ... had lightly assumed" (84). Pater would know that some of his readers were aware that most of Michelangelo's verse was addressed to a young man, Tommaso Cavalieri. Clearly, Michelangelo was troubled by the conflict between the love he felt for Cavalieri and the dictates of his own religious belief. The poems tell the story of an effort to spiritualize and sublimate the emotions from which they spring. The verses "make us" aware of the "struggle of a strong nature to adorn and attune itself" (82). It is the effort of a "desolating passion" to become "resigned and sweet and pensive" (82). Michelangelo's loves may have been "wayward" (81) but they caused him anguish since "they partook of the strength of his nature" (81). His love would "by no means become music, so that the comely order of his days was quite put out" (81). Calm, the sublimation of sexual desire through art ("become music") and the achievement of a graceful, well-managed life ("comely order") are the goal, but there is no pretence that it is easily reached. (It is hard to avoid the thought that Pater speaks from his own experience.)

"The Poetry of Michelangelo" concerns itself with a curious by-way of the emotional life, with types of feeling which are both idiosyncratic and tinctured with cultural attitudes (Renaissance neo-Platonism and Counter-Reformation religion) which require imaginative effort to reconstruct. Even to tell such a
story implies an answer to Ruskin's moral hectoring. If Michelangelo's quest for inner peace is to make emotional sense and, as it is capable of doing, to reveal something of importance about his nature, then it must be explored with precision, delicacy, and care.

Pater makes two essential points about Michelangelo's relationship with Vittoria Colonna. The bond the two formed was not a passionate sexual involvement: "It was just because Vittoria raised no great passion that the place in his life where she reigns has such peculiar suavity" (85). At the same time, the love Michelangelo felt for this young woman "of grave intellectual qualities" (87) was so deep that it alarmed him. He wondered if this last onset of emotion in his life "would be the most unsoftening, the most desolating of all" (84) and was puzzled as to its nature. Was it a "carnal affection" or something born in "Plato's anti-natal state"? (84). The artist's bewilderment testifies to his emotional fragility – the pain love had caused him in his life, perhaps even to some difficulty he had, in spite of serious efforts, to know himself. Pater does not solicit sympathy for Michelangelo, but it is hard to withhold it. In any case, the figure that emerges from an exploration of the poems, and of a somewhat recondite realm of feeling, is very different from Ruskin's quarrelsome, careless egotist.

This account of Michelangelo's and Vittoria Colonna's friendship requires us to understand a particular shade within the spectrum of love, a coming together of two deeply wounded people. "An ardent neo-catholic," Vittoria was "vowed to perpetual widowhood since the news had reached her seventeen years before" of the death of her "youthful and princely husband" from wounds "received in the battle of Pavia" (83-4). From an early source, Pater draws a picture of Michelangelo and his friend "together in an empty church at Rome, on Sunday afternoon, discussing painters" but still more the writings of Saint Paul (84). Drawing comfort from each other in their different sufferings, the two are "following the ways and tasting the sunless pleasures of weary people whose hold on outward things is slackening" (84).

Pater sees this emotional bond as an ingredient in the matrix of Michelangelo's art, a means by which the essential quality of "sweetness" was added to his "strength." The "charmed and temperate space" (85) the relationship formed in Michelangelo's life enabled him, as it later did Goethe, to "escape from the stress of sentiments too strong for him" by turning them
into art and "by making a book about them" (85). Reaching the point when it became an aesthetic object was "already in some way to command" passionate thought (85).

Michelangelo's religious belief and its connection with his art is one of the most interesting subjects in Pater's essay. Since it appealed directly to Victorian Protestant prejudice Ruskin's most damaging aspersion was the connection between what he saw as Michelangelo's meretricious art and the supposedly theatrical religion of the Counter-Reformation. Pater responds by offering a more sophisticated model of how cultures change than one of achievement and degeneration. Instead, he perceives a merging, blending, interfusing and overlapping of cultural and intellectual movements, whose new elements do not erase what has gone before but marry with it. (The long passage (86-88) showing points in which, influenced by Ficino's neo-Platonism, Michelangelo differed from Dante and yet retained much of his spirit offers a striking example of Pater's intellectual approach.)

Michelangelo's finding of inner peace, in which his friendship with Vittoria Colonna was instrumental, involved a calming and sublimination of his erotic inclinations by making them into art. But Pater makes clear, it was both the cause and consequence of a spiritual journey at the end of which "the sweetness it had taken so long to secrete in him was formed at last" (89). Pater does not dispute Ruskin's adverse verdict on Counter-Reformation religion but he gives it a different emphasis. As well as its pompous display, he criticizes its intellectual rigidity. Crucially he places Michelangelo himself outside the religious developments of his later years. The artist was not a part of this "frozen orthodoxy" but, rather, a "stranger to it" (89). "The world had changed around him" and the "Roman Catholic Church had passed beyond" the beliefs and interests of his youth, developing a spirit as "unlike as possible from that of Lorenzo or Savonarola even," much less that of "Pico of Mirandola" (89). Such references are a useful reminder of the need to be precise about its development if one is to understand the Italian Renaissance. For Pater, Michelangelo's spiritual journey involved turning away from the political and religious pageants of a "worn-out society, theatrical in its life, theatrical in its art, theatrical even in its devotion" (90). The faith which consoled the artist was a "divine ideal, which above the wear and tear of creeds had been forming itself for ages as the possession of nobler souls" (89). It is a form of religious
awareness, growing over long periods, to which theological formulae and ecclesiastical power-structures do not relate. Feeling as he did, Michelangelo experienced the “soothing influence” (89) which the Roman Catholic Church has often exerted “over spirits too independent to be its subjects” (90).

Rather than something incomprehensible, as Ruskin had asserted, Pater sees Michelangelo’s religion as cognate with Pater’s own and many of his readers’ approach. The four symbolic figures in the Sacristy of San Lorenzo were produced by someone dealing “cautiously and dispassionately with serious things” and whose religious hope was “based on the consciousness of ignorance” (95). The attitude behind these figures embodies the “vague fancies, misgivings, presentiments, which shift and mix in the mind whenever the thoughts try to fix themselves with sincerity” (95) on the possibility of life after death. Vague as such intimations may be, they are not more vague than the most definite thoughts” (96) on the subject men have had over the last three centuries.

What Pater has done here is vital to his argument and to his whole aesthetic approach. By wrestling his key word and concept “sincerity” from Ruskin, Pater modifies the whole framework within which art is to be discussed. If, moving within the consciousness recent centuries have produced, we are “sincere,” then we must acknowledge the limitations of our knowledge and, consequently, how humble, tentative, and exploratory should be our approach to whatever artistic subject we consider. Rather than ringing affirmations or repudiations, sincerity points towards care and composure in understanding multifarious and particular details.

Pater’s response to Ruskin in 1871 marks a watershed in art criticism. It is not merely that Pater reached entirely different conclusions about Michelangelo. Other contemporaries felt that Ruskin’s view of the artist was extreme, even eccentric. What is important is that Pater was prompted by the (saddening) occasion of Ruskin’s lecture to demonstrate a new tone and methodology in aesthetic discourse. Giving up the combatative, moralistic attitude of which “The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret” was only an extreme instance, Pater beckoned readers towards a criticism in which imaginative sympathy with the unfamiliar, and care over idiosyncratic detail, were to be the dominant notes. Instead of a diagrammatic model of history where individuals become back-up material for a thesis, Pater prepared his readers to see the
constant interweaving and resurfacing over centuries of cultural and artistic styles and treatments. Michelangelo helps us to understand William Blake or Victor Hugo and they throw light up on him. Rather than treasures locked in the past which we reverence, great art "interprets and justifies" (97) what in modern work is most akin to it: "Perhaps this is the chief in studying old masters" (97).

NOTES


3 John Ruskin, "The Relation between Michael Angelo and Tintoret" (1872; repr. in Aratra Pentelici [London: George Allen, 1907]), 236. Subsequent references in parentheses.


7 Tintoretto was "known to use unscrupulous means to secure his commissions," which "made him unpopular with his contemporaries." K. Bradbury, A. Cunningham, L. Hawksley, L. Payne, Essential History of Art (Bath: Parragon, 2000), 67.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

BOOK


Few scholarly books today are as beautifully produced as this one – the color reproductions, on excellent paper stock, feature both entire paintings and informative close-ups of details – or as informative. Prettejohn synthesizes arguments from previous studies to present a coherent, multifaceted argument about the crucial role of painting in Victorian aestheticism. There is something new to be learned about all the painters discussed (Simeon Solomon, Albert Moore, Frederic Leighton, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, James McNeill Whistler, Edward Burne-Jones) and generous, well-researched analyses of their paintings are provided. Equally, the roles of Swinburne and Pater are judiciously reconsidered. The final chapter, which focuses on Pater, elegantly reminds one why *The Renaissance* was, in Arthur Symons’s words, “the critical manifesto of the so-called ‘aesthetic’ school.” Central to her critical project – how to account “for the diversity of approaches, in art practice, to the basic problem – the problem of what art might be, if it is not for the sake of anything else” – is the argument that art for art’s sake, a “non-theory,” was “underpinned, not casually but rigorously, by the German tradition of philosophical aesthetics that proceeded from Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* of 1790.”

Lesley Higgins

Østermark-Johansen argues that "Luca della Robbia" represents a significant development of Pater's ideas on sculpture, a shift from the Winckelmann essay's focus on the physicality and tactility of antique sculpture toward an emphasis on sculpture as idea and abstraction. She reads Pater's evolving ideas on sculpture not only within the context of his own work, but in relation to Renaissance art theory, particularly the *paragone*, and, most interestingly, to what she calls, the "della Robbia craze" (31), the Victorian culture's intense interest in the quattrocento sculptor and, especially, his brightly colored glazed terracotta reliefs, della Robbia ware. As Østermark-Johansen details, Pater treats "the Renaissance artist who to most Victorians would have been associated with bright colour in sculpture" (33), into a worker in white marble, a sculptor of colorless, atmospheric effect.

Kenneth Daley


In this celebratory study of the Victorian elegy, John D. Rosenberg casts a wide net and catches, in addition to more common fish, a few exotic ones, among them Walter Pater. Rosenberg early on declares that "the best Victorian autobiography is intrinsically elegiac" (3). Yet, as his chapter on Pater demonstrates, he also believes the best Victorian elegies to be intrinsically autobiographical. To this end, his readings of three Paterian texts – "The Child in the House," *The Renaissance*, and *Marius the Epicurean* – propose to locate in each work and in the author's aestheticism more generally the shaping influence of a "temperament ... fixated on the fleeting" (187). As "supremely the artist of the evanescent," Pater's preoccupation with "arresting the perception of beauty
and the, for him, inextricably linked experience of pain” is presented as the animating force in fictional creations like Marius and the organizing principle in Pater’s selection of critical subjects (212). Though always apt and eloquent, Rosenberg’s impressionistic descriptions of Pater’s equally impressionistic writings are sometimes less illuminating than they are suggestive. That being said, the chapter’s careful “tracing of this nexus of cultural affinities [that] lies at the heart of much of Pater’s writing” is invaluable for those who are interested in those authors and events that served as Pater’s own aesthetic education.

Meghan Freeman


Vogel’s essay [“In Flight From Images: Walter Pater’s Imaginary Portraits”] situates Pater’s writings in the context of the emergence of commercial photography in the 1870s and 1880s. Vogel starts from the assumption that the mass reproduction and distribution of photos “devalued” images by depriving them of their singularity and their humanist aura, an aura she associates with the concurrently declining genre of portrait painting. She interprets The Renaissance as a critical response to this devaluation, for instance in Pater’s alleged subordination of visual to textual and typographical elements, and in his decision not to include any visual reproductions of the images he discusses. Pater, she argues, mythologizes Renaissance artworks as a reaction against the de-mythologizing medium of commercial photography, but ironically does so by highlighting elements in those works that are distinctly photographic, for example certain light effects and contrasts. Vogel then discusses Imaginary Portraits as a critique of the serialization and mass distribution of images, arguing that the fragmentation, facelessness, and vacuity that characterizes the four selections “reflects the devaluation to which the bourgeois face was subjected by means of its commercial reproduction” (26). As evidence for such a critique, she points to
the demonstrable absence of any actual, tangible, living referent in each of the four portraits, an absence she also finds in commercial photographs, and which she claims undermines the mimetic and humanist assumptions of traditional portraiture. She also points to the privileging in each of the *Imaginary Portraits* of abstraction over illustration, of absence over presence, of self-destruction over self-realization, and of Dionysian intoxication over Apollonian clarity. The article concludes with a psychoanalytically inflected discussion of "The Prince of Court Painters," in which Vogel interprets the figures of Jean-Baptiste Pater and Antoine Watteau as eighteenth-century precursors of the "image inflation" (and the accompanying decline of the singular image) she associates with nineteenth-century commercial photography.

_Thomas Albrecht_

**ESSAYS WITH NOTABLE REFERENCES TO PATER**


As her contribution to this collection on Victorian life writing, Laurel Brake offers a compelling explanation of the changing environment in the print media between 1890 and 1900 for the articulation of homosexual and homosocial discourses. Focusing mostly on obituary and other posthumous tributes and critiques written for J. A. Symonds, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde, she illustrates the ways in which the three Wilde trials made clear what "expressive strategies [were] open to journalists/writers who wished to acknowledge ... the significance of these icons of gay life and writing in the mainstream and class press" (165). The trials marked a public turning of the tide, reversing the increasingly "permissive environment" of the first half of the decade and leaving, in its wake, fewer opportunities and greater risks for those journalists who "pushed at the
limits of public discourse for language to express alternative models of sexual orientation” (189). Yet, as Brake notes, even in the earlier period, social tolerance often took the form of coercive suppression; “explicitly homosocial material” was overlooked, not encouraged. For the “more self-policing and policed” Pater, the relative scarcity of “explicit” writings allowed his biographers to obliquely acknowledge a “discourse of sexuality” in his work and nevertheless celebrate his literary legacy, while such an ideological reconciliation was impossible in the case of Oscar Wilde (172).

Meghan Freeman


This article examines the overlap between the historiographical writing about the Renaissance and ‘the sexological writing that attempted to define and categorize the homosexual’ (56). It traces the development of ‘the myth of the queer Renaissance’ (42) in nineteenth-century historiography, teasing out the presence of sexualized language and imagery and, where possible, homoerotic patterns, in the writings of Ruskin, Symonds, Havelock Ellis, and Pater. Starting from Pater’s review of Symonds’s *Renaissance in Italy*, Fisher shows how, in *The Renaissance*, Pater reworks ideas from Ruskin (mainly), Michelet, and Burckhardt. He examines the open treatment of homoeroticism in “Winckelmann,” aligning the trope of Renaissance as re-birth used by Pater with the idea that the late nineteenth century saw the historical birth of modern homosexuality, according to the well-known Foucauldian model.

Stefano Evangelista

In his “necessarily speculative essay,” Hatt explores the relationship between homosexuality and the creation of Aesthetic spaces – real and imagined – in late-Victorian Britain. Pater plays a formative role in Hatt’s analysis: in his subsection “glitter and be gay: Pater and interiority,” Hatt suggests that Pater found in the metaphor of the interior, “a means of articulating something about subjectivity and its relationship to the Aesthetic,” which carries “significant consequences for conceptualizing homosexuality.” Focusing largely on Pater’s essay “The Beginnings of Greek Sculpture,” Hatt argues that rather than promoting a “narcissistic” model of subjectivity, Pater’s notion of interiority stressed the social nature of the subjective. At times, Hatt’s analysis is unclear – when he argues, for instance, that Pater opted for the “sensual” and “embodied” over the “formal” and “intellectual”; or that Hegel’s influence on Pater has been “underestimated.” Nonetheless, the essay is interesting for its focus on Pater’s construction of metaphoric interiors as spaces in which private desire and public self were integrated.

Margaux Poueymirou


This essay charts the formative influence of English aestheticism and pre-Raphaelitism on the Greek poet Constantine Cavafy. There is only one direct reference to Pater here, but Pater scholars might nonetheless be interested in this nuanced study of the reception of the works of Burne-Jones, Whistler and Swinburne by a modern Greek poet – and of the cosmopolitan afterlife of English aestheticism more generally.

Stefano Evangelista

Johnson seeks to “shift readers’ view of Ulysses as a military general and an explorer to Ulysses as a beautiful artifact” by reading Tennyson’s poem as a dramatic staging of the struggle facing “Walter Pater’s aesthete, a type of aesthetic personality that has a superior capacity for appreciating beauty” (72). Drawing on the aesthetic theories of Archibald Alison, Arthur Hallam, and Walter Pater (among others), she argues that Tennyson presents Ulysses as “an aesthetic personality who was once vibrant and mature but has now degenerated to his present state because of desensitivity” (81). Johnson finds in Ulysses’ monologue as well as in the poems “The Palace of Art” and “The Lotos-Eaters” the imperative that underwrites Tennyson’s “philosophy of aestheticism”: namely, that the would-be aesthete must assume a “peripatetic” lifestyle, constantly in search of “novelty and invention,” in order to avoid the blunting of one’s senses through over-familiarity with a particular milieu (89). “Ulysses” is thus read as a warning of the consequences of stasis: “Ulysses rusts away because he is useless, unable to experience passionate moments of beauty or produce them for readers” (85).

Meghan Freeman


Although Kreutziger’s paper was given at a conference concentrating on Woolf, he gives equal attention to Pater in his discussion. Darwin’s understanding of temporality is the hinge for the comparison. According to Kreutziger, Pater responds to On the Origin of Species by translating evolutionary and scientific theory into an aesthetic vision, reimagining temporality by reconciling perpetual flux to the individual moments of the mind. Pater refines such moments out of existence into art, in Kreutziger’s reading. Woolf, on the other hand, manages more convincingly to represent a similar aesthetic vision yet refuses to fix
temporal or ontological limits. She does so because of the ethical questions—feminism, war—that inform even her early experimental short stories, such as "Kew Gardens" and "The Mark on the Wall."

Elicia Clements


This article starts from a discussion of the writings of Oscar Wilde’s classics tutor at Trinity College Dublin, John Pentland Mahaffy. It argues that the treatment of ancient Greek homosexuality and pedagogy in Mahaffy’s *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander* influenced the mature work of Wilde. There is a brief discussion of Pater towards the end of the article, where the author moves on to examine the “darker, subterranean currents” (307) of Pater’s influence on Wilde, concentrating on the areas of linguistic style, especially on Pater’s “cautiously eroticized language” (308) in *Marius.*

Stefano Evangelista

**DISSERTATIONS**


This dissertation argues that modernist aesthetics is grounded in the poetics of British Aestheticism, particularly the work of Walter Pater and the ideal of the "hard, gem-like flame." Pater’s ideal is the basis of an alternative tradition in modernist aesthetics, a third term between the romanticism that mainstream
modernism devalued and the classical virtues that such modernism believed itself to emulate and embody. The dissertation analyzes this aesthetic – the blending of the romantic with the classical – in the poetry of Hopkins, Crane, and H.D. Through the condensation of language and symbol, the three poets transform personal experience into the intense aesthetic object.


This creative project and contextual essay consists of a stage adaptation of Pater's Marius the Epicurean, illustrating the concept of adaptation as criticism. Overly suggests that the project demonstrates a method for unearthing forgotten masterpieces and repackaging them for a contemporary audience. To dramatize the sprawling narrative covering twenty-five years, the adaptation is conceived as a memory play set in a holding cell, during which Marius recounts the highlights of his life as he lay dying of the plague. Chapters include analysis of Pater, decadence, and Roman Catholicism in late Victorian England; analysis of the emergence of Christianity in the Greco-Roman world; a critique by director and dramaturg Simon Levy; a first version of the play and a revision; a discussion of adaptation as literary archaeology.
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Call for Contributions

Forthcoming in the Spring/Fall 2009 issue of The Pater Newsletter, commentaries on a special topic:

PATER AND COSMOPOLITANISM

The Pater Newsletter seeks essays for publication of a special issue on the subject of “Pater and Cosmopolitanism” in Spring/Fall 2009.

In “Mr. George Moore as an Art Critic” (1893), Pater asserts that “the genius of Ingres is cosmopolitan, like that of those old Greek artists,” then goes on to explain why “a certain cosmopolitanism [is], in truth, an element of national character.” Essays which explore the implications of cosmopolitanism for literary, aesthetic, mythic, historical, national, political and/or cultural work in a Paterian context are invited. Essays should be 2500-3000 words, but submissions of any length (or medium) will be considered. Each submission should include a title page identifying your name and institutional address; the essay, which should not include any identifying markers; and a 200-word abstract.


Questions and/or submissions should be directed to:

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