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Redefining British Aestheticism:
Elitism, Readerships and
the Social Utility of Art



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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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—ABSTRACT—

British Aestheticism's demand for an elite audience has been conceived as emblemizing its reputation as a socially-disengaged movement. This thesis revises literary historical accounts of the movement by challenging such long-held assumptions. It aims to develop a more complex understanding of Aestheticism's theorized reading practices in order to examine how the movement's elitism evolves out of a concern for specialized methods of critical engagement with form, which are conceived as having ethical consequences. For authors and critics associated with British Aestheticism, a specialist appreciation of form, far from being a retreat from ethics, represents a refined mode of social engagement. In short, this study considers how the movement's theories of art's social utility are held to depend upon its elitism.

Scholarship has tended to utilize recuperations of Aestheticism to suit certain theoretical agendas and in the process has revised our understanding of the movement's elitism. Feminist scholarship, for example, has defined a broader, more inclusive and capacious movement in which the link between art's social utility and aesthetic value is redefined so that Aestheticism is open in principle to anyone, including the public at large. Nicholas Shrimpton has pointed out that the use of the term Aestheticism in recent scholarship 'as a chronological catch-all [means] the term "Aesthetic" has been stretched so thin that it is [in] danger of collapsing.' This thesis aims to recuperate the elitism of British Aestheticism, arguing that we should not allow modern values and priorities to reconstruct our understanding of Aestheticism's critical terms and concepts. In doing so, it aims to re-historicize the Aesthetic Movement. More precisely, it shows how Walter Pater, Henry James and Vernon Lee (pseud. Violet Paget) formulate frameworks of 'ideal' aesthetic response against the backdrop of their engagements with intellectual and literary culture.

Each chapter traces a number of connecting threads concerning stylistic supremacy, readerly ethics and artistic responsibility that run between the works of these three figures. The first chapter reassesses Aestheticism's elitist

critical practices in relation to its readerships. This chapter pays close attention to the relationship between Pater, James and Lee's aesthetic theories and authorial strategies expanding our traditional picture of the evolution of Aestheticism to encompass a more complex understanding of its theorization of its readerships. The second chapter traces the influence of the philosophical concept of Arnoldian disinterestedness as a negotiated framework of 'ideal' aesthetic response. It considers how a tension between elitism and ethics underlies this critical practice. Whilst this activity preconditions its practitioners for social interaction, it requires a specialist critic to undertake it. The third chapter examines how late-19th century psychological discourse informs our understanding of the tension between elitism and ethics which inhabits Aestheticism's appropriations of disinterestedness. Overall, the argument of this thesis aims to reassess to the movement's traditional emphasis on artistic integrity, readerly ethics and stylistic supremacy, but, at the same time, to rethink the periodicity and capaciousness of Aestheticism itself.

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An essay entitled 'Vernon Lee and Elitism: Redefining British Aestheticism' (*English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, July, 2011) rehearses sections of the argument presented in this thesis. This essay reformulates ideas I presented at a timely conference called 'British Aestheticisms: Sources, Genres, Definitions, Evolutions' at the Université Paul Valéry in 2009. I should like to thank the Graduate School at the University of Nottingham for funding this visit.

A special thank you is reserved for my parents who have offered generous encouragement, friendship and guidance at every stage. I am grateful for the kindness of my whole family. And finally, my deep gratitude goes to Richard for his unconditional support, advice and empathy.

—ILLUSTRATIONS—

Fig. 1. Max Beerbohm. Detail from Beerbohm's privately embellished edition of Oscar Wilde's *Intentions* (1891); facing page of 'The Critic as Artist,' Part I. William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

Fig. 2. Edward Linley Sambourne. 'Punch's Fancy Portraits No 37: Oscar Wilde.' *Punch*. 25 June, 1881.

—INTRODUCTION—

AESTHETICISM'S MEMBERSHIPS, LITERARY CRITICISM AND THE SOCIAL UTILITY OF ART

A suspicion has come to me, in moments of weariness and depression (as such suspicions always do come), that I might be getting entangled in exaggerated, unjust notions; that I might, so to speak, be selling my soul to the most cunning of all fiends, the Demon of Theory. This demon is much more subtle and dangerous than those of his brethren who, once upon a time, haggled souls out of unlucky alchemists in exchange for books of spells and plans of cathedrals... You find the unexpected thing which solves all your difficulties, puts an end to your worries; and in all probability you hasten to pick it up, thanking your good fortune, and wondering at your stupidity in not having noticed before this invaluable piece of property. The demon, who sees all that is going on, laughs in his sleeve.¹

—Vernon Lee, *Juvenilia*, 1887

¹ Vernon Lee, *Juvenilia* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), p. 25.

Overview

Vernon Lee would have been sceptical of—but not surprised by—the way modern literary criticism has appeared to utilise recuperations of British Aestheticism in order to suit certain theoretical agendas.² Since the late 20th century, accounts of Aestheticism have reflected trends in literary studies more generally and, in the process, have marginalised the movement’s traditional artistic and philosophical ideals. Crucially, this marginalisation has distorted our understanding of Aestheticism’s elitism. In the 1980s and 1990s, it was common for critics concerned with the social engagements of literature (particularly those associated with Marxist criticism) to judge—somewhat inappropriately—art’s value against a politics of aesthetic inclusivity. This assumption underlies several studies which, as I detail below, have sought to recuperate Aestheticism as a socially-engaged movement. As a consequence of this logic, critics have tended to marginalise Walter Pater and his elitist polemic when reclaiming the social engagements of Aestheticism. In 1888, Pater had stated that the artist must write for ‘the scholar and the scholarly conscience,’ which, he claimed, ‘necessitates a central need of a select few, those “men of a finer thread.”’³ High literary art, as far as Pater is concerned, demands a skilled reader who possesses ‘a certain kind of temperament.’⁴ In effect, Pater’s polemic excludes the general reader and the reading public at large from participating in literary culture. In a bid to recuperate a more

² Throughout, I will use Aestheticism with a capital ‘A’ to reflect the aim of this thesis to provide a historicist rather than modal definition of the movement. However, I could have used ‘aestheticism’ to reflect the way this thesis rethinks the capaciousness and periodicity of Aestheticism itself.

³ Walter Pater, ‘Style,’ in *Appreciations* (London; New York: Macmillan and Co., 1889), p. 14.

⁴ Walter Pater, ‘Preface,’ in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), p. x. (Unless otherwise stated, all further references of *The Renaissance* will cite this edition).

socially-inclusive and—following the politicized logic of recent years—a more socially-engaged cultural movement, revaluations of Aestheticism in the late 20th century tended to overlook Pater’s meditations on the conditions of reception required to engage with literary art.

When feminist critics—such as Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades—revisited accounts of Aestheticism in the 1990s it was precisely in order to revise our understanding of the movement’s elitist Paterian principles. As part of its project to recover female writers, feminist critics sought to demonstrate that women as well as men contributed to Aestheticism. In the process, it defined a broader, more inclusive and capacious movement in which the link between art’s social utility and aesthetic value was redefined so that Aestheticism was open in principle to anyone, including the public at large. Whilst we should accredit this expansion of Aestheticism for presenting a more capacious movement and returning important marginal figures (including Vernon Lee) back into the literary-history frame, we should be cautious of the way it has led to the marginalisation of Aestheticism’s traditional emphasis on artistic integrity and stylistic supremacy. Again, such accounts continue to assume that the elitism of Aestheticism is central to its social disengagement, and so in order to make a case for Aestheticism as a socially inclusive movement, feminist criticism marginalises Paterian elitism. Nicholas Shrimpton has noticed this trend, arguing that ‘The opportunistic use of “Aestheticism” as a chronological catch-all has...drawbacks...the term “Aesthetic” has been stretched so thin that it is in danger of collapsing.’⁵ This

⁵ Nicholas Shrimpton, ‘The Old Aestheticism and the New’ *Literature Compass*, 11 (2005): 7.

opportunism has been possible due to simplistic and dismissive readings of Pater's demand for an elite readership, which has been perceived as emblemizing Aestheticism's attempt to divorce works of art from social concerns. It is the aim of this thesis to develop a more complex understanding of Aestheticism's theorized reading practices by reinstating Pater's elitist polemic at the centre of our accounts of Aestheticism as a socially-engaged movement.

Revisiting the fiction and criticism of three authors and critics associated with British Aestheticism, this thesis historicises each writer's nuanced and self-conscious meditations on the consumption practices required to engage with literary art. I start with Pater whose writings have shaped traditional accounts of Aestheticism; I then assess how these ideas are worked through in the writings of Henry James and Vernon Lee, thus arriving at an expanded account of the movement. Interrogating how James and Lee each aim to extend Pater's ideas into a new age of literary reception, I examine how each writer conceives art's social utility as that which is held to depend upon consumption practices. It may seem paradoxical to undertake the task of returning to a more traditional understanding of Aestheticism's ideas of reception without reconsidering the works of well-known aesthetes such as Charles Algernon Swinburne, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Oscar Wilde. However, I have selected Pater, James and Lee in order to construct a new literary-historical narrative of Aestheticism that prioritises the writings of deeply-engaged, reflective practitioners whose fiction and criticism contemplates the ethical value of literary art in relation to specialist readerly

and writerly practices. Moreover, I hope to show the ways in which Paterian Aestheticism is extended into a new age of literary reception by demonstrating how Pater's ideas on readerly ethics, artistic responsibility and literary art's social utility are discussed or tested by James and Lee in non-fictional venues, and how those concepts are dramatized or played out in their fiction. James and Lee each extend Paterian Aestheticism into the early 20th century, and their writings complicate the assumption or default position that Aestheticism's sphere of reception was *inevitably* comprised of elite readers. As we shall see, James and Lee, unlike Pater, deploy authorial strategies that accommodate the reading public enfranchised by the 1870 Forster Education Act and reveal attitudes that account for a much broader notion of audience. And so whilst this thesis seeks to challenge the assumption that literature is *only* socially useful when its spheres of reception are inclusive, it does not return to the naïve view that Aestheticism was a movement that *only* catered for a 'select few,' 'those men of a finer thread.'

It is the work of the whole thesis to interrogate the nature of Aestheticism's elitism and it is the aim of each of the following chapters to trace the interconnecting threads concerning the tensions between certain kinds of elitism and ethics that run between the works of the three writers with which it is mainly concerned. However, it will be helpful at this stage to offer a brief clarification of these terms: ethics and elitism. Modern usages of the term 'elitism' generally refer to issues concerning social class. Whilst I consider the political elements of Aestheticism's elitism in the first chapter when exploring each author's engagement with late 19th-century notions of individualism, none

of the writers under examination are particularly preoccupied with concerns relating to the social class of their readerships. At the same time, whilst the issue of economic wealth is a factor that contributes towards Pater, James and Lee's ability to prioritise their own artistic concerns over and above readerly expectations, the consumption practices which each writer theorizes do not appear to necessarily hinge on the financial position of readers. This point is supported by the fact that Aestheticism's reading practices are self-consciously opposed to both the 'ordinary' consumption habits associated with the reading public at large and the assumption that a work's market value necessarily informs or determines its aesthetic value. Instead, Pater, James and Lee are concerned with a form of intellectual elitism, which is anchored to the way each writer promotes 'ideal' frameworks of aesthetic response that entail an elitist set of protocols. This thesis interrogates how each writer formulates such specialist critical practices by reference to his or her engagement with late 19th- and early 20th-century notions of readerships, the philosophical concept of disinterestedness and psychological discourse. It examines how Pater, James and Lee conceptualise elitism in terms of: firstly, readerly skill and proficiency; secondly, a philosophised critical posture of disinterestedness; and, finally, the psychological mechanisms that construct those modes of response that are properly attuned to form.

In particular, this thesis examines the tensions between the types of intellectual elitism that I have outlined above and each writer's engagement with certain ethical concerns. Certain forms of elitism and ethics become opposed in the late 19th century due to various political movements—such as

Socialism—which propose a different way of thinking about their relation.⁶ Aestheticism, too, suggests a new way of thinking about the relationship between particular kinds of elitism and particular kinds of ethics. As far as Pater is concerned, specialist modes of critical engagement, which depend on a form of intellectual elitism, nonetheless make the individual practitioner more sympathetic towards others. The problem with this ethical model, however, is that it does not commit the individual to *act* ethically; it merely preconditions him for social interaction. James, apparently alert to this tension, concentrates on the capacity of certain kinds of art-objects, specifically the formal complexity of the art-novel, to portray human experience in its idiosyncratic forms; in this view, critical engagement is ethical when it is able to recognise such idiosyncrasy. Like Pater, James recognises that an appreciation of a novel's ethical dimensions requires a proficient reader (as much as a proficient author); but unlike Pater he wishes to cultivate a broader public, one which is equipped with the skills to interpret those works of literary art that convey the individuality of experience. In this respect the problem for James is resolving the tension between an idea of the reader as someone who must be sufficiently skilled to respond to the formal complexity of those works of art which can yield an ethical response, and the notion of a broad readership which, by definition, will encompass a wide range of interpretative skills. If in practice James' 'house of fiction'⁷ only represents, and appeals to, the perspectives of

⁶ As this thesis argues, Pater, James and Lee each engaged with late 19th century notions of individualism. Oscar Wilde also engaged with notions of Socialism, writing in *The Soul of Man* (1891) that 'The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of Socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that Socialism would relieve us from the sordid necessity of living for others which, in the present condition of things, presses so hardly upon almost everybody. In fact, scarcely anyone escapes.' (Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man,' 1891 ((London: Privately Printed, 1895)), p. 1).

⁷ Henry James, *The Art of The Novel: Critical Prefaces*, 1909-11 (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 46.

Pater's 'select few' then this limits the novel's formal possibilities and undermines the utility of literary art as James conceives it. This thesis examines the ways in which James deals with these tensions, particularly as they relate to the responsibilities of the author towards both the work of art which he produces, as well as to its readership, not all members of which will necessarily be equipped to comprehend that work. Vernon Lee, like James, also tries to account for a broader readership; and like Pater, she is prescriptive of literary art's social utility. Yet, the nature of her expansion of Aestheticism is ultimately distinct from the ideas of both men. She rewrites Paterian sympathy to prescribe a mode of aesthetic empathy, one which opposes James and Pater's emphasis on critical detachment and promotes, instead, a more immediate and vicarious form of interaction with the art-work under observation, a mode of engagement that is supposed to resist prescription and instruction. However, because she is concerned to accommodate what she views (like James) as those untrained members of the reading public, Lee also advocates giving such readers authorial assistance. The paradox of Lee's position, then, is that her formal didacticism turns out to undermine the impulsive and highly individualised modes of response that she associates with aesthetic empathy, and thus with art's social utility.

The first chapter of this thesis reassesses Aestheticism's specialist critical practices in relation to its readerships, paying particularly close attention to the attitudes that Pater, James and Lee each display towards the proficiencies of the reading public and to the authorial strategies each writer uses to construct a readership for his or her fiction. I consider how their various

authorial strategies introduce us to the tensions that I have summarised above. The second chapter traces the influence of the philosophical concept of Arnoldian disinterestedness as a negotiated framework of ‘ideal’ aesthetic response. It considers the tension between disinterested critical engagement as an activity which preconditions the individual for social interaction, but requires a specialist—and, in the case of Pater and James, a detached—practitioner to undertake it. The third chapter examines how late 19th-century psychological discourse informs our understanding of the tensions between elitism and ethics which inhabit Aestheticism’s appropriations of disinterestedness. Overall, this thesis historicises Aestheticism’s theorized reading practices in order to develop a more complex understanding of the ethical, social and cultural implications of its readerships.

Building on previous scholarship in the highly contested field of British Aestheticism, this thesis aims to reprioritise historicist accounts of the movement. As a rule, historicist accounts work on the assumption that Pater is the ‘the apex of the aesthetic movement;’⁸ and that it is in his work that we find those ‘ideas which then assumed a distinct form, and presented a new and serious challenge to more traditional and conventional ideas.’⁹ It is this approach which underlies R.V. Johnson’s definition of Aestheticism, in his 1964 *Aestheticism*, as a self-contained movement consisting of figures that

⁸ Sayed Hassan Shoukry centralizes Pater: ‘The chief exponents of the aesthetic and critical theories in the late Victorian period are Pater, Wilde, Symons, Johnson and Dowson.... In his theory and practice, Pater was the apex of the aesthetic movement. When we speak of it, it is primarily of him that we think, and it is his ideas that we mainly remember. To study his contribution is actually to study aestheticism, its origins, its tendencies, and its ends—making of the modern literary mind, the trials and errors of its beginnings, the nature of its real success.’ See Sayed Hassan Shoukry, *The Victorian Taste: A Study of the Critical and Aesthetic Theories in the Victorian Period* (Riyad: Riyadh University Libraries, 1979), 3.

⁹ R.V. Johnson, *Aestheticism* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1969), p. 1.

resemble[d] each other in what they thought and said and wrote, and did make common cause together; and that with such coherence of thought and action, there did come into being a force in nineteenth-century life as recognizable as other forces—Nonconformity, for instance, Utilitarianism, Darwinism or early Socialism.¹⁰

Johnson's attempt to identify Aestheticism as a 'consistent' and 'coherent' movement is notably different from more recent accounts, mentioned earlier, which view it as possessing a much more diverse set of concerns to the point at which its members do not resemble each other 'in what they thought and said and wrote.' By offering an account of Aestheticism which re-situates Pater and his ideas at its centre, this thesis opposes such studies which, I argue, have largely lost sight of the movement's core philosophical and artistic ideals.

That said, historicist accounts can also have limitations; notably they can be too prescriptive in their view of the movement's membership, and so, as I explain more fully later in this introduction, I do not completely dismiss those studies which have offered a more expansive definition of the movement; indeed the explanation of Aestheticism offered in this thesis, although narrower than that found in recent accounts by feminist critics is nonetheless broader than that of Johnson. Suspicious of historical anachronism, in *Conditions for*

¹⁰ R.V. Johnson, *Aestheticism*, pp. 5-6.

Criticism: Authority, Knowledge, and Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century (1991) Ian Small pointed out that attempts to recuperate the material contexts of literature tend to ‘ask questions about the past which almost certainly would have been irrelevant then, and thus, under the rubric of some general political concern, simply falsify the past.’¹¹ Although this criticism can often be applied to accounts that expand Aestheticism’s membership, it is nonetheless the case as I go on to show, that materialist readings of the movement have usefully illuminated its engagements with a broader canon of cultural concerns and, in the process, have offered insights into the ways Pater’s ideas are extended and complicated. Although the figures who concern me in this thesis—Pater, James and Lee—have, as we have already seen, some important concerns in common, they do not entirely ‘resemble each other in what they thought and said and wrote.’ And it is the differences between the ways they engage with ethics and elitism, as much as their similarities, which interest me.

In addition to historicist and cultural materialist readings of Aestheticism, this thesis also builds on studies such as Catherine Maxwell’s *Second Sight: The Visionary Imagination in Late Victorian Literature* (2008) and Angela Leighton’s *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism and the Legacy of a Word* (2007), both of which have recuperated the formal tropes of Aestheticism by situating its distinctive formalist aesthetic against the backdrop of a broader aesthetic tradition extending from Romanticism to Modernism. Contributing to the recent formalist ‘turn,’ these studies have devoted much-needed attention to

¹¹ Ian Small, *Conditions for Criticism: Authority, Knowledge, and Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Alderley: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 5.

the artistic priorities of writers that we might associate with Aestheticism. Yet, as I survey in more detail later, these accounts in discarding the ‘well-worn narratives of Aestheticism and the fin de siècle’¹² in order to analyse Aestheticism’s formal tropes have tended to overlook the historical conditions which determined its formation as a distinct movement. Moreover, a reverence for formalism has been particularly problematic for Aestheticism’s image: frustratingly formalist accounts have returned us to Aestheticism as a movement that valorises the formal properties of literary art, over above any social or moral concerns.

In general terms, then, this thesis recognises the contributions of these various approaches to the study of Aestheticism, while at the same time arguing that each is inadequate when used in isolation. In what follows I aim to combine elements of historicist, cultural materialist and formalist approaches in a sort of methodological bricolage which resembles what has been termed the ‘New Formalism.’ Nicholas Shrimpton identifies ‘The “New Formalism” with what he calls the “New Aestheticism,”’ arguing that it has been ‘reasserting the importance for modern critical practice of concepts associated with the creed of Art for Art’s Sake.’¹³ I would like to think that Pater, James and Lee would have been somewhat assuaged by this new approach to Aestheticism. Each writer felt that appreciating the aesthetic quality of the work at the foremost stage of critical engagement would (pre)condition the practitioner for a type of

¹² Catherine Maxwell, *Second Sight: The Visionary Imagination in Late Victorian Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), p. 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

social interaction that was ethical.¹⁴ By attempting to ensure that treatments of Aestheticism do not pre-empt or predetermine its critical terms and concepts, I suggest that we are more faithful—on a metacritical level—to Aestheticism as a movement which seeks to contest self-interested modes of literary criticism. As becomes clear in the second chapter, Pater, James and Lee each seek to promote disinterested modes of aesthetic engagement in which the critic appreciates the singularity of a work of art by subordinating his own self-interest. Lee’s suspicion of the ‘Demon of Theory,’ for example, is anchored to her concern for a type of criticism that appreciates the object under observation on its own terms. Accordingly, it is the aim of this thesis to try to recuperate Aestheticism’s social engagements by reference to the movement’s own terms, that is, by re-historicising its theories about the conditions of reception required for an ethical engagement with literary art.

i. Aestheticism and the Marketplace

The expansion of Aestheticism that I have summarised above was initiated by cultural materialist critics in the 1980s and 1990s who sought to demonstrate the complexity of the movement’s relationship with the late 19th-century marketplace. This approach charted a more capacious and dynamic movement in which writers strategically pursue different types of audiences for their works; moreover, it demonstrated how Aestheticism was anchored to a historically-specific set of cultural concerns. As the first chapter on readerships

¹⁴ As Swinburne had written in 1867, ‘Art for art’s sake first of all and afterwards we may suppose all the rest shall be added to her (or if not she need hardly be overmuch concerned).’ (A. C. Swinburne, *William Blake: A Critical Essay*, 1867 ((London: William Heinemann, 1925)), p. 91).

illustrates, both Henry James and Vernon Lee self-consciously and strategically extend Paterian Aestheticism's fields of reception to a broader public. My chapter on Aestheticism and readerships is thus, to a certain extent, indebted to Regenia Gagnier's *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (1987) which examines how Oscar Wilde aimed to attract both 'a general audience and...a special audience'¹⁵ for his fiction. The key difference, however, is that whereas my ambition is to show how James and Lee's extension of Aestheticism's fields of reception remains anchored to Paterian elitism, Gagnier's purpose is to show how Wilde's courting of different types of audiences is a consequence of the way 'late-Victorian aestheticism was embedded in popular culture, everyday social life, and common experience.'¹⁶ She aims to demonstrate that 'the emerging service and consumerist economy ...determined late-Victorian aestheticism.'¹⁷ The problem with this account is that it marginalises Aestheticism's emphasis on a proficient, active and responsible reader to undertake the specialized critical practices demanded of high literary art. Gagnier's account appears to overlook Pater's emphasis on aesthetic experience as a private activity that is individualistic and elitist, as opposed to communal and 'popular.'

As the second chapter of this thesis examines, Pater, Lee and James each devote significant portions of their writings to promoting disinterested modes of critical analysis, which are distinguished from 'ordinary' consumption habits common to the reading public at large. A critical stance of

¹⁵ Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1987), p. 4.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

disinterestedness ensures that the critic appreciates the formal dimensions of the art-work first and foremost; by and large the formal tropes of Aestheticism, are, however, overlooked in Gagnier's account. Rather she looks beyond the formal concerns of Aestheticism to argue that the 'engagement of Aestheticism as we are presenting it in the 1890's was grounded in the beginnings of modern spectacular and mass society and depended upon image and advertising.'¹⁸ The inevitable upshot of this argument is that Gagnier silences Aestheticism's emphasis on an ideal reader as a figure who appreciates art's singularity (and who thus preserves the artist's integrity and art's autonomous properties) in order to argue that the marketplace engages Aestheticism to the point of obliterating any possibility of art achieving aesthetic autonomy: 'In our analysis of art from the point of view of consumption, Wilde's works offer a site where the imagination...meets the marketplace that inevitably absorbs and transforms it.'¹⁹ This view of Aestheticism establishes a precedent for later accounts of it as a culturally-determined movement.

In *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (1990), Jonathan Freedman reiterates Gagnier's view of Aestheticism as a movement determined by the homogenizing cultural forces of the marketplace. Here Freedman argues that 'British Aestheticism is a finely articulated arena in which new definitions of the aesthetic and its relation to the social are negotiated and renegotiated.'²⁰ This view of Aestheticism also disregards the movement's formal aesthetic and its theories on style and

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 8

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁰ Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism, and Commodity Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 47.

readerships. Freedman claims that those accounts which celebrate Henry James as a formalist are only able to do so due to the way literary criticism has read his works and those of British Aestheticism more generally against ‘the critical fortunes of High Modernism in both its pre- and post-academic phases, leading to the distortions and evasions it has been the goal of this study to correct.’²¹ He endeavours to clear the ‘peculiar flotsam, particularly on the shores of James scholarship’ which the ‘flood tide of modernist formalism has, it would seem...left behind.’²² Freedman declares that his account is ‘freed from modernist privileging of the formalist, aestheticist James’²³ and it is this freedom which enables us to appreciate the capaciousness and dynamism of Aestheticism. Yet, this disregard for form in order to prioritise a focus on James’ engagements with the marketplace merely utilises late 19th-century Aestheticism to satisfy an interest in late 20th-century issues of consumerism, and to read art’s relationship with the marketplace through the lens of Marxism which views art as determined by the market.²⁴ So whilst cultural materialist accounts claim to trace Aestheticism’s relationship with the late 19th-century marketplace, in practice they tend to superimpose onto their accounts of Aestheticism 20th-century attitudes towards high art’s relationship with commodity culture.²⁵ Cultural materialist critics, then, rebrand Aestheticism as a movement which cannot speak for itself. Freedman concludes his study by

²¹ Ibid., p. 254.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Jonathan Freedman claims that his study ‘confront[s] the problematic role of the privileging of art plays in the lives of those who ambivalently and indeed often rebelliously find themselves positioned to educate others in the lineaments of aesthetic knowledge and judgment—those “aesthetic professionals” we call literary academics. (Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, p. xvii).

²⁵ Indeed, both Gagnier and Freedman return to 20th-century theorists of commodity culture such as Theodor Adorno and his view that ‘the codeword of *l’art pour l’art* is the opposite of what it claims to be.’ (Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt ((London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984)), p. 339).

arguing that the forces of consumerist society mean that ‘the privileging of a fully autonomous aesthetic sphere may have breathed its last, at least conceptually [...and] one wants to say good riddance.’²⁶ This argument is only possible due to cultural materialism’s marginalisation of Aestheticism’s perceived concentration on aesthetic form and an ideal reader.

Freedman insists that by studying the interrelationship between Henry James, British Aestheticism and commodity culture we can re-understand Aestheticism as a capacious movement and realise the ‘heterogeneity of aestheticisms.’²⁷ James, he argues, is a figure who departs from Ruskin, Pater and Wilde—figures whom he casts as James’ ‘problematic rivals’—by ‘claim[ing] for himself the artistic sufficiency he saw the aesthetic movement as lacking.’²⁸ Freedman is right to note that James, unlike Pater, must negotiate between the ideal of ‘high’ art and the marketplace. Yet, he is incorrect to suggest that this negotiation has very little to do with art and is, instead, dictated by the marketplace. James did not, for instance, settle on being ‘aesthetic enough’²⁹: his aim to cultivate a readership for his fiction does not involve pandering to the untutored reader by evading Pater’s emphasis on aesthetic difficulty; instead, as chapter one illustrates, James attempts to inculcate readers in rules of engagement which require individualised modes of response. In 1884, James had noted that the novel ‘must take itself seriously for the public to take it so.’³⁰ His negotiation hinges on the responsibilities of

²⁶ Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, p. 257.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

³⁰ Henry James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ 1884, in *Partial Portraits* (London; New York: Macmillan), p. 377.

novel-readers as opposed to compromising his authorial priorities in order to accommodate the demands and expectations of the marketplace. Freedman overlooks the way James' extension of Aestheticism's field of reception is anchored to his concern for democratizing the movement to guarantee a more representative 'house of fiction.'

Instead, Freedman assumes that this extension is 'born...of the commodification of art and the artistic career' and it is James' contradictory 'resistance to such commodification' that explains his role in the production of elitist literary works; that is, his 'full delineation of a zone of "high culture,"' and 'the creation of a separate niche amidst a complex market economy for the earnest production and avid consumption of austere, self-regarding, art.'³¹ Freedman's judgment that James' art is 'austere' and 'self-regarding' is perhaps the inevitable upshot of his view of James as a professional writer, constantly succumbing to the pressures of the mass market, rather than as a literary artist with high levels of artistic integrity and creative esteem; this view of Aestheticism limits appreciation of the philosophically- and ethically-engaged dimensions of James' art. It is this approach, moreover, that allows Freedman to present James as a figure who departs from Paterian Aestheticism and so to eliminate Pater's legacy when depicting James as a figure who extends Aestheticism into literary modernism. It is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate how James extends *Paterian* Aestheticism—and not 'aestheticism-as-consummation-of-commodity-fetishism'³²—into a new age of

³¹ Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, pp. xxvi-xxvii.

³² *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

literary experimentation in which the responsibility of novel-readers would matter to an unprecedented extent.

My thesis makes further challenges to the view that Jamesian Aestheticism is determined by the marketplace. In chapter two, I argue that Henry James' emphasis on the Aesthete's detachment from social life serves as a crucial precondition for the artist to make fine-grain distinctions of his experiences; detachment is crucial for the production of high literary art. Freedman, however, argues that James views the aesthete's detachment as representing his avoidance of the marketplace. Reading this evasion through the figure of Gabriel Nash—the self-declared aesthete of James' *The Tragic Muse*—Freedman argues that James conceives the aesthete as being 'caught between a rock and a hard place'³³ because if he sacrifices this detachment in order to be popular it will be 'at the cost of his artistic integrity'³⁴ and if he remains detached, he indulges an artistic philosophy that is 'too pure for actual art making' and it will be 'at the cost of escaping from any commitment or accomplishment whatsoever.'³⁵ Yet, as my analysis in chapter two reveals, Gabriel Nash does not represent James' view of the Paterian aesthete. It is Freedman's misreading of Pater which leads to such an assumption: Gabriel, for Freedman, practices a 'Paterian privileging of mere being as opposed to rigorous doing'³⁶ by demonstrating a 'refusal to conform to the dictates of a professionalizing world.'³⁷ James does not condone Gabriel's complete withdrawal from the world because it does not prefigure the production of works of art that benefit from his detachment. Freedman is right to note that

³³ Ibid., p. 190.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 186.

³⁷ Ibid.

Gabriel does not map onto James' own aesthetic practices and that he figures as a satirized aesthete who represents 'art for art's sake' as disparaged in the late-Victorian press. As Figure 2 on the next page shows, in 1881, *Punch* had caricatured Oscar Wilde as a decadent dandy through its depiction of him as a sunflower. The text criticises Wilde for affecting the image of an aesthete, but not producing art works that live up to the authorial reputation he supposedly self-fashions. James does not, however, collaborate with the press to further rebuke 'art for art's sake' *per se*. His portrayal of Gabriel, instead, constitutes his attempt to disparage the dandyism that he felt all-too-often emblematised superficial engagements with Paterian aestheticist philosophy. Freedman, overlooking the formal concerns and ethical implications of both Paterian and Jamesian Aestheticism, continues to assume that James endorses the age-old denigration of Aestheticism.³⁸

³⁸ James' depiction of Gabriel Nash resembles Max Nordau's account of the aesthete in *Degeneration* (1895) which would dismiss Wilde as a figure who 'goes about in "aesthetic costume" among gazing Philistines, exciting either their ridicule or their wrath, it is no indication of independence of character, but rather from a purely anti-socialistic, ego-maniacal recklessness and hysterical longing to make a sensation, justified by no exalted aim; nor is it from a strong desire for beauty, but from a malevolent mania for contradiction...His ideal of life is inactivity' (Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, 1892 ((Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1993)), p.242). There is evidence to suggest that James opposed Wilde's dandyish image on the basis that it was too vulgar and popularised art at the expense of artistic integrity.

PUNCH'S FANCY PORTRAITS.—No. 37.



"O. W."

"O, I feel just as happy as a bright Sunflower
Lays of Christy Minstrelsy

Æsthete of Æsthetes!
What's in a name?
The poet is WILDE,
But his poetry's tame.

(Figure 2)

Re-centralising Aestheticism's traditional emphasis on an appropriately 'active' reader places much-needed pressure on accounts which view Aestheticism as determined by the marketplace. Josephine Guy has challenged Regenia Gagnier's conflation of aesthetic and economic discourse by reminding us of the way Pater defined 'aesthetic experience...in terms of uniqueness' and 'was [thus] able...to preserve the singular nature of even reproduced art.'³⁹ This view challenges Gagnier's depiction of Paterian aesthetic discourse as that which subscribes to William Stanley Jevon's economic theory and thus perceives the individual 'as a "passive consumer" with "insatiable wants."' ⁴⁰ In 'On the Insatiability of Human Wants: Economic and Aesthetic Man,' Gagnier aims to show 'how Jevons, the mathematical economist, and Pater, the donnish aesthete, converge in their promotion of subjectivism, individualism, passive consumption, and ultimately formalism.'⁴¹ Guy challenges this endeavour by pointing out that to conflate 'aesthetic man' with 'economic man' is to overlook Paterian elitism, which 'may itself be seen as an attempt to preserve art from the market.'⁴² Aesthetic experience is an elitist practice reserved for 'a select few' who possess a 'certain kind of temperament' because it requires the aesthetic critic to make qualitative (not quantitative) personal judgments; and this means, as Guy puts it, that 'the material abundance of art objects...have no necessary relationship to their value for consumers.'⁴³ It is this element of Pater's aesthetic theory which challenges the view that 'works of art are desired, valued and consumed in

³⁹ Josephine Guy, 'Aesthetics, Economics and Commodity Culture: Theorizing Value in Late Nineteenth-Century Britain,' *English Literature in Transition*, 42: 2 (1999): 159.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

⁴¹ Regenia Gagnier, 'On the Insatiability of Human Wants: Economic and Aesthetic Man,' *Victorian Studies*, 36, 2 (1993): 145.

⁴² Guy, 'Aesthetics, Economics and Commodity Culture,' p. 153.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

exactly the same manner as bags of sugar or sacks of coal—they are subject, that is, to market evaluations.’⁴⁴ We could levy this criticism against Freedman’s account of Henry James as a figure who ‘fatally compromised’⁴⁵ the aesthetic: James too continues to preserve Pater’s emphasis on aesthetic experience which evades market evaluations because it is not ‘concerned with *quantity*, with things that were measurable.’⁴⁶ Across his oeuvre, James challenges aesthetic proscriptions, notifying the literary artist: ‘It goes without saying that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being.’⁴⁷

When challenging the conflation of economic and aesthetic discourse, Guy recuperates the elitism of Aestheticism and challenges cultural materialism’s expansion of Aestheticism’s membership, noting: ‘we are all economic agents, but very few of us (Pater argues) can be aesthetic agents or aesthetic critics.’⁴⁸ Guy opens her challenge of Aestheticism to a broader cautioning of the literary historian’s deployment of interdisciplinary approaches, asserting:

As literary historians, our attempts to understand that culture will be best served by maintaining an alertness to the ‘difference’ of other ‘non-literary’ domains of knowledge. We should be aware that

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, p. 255.

⁴⁶ Guy, ‘Aesthetics, Economics and Commodity Culture,’ p. 154.

⁴⁷ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 387.

⁴⁸ Guy, ‘Aesthetics, Economics and Commodity Culture,’ p. 164.

specialized languages and vocabularies (including that of academic economics) are coined to function in specialized contexts: they do (and did) highly specific ‘work.’⁴⁹

This challenges Gagnier’s defence of her approach as stated in ‘Cultural Philanthropy, Gypsies and Interdisciplinary Scholars: Dream of a Common Language’ (2005): ‘One uses other disciplines insofar as one needs them to solve a problem or tell the story that must be solved or told.’⁵⁰ Gagnier aims to construct a literary-historical narrative that ‘comes out of dialogue with specialists from a range of disciplines.’⁵¹ Yet, seeking to pursue a ‘common language’ in order ‘to understand real problems’⁵² runs the risk of failing to appreciate that certain historical discourses—such as that of ‘aesthetic man’ and ‘economic man’—even when employing what seem like similar terms, functioned in specialized contexts where they could possess distinct meanings. Of course this does not mean that different discourses are always discrete, or have no relation to each other; indeed, later in this thesis I examine the use by James and Lee of concepts and ideas from contemporary psychological discourses. My argument is rather that we need to be cautious when explaining literary ideas by reference to non-literary discourses; importantly such explanations should not simply conflate the former with the latter, as tends to happen in Gagnier and Freedman’s accounts of Aestheticism. To refer again to

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

⁵⁰ Gagnier, Regenia. ‘Cultural Philanthropy, Gypsies and Interdisciplinary Scholars: Dream of a Common Language,’ *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 19.1 (Autumn 2005): 23. <http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk/issue1/Regenia_Gagnier.pdf/>, accessed 1st August, 2011.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵² Ibid.

Ian Small's comment, Gagnier's work 'ask[s] questions about the past which almost certainly would have been irrelevant then, and thus, under the rubric of some general political concern, simply falsify the past.' It is not surprising then that Gagnier's description of interdisciplinary work resembles Lee's evocation of the 'Demon of Theory' as that which helps one to 'find the unexpected thing which solves all your difficulties, puts an end to your worries.'

ii. Aestheticism, Gender and Sexuality

By marginalising Aestheticism's elitism, cultural materialist accounts paved fertile ground for the movement to be conceived in socially inclusive terms. Regenia Gagnier's conflation of 'economic man' and 'aesthetic man' leads to her reading of Pater as a figure who subscribes to 'an economics for the many rather than the few,' which thus furnishes her argument that 'for feminist critics of economics and aesthetics the economic life and the aesthetic life should be one.'⁵³ It is not surprising then that the feminist critics Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades in *Women and British Aestheticism* accredit the work of Gagnier and Freedman for their re-description of late Victorian literary culture. Cultural materialist accounts, as far as Schaffer and Psomiades are concerned, offer a revised vista of the period that 'enables us to rethink historical constructs of nineteenth-century culture and to revise our own contemporary critical paradigms.'⁵⁴

⁵³ Gagnier, 'On the Insatiability of Human Wants,' p. 149.

⁵⁴ Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades, eds. *Women and British Aestheticism* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1999), p. 19.

The essays collected in *Women and British Aestheticism* each aim to recuperate female aesthetes by working on the assumption that Aestheticism is a movement anchored to cultural, not formal, concerns.⁵⁵ Such sentiments are reiterated by Schaffer in later works on the recovery of women writers who might be perceived as marginal in relation to Aestheticism's core artistic and philosophical ideals. In a recent article which reviews recovery work on British non-canonical women novelists from 1850-1900, Schaffer argues that the overall purpose of this research should be to recuperate the cultural conditions as opposed to individual works: 'Recovery work is not about recovering authors, but about reconstructing the conditions that make those authors worth recovering.'⁵⁶ This view effectively marginalises the movement's emphasis on form and artistic integrity because women writers are, instead, celebrated for their professionalism. In *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (2000), Schaffer notes that 'it is precisely because aestheticism was a...material culture that so many women writers found it such a hospitable medium.'⁵⁷ On these grounds, Schaffer circumvents the canonical criteria on which the work of women authors might otherwise be judged. As Josephine Guy notes:

⁵⁵ The collection includes an essay by Regenia Gagnier. See: Regenia Gagnier, 'Productive Bodies, Pleasured Bodies: On Victorian Aesthetics,' in *Women and British Aestheticism*, pp. 270-290.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

⁵⁷ Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes: Literary Culture in Late-Victorian England* (Charlottesville, Virginia; London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p. 3.

figures such as Marie Corelli and Ouida, for many years routinely dismissed for the derivative and formulaic qualities of their work, and their often reactionary politics, can now be celebrated for their entrepreneurial skills and commercial acumen, for their ability to recognize and exploit changes in the nineteenth-century literary marketplace.⁵⁸

Schaffer's revised understanding of Aestheticism in the terms of material culture means that writers can be recuperated into the movement on grounds of their professional engagements with the literary marketplace. Therefore, New Women writers such as Sarah Grand are reintroduced into Aestheticism on the basis that they partake in 'flexible, social, and professional networks'⁵⁹ with Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and Henry James. Freedman's re-evaluation of James as a professional author as opposed to a literary artist underpins Schaffer's conception of female participation in a cultural network. This revised understanding of Aestheticism does not account for the extent to which the formal priorities of the enlisted male aesthetes differ fundamentally from those of the enlisted New Women writers. For many of these women writers, art should subordinate form in favour of didactic measures—a prescription

⁵⁸ Josephine Guy, 'Cultural Value Versus Financial Capital: Defining Literary Value at the Fin de Siècle,' in *Victorian Literature and Finance*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 178.

⁵⁹ Talia Schaffer, *The Forgotten Female Aesthetes*, p. 16.

which directly opposes an appreciation of art for its own sake.⁶⁰ This kind of argument is representative of what Nicholas Shrimpton has described as the opportunistic expansion of Aestheticism by feminist critics. He argues: ‘A loose definition of the “Aesthetic writer” becomes, indeed, a way of rescuing female authors whose lack of “New Woman” credentials had made them ineligible for the attention of Feminist canon-revisers.’⁶¹ One female figure who came to the attention of those canon-revisers was Vernon Lee; however, accommodating her within Aestheticism has been a complex and contradictory matter. Initially Lee was depicted as a figure who opposed Paterian Aestheticism.⁶² Indeed many of the studies that have contributed towards Lee’s relatively recent recovery have highlighted the way she theorizes a socially-engaged Aestheticism by extending the movement’s contested fields of reception to a broader public. In short, these studies suggest that Lee revises the elitism of Pater’s Aestheticism. For example, in Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades’ *Women and British Aestheticism* (1999), Diana Maltz focuses on Vernon Lee’s promotion of ‘the gallery tour as a catalyst for

⁶⁰ Schaffer and Psomiades agree with Freedman that Aestheticism has been subject to the modernist recasting of late nineteenth-century authors. They note: ‘As Freedman has pointed out, much of our thinking about aestheticism has to do with its relation to modernism. Much of the early work on aestheticism was done from the perspective of modernism, so it is not surprising that the two central critical narratives that still structure our discussions should have so much to do with modernist anxieties.’ (Schaffer and Psomiades, *Women and British Aestheticism*, p. 6).

⁶¹ Shrimpton, ‘The Old Aestheticism and the New,’ p. 6.

⁶² This may be because on her initial reintroduction, Lee was subject to what Schaffer has described as a need for feminist literary critics to combine criticism of writers with supplementary ‘basic information’; this has meant that ‘the critic has no energy spare for doing something with the data’ (Talia Schaffer, ‘British Non-Canonical Fiction Women Novelists,’ pp. 327-8). Catherine Maxwell has noted this trend arguing that since Lee ‘may now be deemed to have come of age’ we can ‘dispense with’ the critical frameworks used to recover her (Catherine Maxwell, *Second Sight*, p. 10). Now that there have been volumes ‘outlining her biography and listing her many achievements,’ we can turn to the bigger questions (Ibid., p. 10). Schaffer notes that Vernon Lee studies, in particular, invites us ‘to perform the exciting larger project of rethinking Victorian canonical, literary-historical, sexual, and intellectual assumptions’ (Schaffer, ‘British Non-Canonical Fiction Women Novelists,’ p. 335).

sharpening universal aesthetic sensibility,⁶³ whilst Dennis Denisoff traces Lee's feminist re-theorization of Aestheticism through the lens of her lesbian desires, thinking about how she constructs 'literary tools of contestation for women who wished to articulate their unsanctioned emotional needs and desires.'⁶⁴ Studies such as these suggest that for Lee aesthetic appreciation is corporeal, communal and inclusive rather than intellectual, individualistic and elitist. Other studies have portrayed her theorization of artistic appreciation in a similar way. Christa Zorn, for example, has argued that Lee's Aestheticism is markedly different from that of Pater and Wilde: 'Unlike Pater and Wilde, she did not fashion her aesthetics as a cult of the artistic individual but consistently redirected her view toward the audience.'⁶⁵ Zorn's argument implies that Lee is directly challenging Paterian Aestheticism by inscribing the reading public into the movement's contested fields of reception. Moreover, it has been conceived that whereas in Pater's Aestheticism literary value stems from aesthetic difficulty, in Lee's Aestheticism literary value stems from art's accessibility. By contrast, I argue that this opposition overstates Lee's interest in a communal and inclusive Aestheticism and over-simplifies her views of the reading public.

This thesis proposes, then, that we can accommodate Lee into Aestheticism as traditionally understood on the grounds of what I argue is her elitist demand for an ideal aesthetic practitioner, a demand which aligns her

⁶³ Diana Maltz, 'Engaging Delicate Brains: From Working-Class Enculturation to Upper-Class Lesbian Liberation in Vernon Lee and Kit Anstruther-Thomson's Psychological Aesthetics,' in *Women and British Aestheticism*, p. 266.

⁶⁴ Denisoff, Dennis, 'The Forest Beyond the Frame: Picturing Women's Desires in Vernon Lee and Virginia Woolf,' in *Women and British Aestheticism*, p. 251.

⁶⁵ Christa Zorn, *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), p. xxv.

much more closely with Pater than critics like Maltz, Denisoff and Zorn have been willing to concede. I note in chapter one that it is the inconsistent nature of Lee's oeuvre which explains why, on the one hand, we are presented with a figure who campaigns for a socially inclusive Aestheticism while, on the other, we find a figure who seems to exclude the general reading public—insofar as it is made up of unqualified aesthetic practitioners—from the movement's fields of reception. This thesis endorses recent research which has demonstrated the complexity of Lee's engagement with Aestheticism, drawing our attention to 'early' and 'late' Lee: whilst the 'early' Lee had interpreted Paterian Aestheticism's emphasis on the individual as hedonistic in works such as *Miss Brown* (1884), the 'late' Lee in *Music and its Lovers* (1932) reinstates Pater's elitist principle of an individualistic mode of aesthetic response. My concern in this thesis is with the relationship between these views.

For example, despite a clear shift in her responses to Aestheticism, 'early' Lee and 'late' Lee engage in a dialogical exchange, so it is possible to observe the extent to which Lee's earlier response to Aestheticism continues to inform her later works. Lee is careful to avoid associating her own theorization of Aestheticism with hedonism; to this end, the socially inclusive principles that define her early works claim an underlying presence in her later works. This approach to Lee complements that of Sondeep Kandola who refreshingly, challenges Lee's status as a 'New Woman' writer arguing that her 'proto-New Woman politics of the 1880s—her proleptic pronouncements against aesthetic hedonism, homosexuality and aesthetic individualism on the grounds of the

diminution in ethics they effected—had subsided by 1895.’⁶⁶ Kandola’s focus on the ‘evolution’ of Lee’s aesthetic politics is incisive, because it registers the complications involved in situating Lee in relation to Paterian Aestheticism. Although, as noted above, Christa Zorn sees Lee’s Aestheticism as ultimately opposed to that of Pater, she nonetheless usefully highlights Lee’s self-conscious distinction between ‘early’ and ‘late’ Pater: ‘To her, the early Pater (as opposed to the ‘mature’ Pater in *Marius the Epicurean*) practiced a form of escapism in what she called his “hedonistic aestheticism.”’⁶⁷ This observation raises interesting implications for the way we situate Lee’s *oeuvre* in relation to Paterian Aestheticism; it reminds us that we are not positioning Lee in relation to a theory which she regarded as monolithic, consistent and contradiction-free. Also, it should make us cautious of the strong case Carolyn Williams makes for viewing ‘all Pater’ as ‘late Pater’; at the very least it is not necessarily the way in which Pater was understood by his contemporaries. The complicated chronological distinction between Lee’s responses to Aestheticism strengthens the argument that we need to reassess Lee’s participation in British Aestheticism against the backdrop of her whole *oeuvre*; we need to consider the ways in which her early emphasis on a socially inclusive Aestheticism might still be at stake when revisiting her later elitism.

It is, of course, easier to align the social agenda of Vernon Lee’s Aestheticism with the elitism of British Aestheticism when we view Aestheticism itself as an ethically- and socially-engaged movement. We are able to trace connections between Lee’s campaign for a socially inclusive

⁶⁶ Sondeep Kandola, ‘Vernon Lee: New Woman?’ *Women’s Writing*, 12.3 (2005): 481.

⁶⁷ Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p. 166.

Aestheticism and her demand for an ideal reader by appreciating how her elitism is not antithetical to—or incompatible with—the social agenda of her aesthetic theory. In fact, Lee’s elitism, like that of Pater and James, is *integral* to her theorization of an ethically-engaged and socially aware mode of aesthetic appreciation. In the third chapter of this thesis, I demonstrate how Lee’s ethically elitist aesthetics become most apparent when we turn to her notion of aesthetic empathy, a concept which accentuates and refines the socially-engaged dimensions of Walter Pater’s aesthetic theory while at the same time, having some similarities with the elitism of Paterian Aestheticism.

My attempt to recuperate Vernon Lee into Aestheticism on the grounds of the *elitism* of her theory of aesthetic practice, while in some ways running counter to the claims of recent feminist critics, has a similar overall ambition. For it aims to extend, rather than reject, the project that Schaffer et al. initiated, by showing how feminist recovery work can enter the territory of rigorous historiography through reconstructing our understanding of the cultural conditions of Aestheticism.⁶⁸ In her recent reflections on recovery work, Schaffer admits ‘now the spadework has been done...other critics can have the luxury of thinking about the big questions.’⁶⁹ When we recover Vernon Lee, we develop a revised understanding of how Aestheticism as an elitist movement might be more capacious than previously thought.

⁶⁸ We are now at a point where such work is possible. As Ina Schabert notes: ‘After feminist research has radically altered our view on literature and rendered obsolete the traditional literary histories, the time has come to experiment with patterns of historiography that would not only do justice to women’s literary works but also indicate the relations between male and female contributions, blending them together into one picture of the literary past’ (Ina Schabert, ‘Narrative and Gender in Literary Histories,’ *Comparative Critical Studies*, 6, 2 ((2009)): 2).

⁶⁹ Talia Schaffer, ‘British Non-Canonical Fiction Women Novelists, 1850–1900: Recent Studies,’ *Dickens Studies Annual* 37 (2006): 335.

When we align female aesthetes with male aesthetes in this way, we can re-conceive Aestheticism's elitism as that which does not exclude on the basis of gender, but rather on the basis of proficiency. This is, in fact, a transparent point that Pater makes in his essay 'Style' (1888/9). When he demands that the literary artist should be a scholar, he notes that this must refer to 'the male conscience' because the present 'system of education...still to so large an extent limits real scholarship to men.'⁷⁰ Pater had conceived the role of women in Aestheticism as limited due to their lack of education, an education which was required to preserve Aestheticism's emphasis on a specialist mode of critical engagement with stylistically complex works of art. This demand should serve as a reminder that the nature of Aestheticism's elitism is not ostentatiously anti-social, but rather based on a demand for proficiency, which, as this thesis will demonstrate, is anchored to Aestheticism's theorization of art's social utility.

⁷⁰ Pater, 'Style,' p. 8.

Not all critics concerned with Aestheticism's attitude towards gender have aimed to marginalise Pater's claim that aesthetic practice is reserved for a 'select few,' those 'men of a finer thread.' Queer theorists have re-explained the homosocial nature of Pater's elitism in terms of Aestheticism's articulation of homosexual desire. Megan Becker-Leckrone, for example, has argued that Pater uses the gender-related 'orthodox assertions of his day'⁷¹—that is, his assertion that 'the female conscience lacks the right organs for aesthetic perception'⁷²—to the advantage of his homosexual interests: Pater 'subtly arranges and edits' these orthodox assertions to 'radically unorthodox effect.'⁷³ That is, by reaffirming the gendered hierarchies of his day, Pater is able to challenge late-Victorian sexual normative models in mute and nuanced terms.⁷⁴ This observation is sophisticated in that it points out that Pater is not chauvinistically sexist, but that he was (instead) strategic. Yet, Becker-Leckrone still maintains that Pater excludes women because he appears to express no interest in the participation of this social group. By focusing on the homosexual explanation of Pater's elitism, she overlooks his emphasis on a proficient, skilled practitioner, which is only subjected to issues of gender due to the conditions of the Victorian education system.

⁷¹ Megan Becker-Leckrone, 'Same-Sex and the Second Sex in "Style,"' *The Pater Newsletter*, 52 (Spring, 2007): 41.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Here, Pater also exploits a wider literary tradition of male self-fashioning which, as Ina Schabert puts it, allows 'Male protagonists [to] develop against a background of female otherness, in contrast to women who do not write, ineffectively imitate men, or write in different minor ways' (Schabert, 'Narrative and Gender in Literary Histories,' p. 153). According to Schabert, 'Such acts of male self-fashioning imply story lines' and whilst for the Romantics it tells a story featuring 'misogynistic extremes,' Pater's own male self-fashioning implies a story of homoerotic interests (*Ibid.*, p. 153).

As chapter three reveals, Pater's emphasis on a muscular Aestheticism returns us to his concern for the male body, and so, for critics like Richard Dellamora in *Masculine Desire: the Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (1990), there is a homosexual explanation for his elitism. Dellamora notes how Pater's essays are 'couched in terms of the Romantic/ Victorian literary tradition of male-female androgyny, that refers in a symbiotic subtext to male-male intimacy, including reference to genital activity'⁷⁵ and argues that this sees Pater setting 'out a new masculine ideal' which allowed for 'expression of sexual difference.'⁷⁶ It would be narrow-minded to ignore the issue of homosexuality altogether: whilst the issue of James' sexuality is contested, there is convincing evidence to confirm that Pater and Lee each had homosexual relationships.⁷⁷ Moreover, it is, of course, relevant that the language of Pater's muscular Aestheticism seems to exclude women. However, it is to misunderstand the basis of Pater's elitism to argue that homoeroticism is

⁷⁵ Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: the Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill; London: University of North Carolina, 1990), p. 58.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ For rich critical accounts on Pater and sexuality, see: Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*; Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995); Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1994); and, James Eli Adams, *Dandies and Desert Saints: Styles of Victorian Masculinity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1995). For equally rich accounts on Lee and sexuality, see: Dennis Denisoff, 'The Forest Beyond the Frame: Picturing Women's Desires in Vernon Lee and Virginia Woolf,' in *Women and British Aestheticism*, pp. 251–69 ; Burdett Gardner, *The Lesbian Imagination (Victorian Style): A Psychological and Critical Study of 'Vernon Lee'* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1987); Patricia Pulham, 'Colouring the Past: Death, Desire, and Homosexuality in Vernon Lee's "A Wedding Chest,"' in *Critical Survey*, 19, 1 (2007): 5-16; and, Stefano Evangelista, 'Vernon Lee and the Gender of Aestheticism,' in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, pp. 91-111. Eric Haralson explores the contested nature of the debate on James' sexuality. Haralson moves away from the 'misguided critical and popular obsession with genital proof of James' homosexuality' and instead focuses on the way that James seeks to create an alternative to normative (or culturally validated) male identities in his representation of the 'proto-gay aesthete': 'For Henry James, the struggle to articulate a modern manhood—apart from the normative script of foxed national identity, a vulgarizing, homogenizing career in business and commerce, a middle-class philistinism and puritanical asceticism in the reception of beauty, and crucially, a mature life of heterosexual performance as suitor, spouse, physical partner, and paterfamilias—resulted in his valorizing the character of the disaffiliated aesthete.' (Eric Haralson. *Henry James and Queer Modernity* ((New York: Cambridge UP, 2003)), pp. 221 n.21, 27 and 3).

⁷⁷ Dellamora, *Masculine Desire*, p. 58.

only what is at issue here. Homoerotic exclusivity is not, I argue, the main ground of Pater's elitism.

Instead, homoeroticism finds expression in Aestheticism due to the movement's aim for a mode of artistic self-expression that is unhampered by the individual's adherence to fixed moral codes.⁷⁸ Aestheticism's celebration of 'difference' is studied in the second chapter, which examines how each writer advocates a disinterested mode of critical analysis in order to promote individual self-expression. In *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (2009), Stefano Evangelista argues that for Lee the 'duty of the critic is to keep questioning what societies construct as normative and not to censor or wage phobic wars on minorities.'⁷⁹ In a slightly earlier article on 'Vernon Lee and the Gender of Aestheticism' (2006), Evangelista argues that Lee's engagement with 'Pater's impressionistic criticism, with its rejection of didacticism, its insistence on personal experience and its emphasis on pleasure'⁸⁰ gives 'Lee a language to explore gender difference and play with ideas of androgyny and sexual perversion.'⁸¹ Evangelista's account is particularly valuable because it historicises the movement's theorization of an elitist and specialist type of critical engagement,

⁷⁸ This echoes Haralson's argument—as mentioned in the previous footnote—that James' fiction challenges the 'normative script' of gendered identities by creating an alternative to culturally validated male identities in his representation of the 'disaffiliated aesthete.' My argument is slightly different by arguing that James is able to find a mode of expression in the very aesthetic qualities of his writing which offer a site for the expression of idiosyncratic experience, which may include queer desire.

⁷⁹ Stefano Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 164.

⁸⁰ Stefano Evangelista, 'Vernon Lee and the Gender of Aestheticism,' in *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics*, p. 92.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

and it enriches our understanding of Vernon Lee's reinterpretation of Paterian Aestheticism.

In particular, elements of Evangelista's argument pre-empt the aims of my own work on Lee by drawing our attention to the way she sharpens Aestheticism's social conscience via didactic measures. Evangelista argues that Lee rewrites a distinctly male Aestheticism not only because she was (allegedly) excluded from its membership on grounds of homosexual interests, but also because she objected on moral grounds to the element of sexual perversity at stake in the writings of Pater and Symonds. He asserts it is this concern which leads to the didactic, moralistic element of Lee's revised Aestheticism. I do not wish to contest Lee's objection to the sexual perversity that she perceived in the Aestheticism of Symonds and Pater: as I have mentioned above, and in a similar way to Evangelista, Lee contests what she regarded as the hedonistic, socially irresponsible element of Paterian Aestheticism and aims to refine its social conscience. Yet, I should point out that there are nonetheless some distinctions between Evangelista's account of Lee's didacticism and my own. In the first and third chapters, I observe how the didactic element of Lee's Aestheticism is anchored to her awareness of a broad readership for her fiction; with this in mind, I trace how her didacticism furnishes her aim to sustain the attention of readers that lack the appropriate proficiencies to construct meaning unassisted. In her fiction, Lee accounts for different types of implied reader: her didacticism assumes a reader who requires authorial assistance to engage with the elusive aesthetic that characterizes her work whilst the indeterminate formal qualities of her fiction

presuppose that there may also be readers with the skills to construct meaning in an unassisted, ideal manner.

iii. Aestheticism and the ‘Return to Form’

In the late 1990s and the early 21st-century a backlash was initiated against what George Levine has described as ‘the Eagletonian kind of appropriation of the aesthetic by politics.’⁸² Literary criticism sought to reconnect materialist reading practices with the aesthetic qualities of literary works in order to demonstrate how these qualities offer a special type of moral and political engagement that had been overlooked in accounts which sidelined issues of form and literary value. Critical volumes that devoted attention to form declared a defiant step away from cultural materialism with its preformed set of clearly defined critical objectives. This ‘formalist fight-back’ claimed that in order to appreciate the singularity of form, critics would need to formulate a new vocabulary and mode of analysis for discussions of literature. Derek Attridge’s *The Singularity of Literature* (2004), for example, challenges instrumentalist approaches to literature and campaigns for a creative mode of reading which ‘comes armed (or rather disarmed) with a readiness to respond to the work’s distinctive utterance and is prepared to accept the consequences of doing so’⁸³; this type of reading, he asserts, is distinct from ‘a reading that sees as its task the pragmatic utilization of the work it reads.’⁸⁴ Susan Wolfson and Marshall Brown’s *Reading for Form* (2006) also regards the valuation of a

⁸² George Levine, ‘Introduction: Reclaiming the Aesthetic’, in *Aesthetics and Ideology*, ed. G. Levine (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), p. 12.

⁸³ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 9.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

work of art as mediated through the experience of reading literary works and so rejects premeditated forms of critical analysis. The essays in *Reading for Form* do not seek to satisfy a set of preformed critical expectations. When the collection was first published in the *Modern Language Quarterly* (2000), one reviewer complained: ‘it does not hold together...a coherent statement about formalist criticism and its aims.’⁸⁵ Wolfson and Marshall celebrated this grievance, noting: ‘we thought of putting this on the dust jacket as a positive advertisement.’⁸⁶ This resembles Vernon Lee’s declaration in the introduction to her collection of critical essays *The Handling of Words* (1923) that her ‘notes’—a term she uses to diminish the authoritative stance of these essays—were ‘jotted down over the course of reading’ and as such they are ‘not yet arranged to suit any theory.’⁸⁷

As the title *Reading for Form* implies, this volume focuses on the dynamics between text and reader, a concern which I argue is also central to Aestheticism. However, Wolfson and Marshall offer a rather abstract sense of the reader; they imply we are *all* reading for form and it is this pursuit which unites us in a community of readers:

Whatever we do as readers in *Reading for Form*,
we are not arguing for any totalizing agency...To
treat form as an aesthetic autonomy or to treat

⁸⁵ Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown, ‘Introduction,’ in *Reading for Form*, eds. Susan J. Wolfson and Marshall Brown (University of Washington Press: Seattle and London, 2006), p. 5.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Vernon Lee, ‘Studies in Literary Psychology,’ 1894, in *The Handling of Words and Other Studies in Literary Psychology* (London: John Lane, 1923), p. 136.

form as a determinate cultural formation is to tell a limited story, to render a limited history. The play of form in the culture of reading is nothing if not mobile, variable, unpredictable. Readers for form are joined only, but vitally, by a care for this, and our conviction that the forms of our attention will persist in ceaseless, lively transformations.⁸⁸

And so whilst *Reading for Form* insists that form's value is mediated through the act of reading, it does not return us to the way Aestheticism views readerly engagement with form as an individualistic or private activity, nor does it return us to Aestheticism's theorization of a very specific type of reader. The notion of the 'play of form in the culture of reading' implies that form's value is culturally mediated by the act of reading for form as a collective, communal activity; for Aestheticism, form's value is relative and relevant to the aesthetic experience of the experiencing individual. Moreover, Wolfson, Marshall et al. appear to work with an abstract, de-historicised conception of the reader, one which underwrites their assumption that 'reading for form' is a socially inclusive activity. Once again, then, the issue of elitism is overlooked when tracing the social implications of aesthetic reading practices. By contrast, this thesis aims to show that we can understand how Aestheticism formulates its theorization of a specialist reading practice and of an ideal reader by reference

⁸⁸ Wolfson and Marshall, *Reading for Form*, pp. 23-24.

to each writer's engagements with a historically specific set of cultural concerns.

In addition to these limitations, the essays in Wolfson and Marshall's collection do not interrogate the possible interconnections between critical conceptions of form and writerly conceptions of form's purpose and possibilities. This oversight further reflects the study's failure to develop a sophisticated account of the reception conditions required to engage with formalist works of literature. For Pater, James and Lee, as the following chapters consider, the act of appreciation is in itself a creative process, which thus equips readers with the skills to engage with formally innovative works of art. The limitations of *Reading for Form* remind us that formal practices (which are extrapolated and analysed as transhistorical features of texts) also need to be historicized in the same way as readerly practices in order to fully understand issues of literary reception, which are intimately connected to those of literary creation.

As I mentioned in the overview of this introduction, this recent return to form—an approach that incorporates certain concepts associated with Aestheticism—has intersected with formalist recuperations of British Aestheticism. These last accounts aim to foreground the distinctiveness of the movement's formal aesthetic, thus heeding Dennis Donoghue's argument that '[t]he part of Aestheticism which should now be recovered...is its concern for the peculiarity of form in every work of art.'⁸⁹ Perhaps due to renewed attempts

⁸⁹ Dennis Donoghue, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p. 306.

to focus on form, rather than cultural contexts, these studies tend not to present themselves as recuperations of Aestheticism as a movement, but rather situate aspects of Aestheticism's formal aesthetic against the backdrop of a broader aesthetic tradition. Catherine Maxwell's *Second Sight* (2008), for example, traces the ways in which visionary Romanticism finds 'a characteristic form of expression'⁹⁰ in literature of the late 19th-century; in doing so, she aims to trace a post-Romantic visionary aesthetic within the literary works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Walter Pater, Vernon Lee, Eugene Lee-Hamilton, Theodore Watts-Dunton and Thomas Hardy. Maxwell's selection of authors contests the notion that Pater's aesthetic should be aligned to what (as previously cited) she describes as the 'well-worn narratives of Aestheticism and the fin de siècle.' In addition, Maxwell suggestively expands Aestheticism's traditionally-conceived temporal boundaries by tracing how Pater's formal aesthetic participates in a tradition that extends from Romanticism to early Modernism. This rich and elegant study does not undermine traditional conceptions in order to reposition Pater as part of a new movement with a restated set of artistic priorities: she rather asserts that these writers 'have no monopoly on the visionary imagination in the late-Victorian period'; they were chosen for the way 'they demonstrate interesting overlaps and interfilations.'⁹¹

By evading the issue of cultural monopoly, Maxwell is able to situate canonical alongside non-canonical writers, and thus de-familiarise our

⁹⁰ Catherine Maxwell, *Second Sight*, p. 6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

understanding of late-Victorian literary investments.⁹² This enables Maxwell to trace the interconnections and overlaps between Pater and Lee's formal aesthetic without being hampered by the groundwork typically involved in the project of recovering marginal and relatively neglected literary figures. Yet, Maxwell's study implies that we can only align Pater and Lee when we dispense with cultural materialist readings altogether, and this creates the impression that their shared formalist concerns are formulated within a historical vacuum. Moreover, the study appears to neglect the issue of aesthetic experience and the reader, which is perhaps symptomatic of the marginalisation of debates relating to art's social utility. So whilst *Second Sight* rectifies the problem of the marginalisation of literary form and should be celebrated here for its elegant exposition of the formal distinctiveness of Pater and Lee's writings, the study's chosen methodology overlooks the issue of form's instrumentality.

By contrast, Angela Leighton's *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (2007)—an account which similarly demonstrates how Aestheticism's formal distinctiveness contributes to a broader aesthetic history—confronts the issue of form's instrumentality. Leighton appears to relish confronting cultural materialism's worst nightmare, that by bringing

⁹² This bears compelling implications for the project of recovering marginal and relatively neglected literary figures. Maxwell, a major force in the recovery of the relatively neglected female writer Vernon Lee, has an obvious investment in this project. Maxwell has been responsible for a number of essays and two major studies: *Vernon Lee: Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales* and *Vernon Lee: Decadence, Ethics, Aesthetics* (both published in 2006 and co-edited with Patricia Pulham). Attributing the wider field of Vernon Lee studies for its prolific output over the past five years, Maxwell feels that 'she may now be deemed to have come of age' (Maxwell, *Second Sight*, p.10). Maxwell feels that as readers can go back and refer to this research, *Second Sight* can 'dispense with the standard introduction outlining her biography and listing her many achievements' and 'go beyond the territory of the standard introductory essay to give an in-depth and wide-ranging analysis of certain recurrent ideas and images in her supernatural tales and aesthetic writings of the same period' (Ibid., p.10).

form to the foreground of critical attention, we may reach the conclusion that ‘Form, perhaps, is the sense of nothing.’⁹³ However, Leighton’s argument that form is a ‘hologram...an emptiness’⁹⁴ poses a problem for recuperations of Aestheticism which have identified a utility in the movement. Challenging such accounts which strive to define Aestheticism’s contribution to literary history, Leighton does not offer a definitive answer to the monograph’s central and opening question: ‘What is form?’⁹⁵ The aesthetic history that Leighton traces reveals that form does not lend itself to a set of formulaic critical assumptions or conclusions. To make this point, Leighton demonstrates how for the long list of writers in her study—Alfred Tennyson, Walter Pater, Vernon Lee, Virginia Woolf, W. B. Yeats, Wallace Stevens, W.S. Graham, Anne Stevenson, Paul Muldoon, Geoffrey Hill, Roy Fisher, Elizabeth Bishop and Sylvia Plath—form resists content: ‘form...is what remains when all the various somethings—matter, content, message—have been got out the way.’⁹⁶ When focusing on Pater, Leighton demonstrates how his aesthetic contributes to this formal tradition of ‘nothing’ by arguing that the musicality of his prose furnishes his attempt to set ‘form and content in an extended, syntactically wrestling combat which is not resolved into a conclusion.’⁹⁷ This dialectic ‘jostling’ between form and content is central to Leighton’s registration of the conditionality of Pater’s writings and thus ‘establishes the materialist basis of an Aestheticism full of caution and conditions.’⁹⁸ She incisively notes that Pater’s very style is a commentary on those values to which he draws most

⁹³ Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 263.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 263

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98

attention—his aesthetic manifesto, she writes, is embodied within ‘the whoozy sway of his sentences’⁹⁹—and that his use of form constitutes a strategy that resists didactic tactics in order to ensure that meaning ‘is conditional on the perceiver, and therefore on the moment of perception caught in the passing flux of time.’¹⁰⁰ This underscores Leighton’s portrait of Pater as a writer who uses form to promote ‘a kind of knowledge which does not easily reach conclusions or answers’¹⁰¹ and who offers a mode that responds to the conditions of modernity that are characterized by ‘agnosticism’ and ‘uncertainty.’¹⁰² Leighton thus shows how form is a special type of knowledge, which operates differently from other discourses by offering ‘itself as a kind of knowing which needs if not explanations of what it is about, at least attention, hard work, respect.’¹⁰³ *On Form* thus gestures towards Aestheticism’s demand for a specialized, ‘proper’ mode of critical engagement with form in order to appreciate a given writer’s singularity in a disinterested way.

However, *On Form* has limitations similar to those of *Second Sight*. Both studies elegantly foreground the formal tropes of Aestheticism, but neither considers how this attention to form might be situated in relation to the respective engagements of Pater, James and Lee with historically-specific intellectual debates. Leighton claims that Pater’s Aestheticism ‘may leave him in a backwater as far as the philosophical tradition is concerned.’¹⁰⁴ As a consequence of this marginalisation of Pater’s engagement with intellectual

⁹⁹ Ibid, p.78.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 265.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

culture, the study overlooks the way aesthetic experience—which, as *On Form* illustrates, is so central to form’s conditional, provisional status—is anchored to late 19th-century notions of individualism. As I argue in chapter one, notions of individualism are central to the social utility of Paterian Aestheticism, and thus ensure that form’s instrumentality does not amount to ‘nothing.’ Leighton is right to note that form’s resistance to modes of didacticism is central to aesthetic experience as an activity which is ‘not a programme for frivolity, carelessness, mere hedonism,’¹⁰⁵ but by overlooking the context of individualism misses the way art’s social utility, for Pater, is not ‘nothing.’ As chapters two and three explain, Paterian individualism envisions aesthetic contemplation as an activity which preconditions the individual for social interaction. This thesis shows how Pater’s individualism is anchored to his engagement with late 19th-century readerships, philosophical debates concerning disinterestedness and physiological psychology.

By overlooking the material contexts of Aestheticism’s formal distinctiveness, Leighton’s study is able to present Aestheticism as theorizing form’s instrumentality in terms of its profound nothingness and by reference to its departure from a work’s content. One particular consequence of thinking about Pater ‘in a backwater as far as the philosophical tradition is concerned’ is that it overlooks the philosophical significance of the dynamics between reader, writer and art object. Aestheticism envisions an ideal reader who will respond attentively to the writer’s artistry and thus preserve the work’s ‘specialness.’ Appearing to overlook this in her chapter on Vernon Lee,

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 266.

Leighton argues that ‘Lee challenges the authority of authorship by seeing the work as a body (of words) which lends itself to strange transactions of touch,’¹⁰⁶ ‘the writer ... has no greater knowledge of the work than anyone else.’¹⁰⁷ Rather than a tool for authorial self-expression, then, as far as Leighton is concerned, Lee’s aesthetic is centred on an elusive, ghostlike ‘interaction and interplay’ between writer and reader. Without this interplay, Leighton argues, form is next to nothing: ‘the old association of form and nothing continues its rhetorical dance.’¹⁰⁸ Leighton thus presents Lee as a writer who relinquishes her authority and as one who places emphasis on form as a transparent medium, one that can easily be seen through. This argument could thus support those readings of Lee as a writer for whom literary value stems from art’s accessibility and inscribes the general reader into the movement’s fields of reception. Chapter one argues that Lee promotes individualised modes of readerly response—that is, modes of response independent of authorial instruction—but at the same time she refuses to relinquish her authority because she does not trust that the majority of readers can preserve that Paterian ‘specialness’ for the writer; her authority is apparent in the way she uses didactic measures in order to elevate a ‘correct’ mode of reading. Throughout Lee defends—rather than challenges—the authority of authorship.

The assumption that form is an ‘emptiness’ underscores other accounts that foreground the formal distinctiveness of works associated with Aestheticism. In *Henry James, Women, and Realism* (2007), for example,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 103.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 109.

Victoria Coulson argues that James' *The Tragic Muse* presents a 'fatal split between form and content.'¹⁰⁹ She argues that 'James liberates the signified from the signifier'¹¹⁰ in a novel where characters are offered to the reader as 'little more than a simulacrum' and 'lacking content and interiority'¹¹¹: 'James' novel manifests an emptiness of its own: it is composed of signifiers offering no access to an inner meaning.'¹¹² She goes on to assert that it is due to this 'fatal split' that: '*The Tragic Muse*—to risk putting it simply—is a surprisingly boring book. This phenomenological aspect of the novel is critically occluded but opaquely detectable in much of the history of the text's reception.'¹¹³ Coulson's argument appears to demonstrate that historicist readings of *The Tragic Muse* are entirely dispensable because, as she claims, the novel is 'content-free.'¹¹⁴ To support this argument, Coulson asserts that the actress Miriam Rooth remains 'perversely...blank, untraceable, content-free.'¹¹⁵ She argues that whilst we are told that Miriam is 'extraordinary,' for the 'reader at least there is a mismatch between what we are told to think about the Tragic Muse and how we actually experience her. An eerie weightlessness pervades the descriptions of Miriam in performance...as often, reflected in Peter's infatuation.'¹¹⁶ Yet, this reading overlooks the interpretative conditions that James creates for his fiction, which anticipate a reader who will 'establish in fine a relation with the criticised thing and make it one's own.'¹¹⁷ Her argument that Miriam is 'content-free' is based on an analysis of the dynamics

¹⁰⁹ Victoria Coulson, *Henry James, Women and Realism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 74.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹¹⁷ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 155.

between actress and audience within the diegetic world of the novel. This reading neglects the way James aims to contrast the dynamics between actress and audience (as presented within the diegetic world of the novel) with the dynamics between reader and text (outside the diegetic world of the novel). As I argue in chapter one, James contrasts these dynamics in order to elevate individualised modes of readerly attention above those modes of passive consumption which James had associated with the collective ‘auditorium.’ This apparent oversight of the specific reception contexts within which James situates *The Tragic Muse* enables Coulson to reach the conclusion that this is a ‘boring book,’ a view which undermines James’ ambition to make literature both ‘serious’ and ‘interesting.’¹¹⁸ Without accounting for reception contexts, Coulson’s reading represents the way other formalist treatments of Aestheticism overlook its demand for a specialist practitioner and so, once again, critics circumvent the issue of its elitism.

iv. New Formalism and Redefining Aestheticism

As we have seen, accounts which foreground form constitute attentive, considerate and appropriately elegant treatments of Aestheticism’s primary concerns. Yet, these treatments appear to confirm why form was marginalised in the first place: highlighting Aestheticism’s formal priorities appears to

¹¹⁸ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ pp. 375 and 392. It might surprise us that historicist accounts of the novel can help us to consider how *The Tragic Muse* might offer social engagements through an engagement with its formal properties. John Stokes and Donald Gordon focus on how the novel deploys ironic strategies which ‘permitted *The Tragic Muse* to be for the novelist simultaneously both “topical” and acutely personal’ (John Stokes and Donald Gordon, ‘The Reference of *The Tragic Muse*,’ ed. John Goode. *The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James*. London: Methuen, 1972), p. 163).

undermine attempts to identify a social utility in the movement. Formal concerns are conceived as divorced from discourses of utility and viewed as transhistorical (even a-historical) rather than as part of a unified, historically-specific cultural movement. The fact that these accounts offer an abstract, de-historicised account of the reader and overlook reception contexts means that formalist readings, like cultural materialist readings, fail to account for the issue of Aestheticism's elitism and how the movement's social engagements are held to depend on an active, attentive mode of reading which requires a skilled practitioner.

Owing to the various rich and rigorous critical treatments of Aestheticism since the late 20th-century, we are now in an excellent position to combine formalist and cultural materialist readings of Aestheticism. As I have suggested, Nicholas Shrimpton has advocated the 'New Aestheticism' as a mode of literary criticism which appreciates 'the socially, morally and intellectually referential qualities of literary or painterly texts' provided that critics 'retain their sense of priority' and do not forget that 'These are real but merely secondary characteristics of the distinctive mode of discourse which they have chosen to consider.' We can see this approach being adopted in recent readings of British Aestheticism. Benjamin Morgan, for example, has argued in 'Aesthetic Freedom: Walter Pater and the Politics of Autonomy' (2010) that we should regard the political engagements of Pater's oeuvre 'not [as] something we discover in the secret codes of' his works, but rather appreciate it as that which 'enters by way of what appears to be the least

political aspect of aestheticism: its aesthetics.¹¹⁹ The social or political aspects of a work and its aesthetic engagements are no longer regarded as dichotomous, but rather as interdependent.

In 2007, Caroline Levine echoed Shrimpton's view that this new critical approach, which traces literature's 'intertwined commitments to formal experimentation and the social world'¹²⁰ is pre-empted by the Victorians themselves:

[T]hose exceptionally experimental Victorians themselves are now pushing us to become methodological *bricoleurs*, beckoning to us to put together our old ideas in new and startling combinations that will, just possibly, change the future shape of literary studies as a whole.¹²¹

There is, however, a rather more extreme and precarious side to Levine's prospectus for formalism in Victorian studies than this quotation suggests: that is, the methodological bricolage to which she alludes is somewhat different from my own practice in this thesis. Her framework for 'strategic formalism' suggests that extra-literary phenomena (including politics, policy, economic forces and moral discourses) can and should be subjected to a kind of formalist

¹¹⁹ Benjamin Morgan, 'Aesthetic Freedom: Walter Pater and the Politics of Autonomy,' *ELH*, Volume 77, 3 (2010): 752.

¹²⁰ Caroline Levine, 'Formal Pasts and Formal Possibilities in Victorian Studies,' *Literature Compass* 4, 4 (2007): 1254.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

approach. In 'Strategic Formalism: Toward a New Method in Cultural Studies' (2006), Levine argues:

Using the same formal terms to speak about politics and literature together allows us to see that social forms and literary forms are always potentially embedded within one another. Just as literary forms employ social content, so social affairs are shaped and reshaped by competing and various formal patterns. Certainly, national, religious, economic, and literary forms deserve their own attentive analyses.¹²²

In a response to Levine's article, Herbert Tucker celebrates the timeliness of Levine's manifesto because, he writes, 'We need to relax the taboo on formalism that was instituted a long methodological generation ago by advocates struggling...to relegitimize historical and cultural meanings as primary objects of literary inquiry.'¹²³ However, Tucker challenges Levine's blanket re-endorsement of formalism as a critical optic because it means that often she deals imprecisely with formal features, or sidesteps them all together, by working with a somewhat all-encompassing notion of 'form' as a kind of

¹²² Caroline Levine, 'Strategic Formalism: Toward A New Method in Cultural Studies,' *Victorian Studies*, 48, 4 (2006): 651.

¹²³ Herbert Tucker, 'Tactical Formalism: A Response to Caroline Levine,' *Victorian Studies*, 49, 1 (2006): 85.

container or place-holder, rather than an analysable part of a writer's technique.¹²⁴

Levine's enthusiasm for a blanket re-endorsement of formalism would not be appropriate for thinking about the relationship between readers and writers that is at stake in Aestheticism because it would lose sight of the movement's concern for form as a product of what Pater terms 'soul-fact'; that is, and as the second chapter explains, Aestheticism promotes the production and consumption of works of literary art that convey the writer's individual aesthetic experiences. However, Levine downplays her enthusiasm for a rather radical version of New Formalism when acknowledging that the precise way in which we historicise form remains open to debate. She observes that whilst the methodology of New Formalism—which ensures critics can 'attend equally to aesthetics and politics'¹²⁵—is essential for 'rethinking traditional, narrowly literary formalist models and of the old separation between aesthetic objects and the social world'¹²⁶ there is 'no consensus'¹²⁷ on how this critical approach might be deployed 'to signal an obvious direction for formalism's future in Victorian studies.'¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Tucker argues that 'Levine is entirely right to say that "a new formalism can unpack the intricate and specific conflicts among ordering principles that lie within and between generalizing forms"' but if 'we take her up on this exciting promise, though, we are likely to find that the generalization that is form goes all the way down to the unit, and thus that a fractal relation obtains between our micro and our macro analytics. That ordering principles lie *within* forms as well as *between* them means, in truth, that forms—even in their supposed particularity—are already relations to begin with. To cognize forms is to cognize relations. And, as the man said, really, universally, relations stop nowhere.' (Herbert Tucker, 'Tactical Formalism,' p. 93).

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

My thesis also differs from those studies which address the issue of Aestheticism's elitism, and the level of its social engagement, by ignoring issues of authorial intention in favour of reconstructing its reception history—that is, by attempting to document the experiences of Aestheticism's 'actual' readers. My concern in this thesis is in charting the movement's envisioning of an implied ideal reader. I therefore look at how Aestheticism's critical concepts presuppose such a reader, and how the conceptualization of that reader is formulated in relation to historically specific cultural concerns. As Pater asserts in *The Renaissance*, the idea or concept prefigures that which is 'actually achieved': 'the Renaissance of the fifteenth century was in many things great rather by what it designed than by what it achieved.'¹²⁹ Moreover, as Jonathan Loesberg has argued, 'The theories that capture the aesthetic as a concept nevertheless manage more thoroughly to capture that category within a history that shapes it'¹³⁰ because concepts are typically formulated by reference and in response to historically-specific cultural concerns and conditions, respectively.

The approach I take in this thesis ensures that we directly confront, rather than circumvent, the tension between Aestheticism and elitism that underscores Aestheticism's model of criticism. It is a method, then, that respects the way that Aestheticism's theorized reading practices are the product of contemporary values, values which presupposed that it was a form of intellectual elitism which was the best guarantee of the movement's capacity for social engagement.

¹²⁹ Pater, 'Pico Della Mirandola,' 1871, in *The Renaissance*, p. 21.

¹³⁰ Jonathan Loesberg, 'Fin-de-Siècle Work on Victorian Aestheticism,' *Victorian Literature and Culture* 29, 2 (2001): 534.

—CHAPTER ONE—

**‘ADMITTED TO THE CONCERT OF
LITERATURE’: AESTHETICISM AND
READERSHIPS**

In an essay entitled ‘The Influence of Democracy on Literature’ (1891), the author and critic Edmund Gosse expressed his ‘grave apprehension’ that ‘the enlargement of the circle of readers’ in the late-19th century meant ‘an increase of persons who without ear, are admitted to the concert of literature,’¹ a situation which reduced authors to writing ‘for the sake of the money.’² Writers associated with British Aestheticism shared Gosse’s concern about the deficiencies of the reading public. Walter Pater circumvented that public by writing for ‘the scholar and the scholarly conscience’ whilst Vernon Lee was aware of the ‘stupid or tired Reader’ and Henry James accused the ‘reader, irreflective and uncritical’ for ‘the demoralization, the vulgarisation of literature in general.’³ The elitism which transpired from Aestheticism’s uneasiness about the general reading public has created the impression that Aestheticism sought to cultivate a small coterie of readers due to an anti-social snobbishness.⁴ The reputations of Modernist writers are perhaps most responsible for the way in which criticism has interpreted Aestheticism’s elite

¹ Edmund Gosse, ‘The Influence of Democracy on Literature,’ *Contemporary Review*, 59 (1891): 530.

² *Ibid.*, p. 533.

³ Henry James, ‘The Future of the Novel: An Analysis and Forecast by Henry James,’ *The New York Times* (August, 1900): 1.

⁴ Aestheticism’s elitism is conceived also as anchored to an attempt to make a profit by preserving art for an exclusive, rich coterie and, as we have seen, an attempt to remove art from the pressures of the mass market in order to preserve art’s autonomy—an attempt critics such as Jonathan Freeman regard as futile.

fields of reception. Modernism's reputation for preserving literature for a small coterie of readers has been widely regarded as excluding the reading public on the basis of its detachment from social concerns. As Sean Latham notes, the Bloomsbury Group has been subject to enduring criticism for its 'turn inward, away from the public world' and been condemned for being an 'almost defunct coterie,' populated with 'a self-satisfied and pretentious collection of snobs who had posed as arrogant intellectuals only to reap the rewards of fame and wealth.'⁵ Latham argues that Virginia Woolf fashioned 'the image of the snob' in order to 'escape in the narrowly conceived concept of the Outsider who could forge an autonomous art at the intersection of class privilege and social alienation.'⁶ This criticism of Bloomsbury is, of course, hardly new. In *The Intellectual and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligensia, 1880-1939* (1992), John Carey had argued that Modernists construct the notion of the 'mass' in order to 'eliminate the human status of the majority of people—or, at any rate, to deprive them of those distinctive features that make users of the term, in their own esteem, superior.'⁷ Carey argued that by situating themselves against this 'mass,' Modernists could claim intellectual superiority and 'seclusion.'⁸ Carey and Latham's accounts of Modernism resemble Freedman's criticism of Aestheticism as a movement which 'provided a means for the newly rising professional and managerial elites to challenge the cultural hegemony of the established gentry elite'⁹ and to cater for 'a new cadre of rebellious intellectuals, writers, and artists' by

⁵ Sean Latham, *"Am I a Snob?": Modernism and The Novel* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 117.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligensia, 1880-1939* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers), p. vii.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, p. 112.

providing them with ‘a rhetoric for experiencing and expressing their increasing sense of alienation from culture that surrounded them—and a socially acceptable means of playing the role of alienated autonomy within that culture.’¹⁰ This view of Aestheticism’s attitude towards its readerships misunderstands the way in which Pater, James and Lee seek to cultivate acute interpretative and affective engagements, which imply an ethical type of reading. Rather than aim to affect a type of social alienation in order to preserve aesthetic autonomy, British Aestheticism’s elite set of protocols evolve from its concern for specialized critical practices that demand a qualified practitioner to undertake them. The ethics of Aestheticism are secured by its readers. It is for this reason that figures of the movement shared Gosse’s ‘grave apprehension’ towards those ‘persons who without ear, are admitted to the concert of literature.’

This chapter aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of Aestheticism’s theorization of its readerships by paying close attention to the relationship between the aesthetic theories and authorial strategies of Walter Pater, Henry James and Vernon Lee. It aims to chart the transition from Walter Pater’s circumvention of the general reader and the reading public at large to Henry James and Vernon Lee’s attempts to cultivate a broader readership for literary art. I demonstrate the way Pater’s refusal to extend Aestheticism’s fields of reception to a broader public is due to the way notions of individualism justify his elitism. It is my aim to show how Pater’s elitism is central to traditional accounts of Aestheticism’s theorization of the relationship

¹⁰ Ibid.

between stylistic supremacy, artistic integrity and art's social utility. I then turn to focus on Henry James' democratization of Aestheticism: unlike Pater, James cannot preserve the creative and intellectual integrity of 'a select few.' This part of the chapter considers how James challenges late-Victorian literary culture's tendency to estimate artistic value in quantifiable terms, such as in relation to consumer demand and popular taste, by attempting to cultivate individualised and private modes of response to art. I interrogate how, in his fiction, James constructs interpretative conditions that demand a highly trained reader who is capable of engaging with the work in a disinterested way. The third section of this chapter demonstrates how Vernon Lee continues to preserve Pater's emphasis on an ideal reader, but that her notion of 'the right kind of Reader'¹¹ is borne out of an awareness of a broad notion of audience, and it is this awareness which somewhat compromises her ability to write fiction exclusively for her ideal reader. Whilst Lee aims to promote individualised modes of readerly response—independent of authorial instruction—her broad notion of audience means that she elevates this model in a coercive and didactic way: she refuses to relinquish her authorial agency because she does not trust that majority of readers to preserve that Paterian specialness for the writer. I focus on the allegorical direction of Lee's 'A Wicked Voice' to demonstrate this. I aim to show how each writer's position within literary culture influences his or her authorial strategies and theorization of Aestheticism's readerships.

¹¹ Vernon Lee, 'Aesthetics of the Novel,' in *The Handling of Words*, p. 72.

Overall, this chapter aims to challenge what Peter D. McDonald has termed an ‘idealized opposition between the purists and profiteers’¹² that all-too-often underlies accounts of Aestheticism. Pater, James and Lee each prove McDonald’s argument that:

Between these two extremes there are any number of positions which combine the two perspectives in various degrees. In some, value is measured not only economically, but in moral, political, or religious terms; the agents see themselves, neither as artists nor as money-makers, but as educators, prophets, political agitators, or entertainers; in various ways they target more specific readerships and markets; and they value less fungible, but still extra-literary rewards like public honours, or political and social influence. Moreover, few agents are ever exclusively committed to a single position in the field.¹³

Each writer, in varying degrees, aims to ‘target more specific readerships and markets’ in order to ensure that its specialist critical practices, which have ethical consequences, are undertaken by readers with the required skills and proficiencies. They are conscious of the way their authorial strategies are

¹² Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practices, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*

crucial to the cultivation of a readership that can secure the social utility of literary art. I also argue that by presenting a more complex understanding of Aestheticism's theorization of its readerships, we can rethink the periodicity of Aestheticism and thus expand that traditional picture of its evolution.

1.1 'The central need of a select few': Elite Readers, Style and Paterian Individualism

When rethinking art's social purpose, John Ruskin prioritises aesthetic education over stylistic perfection. In *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder*, Elizabeth Helsinger notes that Ruskin 'examines art...from the perspective of the spectator or reader rather than...from the perspective of the artist.'¹⁴ In 'The Nature of the Gothic' (1853), Ruskin writes:

You can teach a man...to copy and carve any number of given lines or forms, with admirable speed and perfect precision; and you find his work perfect of its kind: but if you ask him to think about any of those forms...he stops; his execution becomes hesitating; he thinks, and ten to one he thinks wrong...But you have made a man of him for all that.¹⁵

¹⁴ Elizabeth K. Helsinger, *Ruskin and the Art of the Beholder* (Cambridge, Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 4.

¹⁵ John Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.40.

By contrast, Pater does not compromise stylistic perfectionism to accommodate the untutored. Whilst Ruskin felt that art's aesthetic value and moral purpose could be taught in non-aesthetic terms—that is, aesthetic ideals could be explained to moralize the individual without that individual necessarily realising those values for himself—Pater does not permit this sort of practice. Pater insists that determining art's aesthetic value and moral significance depends upon first-hand interaction: 'as in the study of light, of morals, of number, one must realise such primary data for oneself or not at all.'¹⁶ Here, there is no third agent to assist the process of aesthetic practice. The individual's first point of contact with art should invoke personal modes of response. In the 'Preface' to *The Renaissance* (1873), Pater abbreviates this proposition into a basic set of questions that account for sensuous, emotional and intuitive responses to art:

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?¹⁷

Personal modes of engagement relate to Pater's careful assertion that 'Beauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative; and the definition of it becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its

¹⁶ Pater, 'Preface,' p. viii.

¹⁷ Ibid.

abstractness.’¹⁸ And so, pertaining to a culture of relativity, which validates a diverse range of self-reflexive interpretations, Pater seems to suggest that anyone can engage with art. It is in this sense that Pater continues Ruskin’s efforts to guarantee aesthetic practice as a socially-engaged enterprise.

However, from this point, unlike Ruskin, Pater makes distinctions between different sorts of aesthetic consumption. Pater, that is, distinguishes between ‘ordinary’ engagement with art—which might be disposable, untheorized, and therefore consumerist—and aesthetic consumption, the latter being a more thoughtful, scholarly and complex activity, one which is, moreover, ethical. Aesthetic consumption necessitates responses that the scholar intuits through meticulous attention to art’s formal properties: he must be a ‘lover of words for their own sake, to whom nothing about them is unimportant, a minute and constant observer of their physiognomy.’¹⁹ This sensitivity towards art’s precise outward shape contrasts with Ruskinian Aestheticism. For Ruskin, ‘no good work whatever can be perfect, and the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art.’²⁰ This is very different from Pater’s idea that all art should aspire towards aesthetic perfectionism (what he terms in *The Renaissance* ‘the condition of music’²¹), in which the very process of aspiring towards aesthetic precision—and attuning one’s critical methods to that—is an effort that, in and of itself, is morally edifying. For Ruskin, imprecise forms of art correspond to and thus legitimate ‘imperfect vision.’ Aesthetic imprecision, as far as Ruskin is

¹⁸ Ibid., p.vii.

¹⁹ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 17

²⁰ Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, p. 48.

²¹ Pater, ‘School of Giorgione,’ 1877, in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London : Macmillan, 1888), p. 140.

concerned, opens up a space for imaginative thought: ‘Whatever we look at is full of mystery. Everything we look at, be it large or small, near or distant, has an infinite quantity of details still too small to be seen; and the only question is not how much mystery there is, but at what point the mystery begins.’²² This contrasts dramatically with Pater’s insistence that the aesthetic practitioner must ‘know one’s object as it really is...to know one’s own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly.’²³ Pater’s emphasis on meticulous aesthetic engagement also contrasts with one of Vernon Lee’s ideas of artistic engagement.²⁴ In her essay ‘Reading Books’ (1904), she writes: ‘I felt acutely how true it is that a book (for the truly lettered) can do its work without being read.’²⁵ Condemning such short-cuts, Pater insists that reading must not compromise (or subordinate) attention to aesthetic detail:

His [the literary artist’s] appeal, again, is to the scholar, who has great experience in literature, and will show no favour to short-cuts, or hackneyed illustration, or an affectation of learning designed for the unlearned.²⁶

For Pater, such short-cuts undermine a culture of aesthetic perfectionism; indeed, as I have mentioned and as the following chapter on disinterestedness

²² Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, p. 48.

²³ Pater, ‘Preface,’ p. vii.

²⁴ In the course of this thesis, I aim to recuperate Lee’s elitism, rather than those oft-cited parts of her work that emphasise a communitarian aesthetic (such as the one quoted here); I argue that we need to revisit a significant portion of Lee’s works which return us to aestheticism’s traditional emphasis on artistic integrity and stylistic supremacy.

²⁵ Vernon Lee, *Hortus Vitae: Essays on the Gardening of Life* (John Lane: London & New York, 1904), p. 21.

²⁶ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 10.

will examine, in order for an experience to be aesthetic, the Paterian critic must realise art's value for himself 'or not at all.' In his essay 'English Literature' (1886), Pater requires a reader to attend to the 'order, precision, directness' of art and appreciate how these formal qualities 'generate a specific and unique beauty.'²⁷ Those readers able to conduct a 'critical tracing out of that conscious artistic structure, and [ascertain] the pervading sense of it as...[they] read'²⁸ are able to value 'the radical merits of prose thought.'²⁹

Attendance to art's formal precision ensures the individual can appreciate the special type of 'truth' that it offers. Pater envisions an impressionistic literary mode in which the artist relays his experience to the reader through the work's formal properties: 'The style, the manner would be the man, not in his unreasoned and really uncharacteristic caprices, involuntary or affected, but in absolutely sincere apprehension of what is most real to him.'³⁰ This literary mode establishes an inseparable and singular link between the artist's subjectivity, stylistic expression and the work's epistemological value. In order to appreciate that link, readers need to attend to the formal properties of the work. Pater asserts: 'an intimate quality of good style' brings us 'nearer to the artist himself.'³¹ By 'intimate' Pater implies a close relationship between reader, writer and style. He

²⁷ Walter Pater, 'English Literature,' 1886, in *Essays from 'The Guardian'* (Portland, Maine: Thomas B Mosher, 1896), p. 5.

²⁸ Pater, 'Style,' p. 21.

²⁹ Pater, *Essays from 'The Guardian'*, p. 5.

³⁰ Pater, 'Style,' p. 34. As Jason Camlot reminds us, 'The concept of style as a verbal index of an individual's "personality" or "soul" dominates essays on rhetoric at the very end of the century.' (Jason Camlot, *Style and the Nineteenth-Century British Critic: Sincere Mannerisms* ((Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2008)), p. 138). George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon's 'Le style, c'est l'homme meme' is a well-known example (George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, quoted in William K. Wimsatt, *The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson*, 1941 ((New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963)), p. 1 n. 6).

³¹ Pater, 'Style,' p. 18.

requires an individual who is capable of attending to aesthetic form as a special type of discourse and discriminating the singular ‘fineness of truth’ that it offers. The word ‘discourse’ in the *Oxford English Dictionary* refers not only to ‘a written treatment on a subject’³² but also to ‘the act of the understanding,’³³ which is crucial to Pater’s emphasis on the critic establishing a close, first-hand relationship with the text.

The following chapter devotes attention to a disinterested critical practice, which requires the critic to subordinate his own self-interest in order to appreciate art’s formal unexpectedness and ‘otherness.’³⁴ This practice, therefore, precludes the use of art for a predetermined or self-interested purpose. Disinterestedness constitutes a specialized method of critical enquiry. It is antithetical to consumerist habits whereby the emphasis is on the possession as opposed to an appreciation of the art work’s singularity. Moreover, as the next chapter examines in more detail, ‘the act of understanding’ in a disinterested way requires the individual to ‘take *intellectual* possession’³⁵ (as James later put it; italicization is mine) of his own intuitions and sensibilities, and to use this knowledge to form personal value-judgments about art. This activity reflects Pater’s envisioning of the act of appreciation as a process of creation that is no different from that which the artist undertakes. Wilde reiterates this relationship between reader and writer in ‘The Critic as Artist’ (1891) and it serves to account for the

³² ‘discourse, n.’. OED Online. April 2009. Oxford University Press. [24 April 2009] <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/53985?rskey=LRSO8&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Derek Attridge explains that the ‘otherness that is brought into being by an act of inventive writing ... is not just a matter of perceptible difference. It implies a wholly new existent that cannot be apprehended by the old modes of understanding, and could not have been predicted by means of them.’ (Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 29).

³⁵ James, *The Art of The Novel*, p.155.

way the work's epistemological categories are relative to the conditions that underlie the critic's aesthetic experience. In 'Style,' Pater writes, 'That living authority which language needs lies, in truth, in its scholars.'³⁶ Pater's use of a comma to separate 'lies' and 'in truth' creates a pun which reinforces the idea that appreciation of high art's affective dimensions depends upon the critic's attention to art's formal properties in a meticulous way. Meticulous attention to form ensures that the critic's sensory, impressionistic responses to art, which he foregrounds at the centre of the analysis, will enable him to ascertain what it is that form 'knows.'³⁷

Pater's emphasis on the individual and the private nature of his response to art has, of course, led to various accounts which view Paterian Aestheticism as ethically- or socially-disengaged and as demonstrating a lack of concern for anything but the individual critic's hedonistic pursuit of pleasure. T.S. Eliot's oft-cited admonition of Aestheticism, which perceives Pater's 'view of art, as expressed in *The Renaissance*' as 'not wholly irresponsible for some untidy lives,'³⁸ focuses on what Eliot construed as Pater's dismantling of the link between art's aesthetic value and its moral function, and its aversion from social engagement. Sarah Grand, a New Woman writer most closely associated with the phrase 'art for life's sake,' also contested what she perceived to be Aestheticism's aloofness, arguing that the social utility of art should serve the concerns of everyday life and play a catalysing role in the social and political amelioration of women.

³⁶ Pater, 'Style,' p. 11.

³⁷ Here, we return to Angela Leighton's argument that Pater's aesthetic manifesto is embodied within 'the whoozy sway of his sentences.'

³⁸ T.S. Eliot, 'Arnold and Pater,' (1930), in *Selected Essays: New Edition* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), p. 356.

Yet Pater's focus on the individuality of the critic, and the special and private nature of his response to art, does not thereby entail a complete abandonment of the social good or ethical responsibility. As Pater perceives it, the critic's capacity to engage with the world around him expands when he responds to formally complex works of art and analyses his response for himself. Aesthetic form, for Pater, is a special mode of discourse which offers a 'fineness of truth,' which requires specialist attention, demanding a proficient individual with the ability to attend to art's formal properties. In his essay 'Four Books for Students of English Literature' (1886), Pater asserts that those qualities which 'generate a specific and unique beauty' are 'far from being a collection of "purple patches."' ³⁹

As the following chapters examine, rather than situate art in a realm which abandons social concerns, Paterian Aestheticism is devoted to the theorization and cultivation of art that makes us question how we know what we know; the art work under contemplation is an object for scientific interest; therefore aesthetic experience becomes equivalent to a process that necessitates specialized knowledge. Paterian Aestheticism thus works on the assumption that knowledge of the self presupposes social interaction. In 'Style,' he concludes by informing us that works which possess aesthetic value are 'devoted to...the enlargement of our sympathies with each other, or to the presentment of new or old truth about ourselves and our relation to the world.'⁴⁰ Pater anticipates that the more formally complex works of art, those

³⁹ Pater, *Essays from 'The Guardian,'* p. 5.

⁴⁰ Pater, 'Style,' p. 36.

which require what he terms ‘a critical tracing out of that conscious artistic structure,’⁴¹ will probe the critic to construct such self-conscious judgments in a rigorous way. As Carolyn Williams has argued also, ‘the [critic’s] faculty for truth must be employed if it is to operate within a field of relations so fluid and almost inconceivably complex.’⁴² Pater is aware that literary formalism’s service to ethics is made possible through notions of Individualism, a term which Steven Lukes explains, ‘has, in this sense, been widely used in England to mean the absence or minimum of state intervention in the economic and other spheres.’⁴³ As Paul Tucker has noted, for Pater art serves ethics by enabling the individual to ‘cultivate and expand the sense of self in accordance with a “higher morality” of sheer tensivity of mind and feeling,’⁴⁴ and in turn pay ‘special attention to circumstance, above all with regard to human actions.’ The implication here is that as perfected individuals—in a Paterian sense—we will become more sympathetic towards others and better social types. By circumventing normative prescriptions of what constitutes aesthetic value, engagement with aesthetic objects enables us to extend our self-knowledge, which thus refines our ability to make personal navigational judgments; this will improve our ability to relate to others and the world around us.

It is through this individualistic philosophy that Paterian Aestheticism is socially useful. John Stuart Mill’s Utilitarian philosophy (in his refined redefinition of Jeremy Bentham’s Utilitarianism) is ‘grounded on the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁴² Carolyn Williams, *Transfigured World: Pater’s Aesthetic Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989), p. 51.

⁴³ Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), p. 39.

⁴⁴ Tucker, Paul. ‘Pater as Moralist.’ *Pater in the 1990s*, eds Laurel Brake & Ian Small (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 1999), pp.113-4.

permanent interests of man as a progressive being'⁴⁵ and as such, the belief that 'the improvement of mankind... demands a balance of individual freedom and social unity which is the key to his utilitarian philosophy.'⁴⁶ In *On Liberty* (1859) and *Considerations On Representative Government* (1861), Mill raises doubts about the 'ordinary' individual's capacity to participate in representative government in the sense of being able to vote in terms other than narrow self-interest; this is why he advocates that intellectual people should have more than one vote.⁴⁷ Pater, likewise, reminds us that the practice of Individualistic thought (in aesthetic practice) is restricted to those qualified to judge. In turn, the fields of aesthetic reception are limited to 'a select few.' For instance, in 'Lionardo Da Vinci,' Pater reminds us that not everyone is able to make judgements about high-art's instrumentality and that it should be the task of the educated individual. Revering Da Vinci for learning 'the art of going deep, of tracking the sources of expression to their subtlest retreats,'⁴⁸ we are then reminded of the profit that sophisticated aesthetic practice prefigures. Pater writes, 'those who *can* judge describe him [Da Vinci] as anticipating long before, by rapid intuition, the later ideas of science'⁴⁹ (italicization is mine).

⁴⁵John Stuart Mill, 'On Liberty,' 1859, in *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government*, ed. Geraint Williams (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), p.79.

⁴⁶ Geraint Williams, 'Introduction,' in *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Considerations on Representative Government*, ed. Geraint Williams (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), p. xxxviii.

⁴⁷ For example, Mill writes, 'representative institutions are of little value, and may be a mere instrument of tyranny or intrigue, when the generality of electors are not sufficiently interested in their own government to give their vote, or, if they vote at all, do not bestow their suffrages on public grounds, but sell them for money, or vote at the beck of someone who has control over them, or whom for private reason they desire to propitiate. Popular election thus practiced, instead of a security against misgovernment, is but an additional wheel in its machinery.' (Mill, 'Considerations on Representative Government,' 1861, in *Utilitarianism*, pp. 192-3. Interestingly, like Pater's intellectual type of elitism, Mill's suggestion of a double vote to intellectuals is not necessarily defined by issues of social class: 'Let me add, that I consider it an absolutely necessary part of the plurality scheme that it be open to the poorest individual in the community to claim its privileges, if he can prove that, in spite of all difficulties and obstacles, he is, in point of intelligence, entitled to them' (Ibid., p.310).

⁴⁸ Pater, 'Lionardo Da Vinci,' 1869, in *The Renaissance*, p. 96.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.103.

This might be a point of art's instrumentality and in turn public interest, but Pater reminds us that not everyone is entitled to make this judgement (it is only 'those who *can* judge').

There is no need for Pater's Aestheticism to reach a broad public, or 'the greatest number,' because it is 'grounded on the permanent interests of man as a progressive being.'⁵⁰ Mill prefigures Pater through correcting those who 'use the term [utilitarianism] in that restricted...sense in which utility is opposed to pleasure...Those that know anything about the matter are aware that...it is not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure.'⁵¹ Mill refines Bentham's Utilitarianism by asserting that the quality of pleasure is more important than the quantity of it. In regarding some forms of pleasure as qualitatively better than others, Mill's view is in some senses Paterian.⁵² The corollary of this is that some individuals have a greater capacity than others for experiencing pleasures of high quality. Mill is well-known for asserting, 'it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.'⁵³ It is in this way that both Mill and Pater endeavour to reconcile the polemical idea that social utility and aesthetic pleasure are opposed terms; Pater insists that the former can be redeemed from the latter. Across his works, Pater refuses to compromise aesthetic perfectionism on the premise that socially-engaged references are best channelled through the formal dimensions of high-art. Pater also refuses to open Aestheticism to a broader reading public on the premise that the untutored

⁵⁰ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 79.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵² Mill writes: 'It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognise the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.' (Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 8).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

do not have the ability (or access to the resources that ‘scholarly living’ affords) to experience pleasures of high quality in a disinterested way. Pater justifies the scholar’s centrality to Aestheticism, therefore, through closely aligning the movement to notions of Individualism.

Pater’s exclusion of the late-Victorian reading public from Aestheticism’s fields of reception allows him to circumvent public modes of reception so as not to compromise the artist’s creative and intellectual integrity that are crucial for the production of high literary art. To a point this is the logical conclusion to his stylistic claims. According to Jason Camlot, against the backdrop of late-Victorian publishing, ‘the critic who addressed his reader in all sincerity faced an unprecedented identity crisis...the moral claim of any single mode of discourse to sincerity, or ethical sympathy, in published writing, was obsolete.’⁵⁴ When addressing his own readers on the link between stylistic and ethical claims, Pater had to find a solution to this problem. He decided to limit aesthetic practice to a coterie of learned men in order to make moral claims about literary style, artistic engagement and ethical sympathies within a specific (or ‘single’) mode of discourse. ‘A scholar writing for the scholarly’ ensures that the literary aesthetic assumes a specific mode of discourse. As I noted, ‘discourse,’ can refer to ‘the act of the understanding,’ which is very Paterian when we think of it in relation to the scholar’s employment of that ‘faculty for truth.’ With this in mind, it is clear that the concept of ‘a scholar writing for the scholarly’ engenders fertile ground for a high-level intellectual

⁵⁴ Camlot, *Style and the Nineteenth-Century British Critic*, p. 1.

exchange between reader and writer, which in turn, cultivates a culture of aesthetic perfectionism.

In 'Denys L'Auxerrois' (1886), Pater represents the individualistic artist, Denys, as a figure who is 'connected always with the assertion of individual freedom.'⁵⁵ He arrives in Auxerre at a time in medieval French history when some towns are 'turning their narrow, feudal institutions into a free communistic life.'⁵⁶ Pater uses this tale to register the importance of individualism in challenging the oppressive constraints of institutional life, but also to demonstrate his awareness of public opinion towards the artist who figureheads a 'new, free, generous manner in art, active and potent as a living creature.'⁵⁷ Pater portrays the artist against the backdrop of public opinion. At the outset, Denys is a popular figure within the community, but the people soon 'turn...against their favourite, whose former charms must now be counted only as the fascinations of witchcraft.'⁵⁸ This allegorizes the way the late 19th-century artist is subject to the whims of the reading public. This public suddenly assumes that Denys is responsible for a series of deaths—including the suicide of a pregnant girl—and so plot to kill him. He notes that 'A kind of degeneration, of coarseness...had come over the company'⁵⁹ and Denys is taken into safety by the local clergy.

⁵⁵ Walter Pater, 'Denys L'Auxerrois,' 1886, *Imaginary Portraits* (London; New York; Macmillan, 1887), p. 62.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 76.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 75.

During this time, Denys is charged with the task of building an organ that will produce a type of ‘music that might express the whole compass of souls.’⁶⁰ Pater charts the way peculiar shades of Denys’ personality emerge as he builds this instrument designed for artistic self-expression. As he builds the organ, we are told:

In three successive phases or fashions might be traced, especially in the carved work, the humours he had determined. There was first wild gaiety, exuberant in a wreathing of life-like imageries, from which nothing really present in nature was excluded.⁶¹

The language of his artistic craft conveys the stylistic integrity of his work: we are informed there ‘was manifest, with no loss of power or effect, a well-assured seriousness, somewhat jealous and exclusive, not so much in the selection of the material on which the arts were to work, as in the precise sort of expression that should be induced upon it.’⁶² The terms deployed here would be used in Pater’s slightly later essay, ‘Style,’ which meditates on the relationship between literary style and aesthetic value. Whilst carrying out his aesthetic craft, Denys’ ‘soul...darkened’ and he had ‘passed into obscure regions of the satiric, the grotesque and coarse.’⁶³ Pater draws a sinister parallel here between the way the artist’s close connection with ‘the assertion of

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

individual freedom' is that which leads to his persecution for suspected deviancy from communal life and also leads him to an aesthetic experience which heightens his awareness of the dark, deviant aspects of his character. This parallel does not take the form of an apology for an aesthetic individualism which promotes an artistic self-expression that challenges the homogenizing forces of communal life. Rather, it offers a way for Pater to illustrate the way society persecutes practitioners of aesthetic individualism because they threaten to disrupt communal life by being different and also because the general public is incapable of understanding the nature of that difference. Pater thus presents an allegory that critiques how the public consumes.

Pater extends this allegory of the persecuted aesthete and the necessity of his detachment from social life in his portrayal of Denys' murder at the end of the narrative. Denys appears to be a forgotten figure when he re-enters communal life for the first time since his departure, and in a bid to regain his former popularity takes the role of 'the person of Winter [who] would be hunted blindfold through the streets'⁶⁴ in 'a somewhat rude popular pageant.'⁶⁵ Denys relinquishes his individuality and falls into communal life by ironically taking on the role of the persecuted individual: 'The old forgotten player saw his part before him, and, as if mechanically, fell again into the chief place, monk's dress and all. It might restore his popularity: who could tell?'⁶⁶ Soon after he has started to 'don' his costume to play a role prescribed by communal tradition—'Hastily he donned the ashen-grey mantle, the rough haircloth about

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 87.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

the throat, and went through the preliminary matter'⁶⁷—the 'pretended hunting of the unholy creature became a real one' and Denys is murdered. Pater does not spare the reader the gruesome details of Denys' mutilation 'as his body [is]...borne along in front of the crowd'⁶⁸ and 'tossed hither and thither, torn at last limb from limb. The men stuck little shreds of his flesh, or, failing that, of his torn raiment, into their caps; the women lending their long hairpins for the purpose.'⁶⁹ This graphic description forms part of Pater's dramatization of the inherent tension between the artist and general public; Pater's depiction of Denys' murder critiques public consumerism by showing that public's literal desire to consume him, to each possess a bit of him.

Pater reinforces this critique by drawing another parallel: Denys both escapes persecution and seeks to regain favour from the public by undertaking a clerical role. His desire to take 'the chief place, monk's dress and all' to 'restore his popularity'⁷⁰ constitutes an attempt to satisfy the expectations of the public and is thus no different from his assistance within the church to evade public execution: both acts respond to public expectation, rather than assert 'individual freedom.' The pageant's turn from a stage-play to real-life symbolises the importance of the portrait's allegorical drive. The line between art and life becomes indistinguishable, which serves as a message to Pater's reader that this portrait has significance beyond its fictive frame. As Pater would write in 'Style,' 'the line between fact and something quite different from external fact is, indeed, hard to draw.' 'Denys L'Auxerrois' thus offers an

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

example of the way Pater uses his fiction to strengthen the rhetoric of his criticism.

To ensure that his own artistic integrity is not compromised, Pater deploys authorial strategies that reveal the extent to which he prioritises an elite readership. We can see how Pater's ideas on reception correlate with the publishing conditions of his work, which he oversaw. The publishing history of Pater's essay 'Style,' an essay that is central to his ideas on reception and style, perhaps offers the most pertinent example. By publishing 'Style' in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1888 (it was reprinted in *Appreciations* soon after in 1889), Pater situates his ideas on literary reception within a forum that would reinforce these ideas and also support the ideological underpinnings of his claims. Mark W. Turner's account of the periodical's beginnings (1865-7) informs us that like other periodicals, the *Fortnightly Review* was conceived 'in the spirit of men's clubs'⁷¹ and this cultural and social formation engendered 'shared beliefs and [a] sense of mission.'⁷² The positivist epistemological side to Pater's claims correspond with 'the Positivist social configuration associated with'⁷³ the *Fortnightly Review* (G. H. Lewes was its founding editor for two years from 1865 until 1866). In principle, positivist thought accommodates the progressive aspiration to an ideal of inclusivity. However, the *Fortnightly Review* aimed to attract an educated, male and wealthy reader. The fact that the periodical 'cost twice as much [as the new shilling monthlies] and came out

⁷¹ Mark W. Turner, 'Hybrid Journalism: Women and the Progressive Fortnightly,' *Journalism, Literature, and Modernity: From Hazlitt to Modernism*, ed. Kate Campbell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 75.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.72.

twice as often as a magazine like the *Cornhill*,⁷⁴ offers a clear indication that it focused its attention on readers from the upper end of the middle classes. Indeed, as Mark Turner points out, whilst Positivists ‘had a significant anti-establishment political dimension to their project...to a large extent, the group...function[ed] like other male-dominated intellectual forums [and] replicated their structures in the *Fortnightly*.’⁷⁵ In ‘Style’ Pater aligns the ‘scholar and the scholarly conscience’ with ‘the male conscience’ because ‘as we must think of it...education...still to so large an extent limits real scholarship to men.’⁷⁶ The fact that the publication traditionally catered for a homosocial group of readers is not entirely incompatible with positive thought, however. As mentioned above, the positivist thinker John Stuart Mill prioritises qualitative judgments, and so the social utility of the *Fortnightly*’s progressive values could be achieved more successfully with a smaller audience—even though, as Turner notes, more women read and contributed to the *Fortnightly Review* by the 1880s. The structure of late-19th-century male-dominated intellectual forums goes unchallenged in Pater to the extent that his Aestheticism caters for a very specific class of readers. ‘Style’ is progressive and anti-establishment in terms of Pater’s theorization of art as offering a special mode of social engagement, but conservative and conformist in terms of Pater’s restriction of Aestheticism’s membership and fields of reception to a ‘select few.’

It is important to note, however, that Pater’s relationship with the *Fortnightly Review* is somewhat more complicated. By the time Pater’s essay

⁷⁴ Turner, ‘Hybrid Journalism,’ p. 72.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷⁶ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 8.

‘Style’ was published in 1888, the *Fortnightly* was under Frank Harris’ editorship. Harris was accused of making it a more entertaining and less politically informative journal, and later fell out with the publishers over the changes he made. Harris had been employed as editor, with little experience and at a young age, to revive flagging sales, and he did so by increasing the literary content at the expense of the politics. In other words, he arguably made the *Fortnightly Review* more commercial, moving it some way from its identity when it was used as a forum for the ‘New Radicalism’ and when John Morley was its editor (1867-1882).⁷⁷ Read in this context, Pater’s decision to publish ‘Style’ in the *Fortnightly* seems less politically motivated. Furthermore, the publication’s new aim to attract a broader audience undermines the argument that Pater used the publication to attract a particular type of reader. However, the periodical’s origins remain significant. Pater had published several significant essays in the *Fortnightly* when John Morley was its editor; these works later appeared in *The Renaissance* (1873).⁷⁸ Therefore, it is possible to make a case for the fact that Pater had established a readership with the *Fortnightly* as a politically radical journal and continued to write for this audience when Harris took over as editor. So whilst the periodical appealed to a broader readership by 1888, Pater wrote with its traditional readership in mind.

⁷⁷ Mark Turner ‘consider[s] the innovation and radicalism of the periodical under its first editor, G. H. Lewes’ and notes how ‘By the time Lewes left, the *Fortnightly* was already known as partisan and Liberal, and Lewes’ successor John Morley extended the radical base.’ (Turner, ‘Hybrid Journalism,’ pp. 72 and 76).

⁷⁸ When John Morley was editor, Pater published several significant essays, including: ‘Leonard Da Vinci’ (1869), ‘Sandro Botticelli’ (1870), ‘Michelangelo’ (1871), ‘A Study of Dionysus’ (1876) and ‘The School of Giotto’ (1877).

When ‘Style’ was republished in *Appreciations* by Macmillan shortly after its initial publication in 1889, the essay may have become associated with a publishing house that had different priorities to those traditionally associated with the *Fortnightly Review* (and Pater), but Macmillan was committed to publishing ‘serious books as a serious business proposition’⁷⁹ and did not allow their ‘political and religious opinions’⁸⁰ to ‘prevent them from publishing worthwhile books which could make a profit.’⁸¹ We may neglect to consider the specific concerns of the *Fortnightly* due to the fact that, as Laurel Brake has observed, ‘the production process whereby writing is translated from the ephemeral of the periodical essay into the permanence of the book engineers the obscuring of the ephemeral characteristics and, most important, origins, even to the original readers of the book.’⁸² Instead, the ‘authorship is shifted to a context which foregrounds the individual,’⁸³ which means that readers of this essay are more likely to focus on Pater as the ‘high priest of Aestheticism’ and—particularly in light of the fact that the cultural conditions of the work’s original publication are overlooked—perceive him as a figure who promotes ‘high’ literary art as inward-looking and situated in a sphere that is removed from any concern for readerships (or indeed from the concerns of everyday life). The republication of ‘Style’ obfuscates the fact that Pater was a socially and politically conscious author deploying various authorial strategies at his disposal. Moreover, it overlooks how Aestheticism demonstrates a highly self-

⁷⁹ John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2006), p.104.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid. As Feather observes, this objective, unreserved strategy ‘was seen as the key to success in the market’ as late-Victorian publishing had to start ‘conducting its affairs in a businesslike manner... dealing with different interest groups within it and around it.’ (Ibid).

⁸² Laurel Brake, ‘The Discourses of Journalism: “Arnold and Pater” Again and Wilde,’ in *Pater in the 1990s*, p. 46.

⁸³ Ibid.

conscious concern for its readerships, even when it is concerned with preserving artistic and creative integrity for the ‘select few.’

Yet the essay’s republication did offer a degree of continuity by allowing Pater to write for a small readership. Macmillan did not require Pater to establish a relationship with—or accommodate—a broad readership for his work. The publisher perceived Pater as a prestige writer that they wanted on their lists and so the house did not threaten to compromise Pater’s aim to write for an intellectually elite readership. Macmillan did not see Pater as someone who could sell to the mass market and was willing to make a loss on *Appreciations*. In correspondence with Pater, Alexander Macmillan writes:

I have been reading your essays in art subjects with very considerable interest, and shall feel pleasure and honour in publishing them. I am also so far encouraged to hope that it may also be profitable to at least some small extent that I am willing to risk the cost of publishing your volume, sharing equally with profits, if they should accrue, and bearing loss, should an inappreciative [sic.] public leave us with loss.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Alexander Macmillan, ‘Letter to to Walter Pater,’ (2 July, 1872) in *The Book Beautiful: Walter Pater and the House of Macmillan*, ed. Robert Seiler (London: Athlone Press, 1999), p.67.

Macmillan's desire to have Pater on their lists at a financial loss meant that publishing demands did not change or influence the arguments he makes here. This contrasts with the publishing pressures with which Henry James had to contend and meant that, unlike James, Pater could continue to control the reception conditions of his works. Robert Seiler charts further correspondence between Macmillan and Pater, which reveals the extent to which Pater managed the publication of his works. Prior to the planned publication of *Dionysus and Other Studies*, Pater withdrew the copy of essays against Macmillan's wishes.⁸⁵ This demonstrates how Pater maintains ownership of his work and is able to prioritise a readership that he had deemed proficient to engage with his writing.

⁸⁵ Seiler writes: 'Pater felt confident, and again approached the *Academy* and the *Athenaeum*, both of which announced (5 October 1878) that this new book could be expected early in the following year. A short while later, he (18 November 1878) wrote to say that the book was ready to be printed, but five days later he asked Macmillan to change the title to read: *Dionysus and other Studies*...The paper was specially made and proof copies were printed later that month, but when he revised proofs he changed his mind and decided to stop the publication altogether. Macmillan was concerned because the book had been advertised in the press. Macmillan wrote to Pater...arguing that there was no reason for his apprehension since the volume would make a worthy successor to *The Renaissance*. Nevertheless, the type was broken up at his own expense.' (Seiler, *The Book Beautiful*, p.42).

Pater's preoccupation with an intellectual audience does not mean that he sought readers who could simply afford to 'buy into' a culture of 'scholarly living.' Pater uses the rather loose term 'scholarly living' in order to differentiate subtly between the socioeconomic conditions that are associated with scholarly practice and the intellectual work associated with that practice. To bother making this distinction indicates Pater's desire to disassociate aesthetic praxis from the academic curriculum and actual scholarly practice, thus suggesting that he wants the scholar to partake in Aestheticism in his capacity as a proficient individual, but not in any institutionally-aligned capacity.⁸⁶ There is further evidence for this. In 1886, writing for *The Pall Mall Gazette*, Pater enters the debate on 'English at the Universities,' questioning whether the study of English Literature should be introduced to the university syllabus: 'Intelligent Englishmen resort naturally for a liberal pleasure to their own literature. Why transform into a difficult exercise what is a natural virtue in them?'⁸⁷ Insisting that English Literature should be taught at University on grounds of 'its own intrinsic reasonableness,'⁸⁸ he fears that elevating it to curriculum status will appeal to 'fancied easiness'⁸⁹ and in turn, 'suppress every kind of excellence born of strenuous labour,'⁹⁰ which, he states, 'is the last thing we require from the university, in an age already overloaded with the heavy, incondite, "brute matter" of knowledge, and too bustling in its habits to think of that just management of its material which is

⁸⁶ As Josephine Guy has argued, 'Pater's specialized few should not be confused with the specialist activity housed within universities' and that Pater 'self-consciously dissociated his work as a critic from his work as an academic.' (Josephine Guy, 'Specialization and Social Utility: Disciplining English Studies,' in *The Organisation of Knowledge in Victorian Britain*, ed. M. J. Daunton. (Oxford: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2005,)) pp. 209 and 210 respectively).

⁸⁷ Pater, 'English at the Universities,' *The Pall Mall Gazette* (27 November, 1886): 1.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

precisely what we admire in Greek and Latin writers.’⁹¹ Whilst this last statement reminds us that Pater was qualified in Classics, and that he did not necessarily consider contemporary English Literature as necessarily constituting ‘high-art,’ it also reveals his attitude towards academic practice and teaching methods within Universities.⁹² He refers to the ‘desire to facilitate things, at any cost,’⁹³ which goes against the grain of his notion of asceticism in which rigor and self-discipline are essential for appropriate engagement with art: aesthetic praxis would not appeal to ‘those who might give the preference to the studies for their fancied easiness, and welcome such a change in the interest of that desire to facilitate things, at any cost.’⁹⁴ More to the point, he fears that framing the study of English Literature in this way might detract from his definition of literary study as a specialist activity and instead, be more closely aligned with the consumption practices of the late-Victorian reading public that were not capable of appreciating art for its aesthetic values.

Furthermore, it might align literary study with the ‘dead-hand of custom’ associated with institutional traditions, which would encumber the progressive aspirations of aesthetic appreciation as a specialist activity. Whilst the reading public might read for content through following the narrative, for example, Pater insists that ‘private’ consumers (those who could afford

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Guy contextualises English Studies in the late-Victorian period, explaining that ‘compared to several other humanities disciplines English gained its status as a discrete discipline relatively late. It is not until the 1880s that there was sustained agitation for an autonomous discipline of English, and even when the subject was institutionalised in universities in the 1890s and 1900s, for several years it remained parasitic upon other disciplines for its skills and methods. As Carol Atherton shows, a study of early syllabuses, reading lists, and examination papers reveals that for much of the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, university English looked a lot like a branch of history or classics than a discipline in its own right.’ (Guy, ‘Specialization and Social Utility,’ p.203).

⁹³ Pater, ‘English at the Universities,’ p. 2.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

‘scholarly living’) should prioritise aesthetic appreciation and subordinate any concerns towards narrative: ‘And so it happens, to its greater credit, that the better interest even of a narrative to be recounted, a story to be told, will often be in its second reading.’⁹⁵ This distinguishes Pater’s definition of the critic from that of Matthew Arnold. For Pater, the critic commits to aesthetic appreciation, rather than appreciating a literary work for its moral values. This means, as Josephine Guy puts it, that ‘the only person Pater’s critic answered to was, logically speaking, him or herself.’⁹⁶ There is, in this sense, no wider audience the critic must address and this meant that Aestheticism could dissociate a broader class of unspecialized reader, whilst guaranteeing high levels of integrity and self-esteem for ‘the select few.’ This finds Pater removing Aesthetic practice further away from ‘the processes of specialization which, at that time, had’ as Josephine Guy explains, demanded that ‘professional knowledge be socially-useful.’⁹⁷ In the process of writing for ‘the scholar and the scholarly conscience,’ Pater makes Aestheticism’s specialist knowledge answerable only to a small elite.

To further emphasise the point that ‘Pater’s specialized few should not be confused with the specialist activity housed within universities,’⁹⁸ Pater then goes on to dissociate aesthetic practice from university teaching methods by asserting that ‘the critic should possess...a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects.’⁹⁹ In other

⁹⁵ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 21 (Henry James would later take issue with the reading public’s tendency to absorb literature, rather than think critically about it).

⁹⁶ Guy, ‘Specialization and Social Utility,’ p. 210.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 209.

⁹⁹ Pater, ‘Preface,’ p. x.

words, aesthetic appreciation as a specialist activity cannot be taught.¹⁰⁰ Instead, aesthetic experience is only possible for those with a unique and innate temperament. ‘A scholar writing for the scholarly,’ thus refers to a particular kind of attitude—one he termed ‘*mind in style*’¹⁰¹—rather than a particular kind of professional status. Therefore, Aestheticism is not something that the individual could simply ‘buy into’ and afford. Pater thus removes Aestheticism from the university and its admissions policies. This forms part of Pater’s aim to disassociate Aestheticism from a capitalist market economy by valuing objects in terms that are unique to the individual consumer. The professionalization of Aestheticism is at odds with—and undermines—the private nature of aesthetic experience. As we will see in the following chapter, the social utility of Paterian Aestheticism depends upon a form of detachment in which the individual is only accountable to himself; yet it is also this activity which preconditions him for social interaction.

1.2 A ‘human complication and a social stumbling-block’: Henry James, Literary Value and the ‘Democratization’ of Aestheticism

One sketches one’s age but imperfectly if one
doesn’t touch on that particular matter: the
invasion, the impudence and shamelessness, of
the newspaper and the interviewer, the devouring

¹⁰⁰ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘temperament’ refers to the ‘constitution or habit of mind, esp. as depending upon or connected with physical constitution; natural disposition.’ ‘temperament, n.’. OED Online. April 2009. Oxford University Press. [4 April 2009]

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/198881?rkey=X3KloV&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>. (This is an etymological development from its medieval physiology where ‘temperament’ referred to ‘the combination of the four cardinal humours of the body, by the relative proportion of which the physical and mental constitution were held to be determined; known *spec.* as *animal temperament*; also, The bodily habit attributed to this, as *a sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, or melancholic temperament.*’ ((Ibid))).

¹⁰¹ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 18.

publicity of life, the extinction of all sense between public and private. It is the highest expression of the note of 'familiarity,' the sinking of manners, in so many ways, which the democratization of the world brings with it.¹⁰²

For Henry James, it is impractical to evade public modes of reception in order to preserve the creative and intellectual integrity of 'a select few.' Yet, James knew that the 'democratization of the world' tends to place art in the hands of those who do not understand it; or rather, in the hands of those who cannot engage with art in the appropriate way. James writes that the usual channels through which we might estimate art's value 'falsify and vulgarize it.'¹⁰³ In the preface to *The Tragic Muse*, James writes:

as a preference attended with the honours of publicity it [art] is indeed nowhere; that in fact, under the rule of its sincerity, its only honours are those of contraction, concentration and a seemingly deplorable indifference to everything but itself.¹⁰⁴

That is precisely why the social conscience of Paterian Aestheticism rests so comfortably on the self-contained 'prison-house' view that the literary artist

¹⁰² Henry James, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, eds. Francis Otto Matthiessen and Kenneth Ballard Murdock (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 82.

¹⁰³ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 83.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

must devote his attention to an intellectual reader, rather than aim to appeal to a broader readership. James' dual attention to Paterian Aestheticism and public modes of reception means that the question of how we articulate the value of art is not quite so self-contained. Art is, for James, a 'social stumbling block.' He explores the ways in which we might articulate art's value in terms the public will understand, but in a way that does not undermine its core values. He tries to ensure that nothing is lost in translation. Oscar Wilde registers this concern aphoristically in 'The Critic as Artist':

From time to time the world cries out against some charming artistic poet, because, to use its hackneyed and silly phrase, he has "nothing to say." But if he had something to say, he would probably say it, and the result would be tedious. It is just because he has no new message that he can do beautiful work.¹⁰⁵

James devotes his novel *The Tragic Muse* (1889/ 90) to the dramatization of how we might articulate art's socially-engaged dimensions. Throughout, the thematic and structural focus is on the actress Miriam Rooth. The novel's ambiguous response to the question of art's value emerges through the differing accounts of each character's interpretation—and evaluation—of Miriam. Each character provides an account of the actress' acting abilities, but the differing nature of these is due to the interpretative conditions under which

¹⁰⁵ Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist,' Part II, in *Intentions* (Leipzig: Heinemann and Balestier, 1891), p. 162.

they engage with her. James conceives that how we deduce and articulate art's value is subject to interpretative conditions, and returns us to Wilde's 'The Critic as Artist': 'Without the critical faculty, there is no artistic creation at all, worthy of the name.'¹⁰⁶ To an extent, each character's idiosyncratic engagement with Miriam is highly Paterian: each response is personally-engaged and thus responsive to those initial questions which Pater asks the critic to answer in *The Renaissance*: 'What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*?'¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the plethora of interpretations returns us to James' own theory that 'art lives upon discussion...upon the exchange of views...and there is a presumption that those times of genius, are not times of development, are times possibly even, a little, of dulness.'¹⁰⁸ Miriam's ability to generate discussion amongst her spectators, in this sense, appears to indicate that she is a successful artist. However, James does not answer the question about how we estimate art's value in such quantitative terms. It is not, James insists, the quantity of discussion that matters, but rather the quality of it. And so, he refuses to ease 'the difficult terms on which it [the "artistic life"] is at the best secured and enjoyed.' James aims to prize the novel away from late-Victorian culture's tendency to estimate artistic value in quantifiable terms, such as in relation to consumer demand and popular taste. Like Pater, James moves towards qualitative and private modes of aesthetic engagement that require specialized methods of critical enquiry.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁰⁷ Pater, 'Preface,' p. viii.

¹⁰⁸ James, 'The Art of Fiction,' p. 376.

However, James' theories of the novel focus on the capacity of the art-novel to portray human experience in its potentially infinite number of idiosyncratic forms, and thus reach towards a quantified sense of innovation. This has implications for James' speculations about reception: he hopes that by cultivating a broader public, one which is equipped with the skills to interpret his fiction, he can train that public to innovate works that convey the individuality of experience in art. In 'The Critic as Artist,' Wilde echoes James' view that literary culture requires proficient readers if it is to produce proficient authors: 'But there has never been a creative age that has not been critical also. For it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms.'¹⁰⁹ In 'The Future of the Novel: An Analysis and Forecast by Henry James' which appeared in *The New York Times* in 1900, James felt that any aim to elevate the novel to the status of high art depends upon the cultivation of an expanding readership: 'the future of fiction,' he writes, 'is intimately bound up with the future of the society that produces and consumes it.'¹¹⁰ He blames the 'reader, irreflective and uncritical,' for 'the demoralization, the vulgarisation of literature in general,'¹¹¹ and argues that the elevation of the novel is held to depend upon 'the very readers for whom the sacrifices have hitherto been supposed to be made.'¹¹² James hopes to cultivate a Paterian readership in which the reader's attentiveness (and subsequent appreciation) reciprocates the writer's attentiveness. The act of appreciation (being no different from the process of creation) prefigures literary experimentation, and James notes that a

¹⁰⁹ Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist,' Part I, in *Intentions* (Leipzig: Heinemann and Balestier, 1891), p. 102.

¹¹⁰ Henry James, 'The Future of the Novel: An Analysis and Forecast by Henry James,' *The New York Times* (11 August, 1900): 1.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*

‘community addicted to reflection and fond of ideas will try to experiment with the “story.”’¹¹³ The novel will be able to extend to more forms when more people are equipped with these skills. After all, James describes artistic perception as idiosyncratic; the artist is ‘a figure with a pair of eyes, or at least with a field-glass, which forms, again and again, for observation, a unique instrument, insuring to the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other.’¹¹⁴ James demonstrates how the ‘democratization of the world’ is indispensable to the extension of the novel’s formal possibilities and stylistic supremacy, and, for James, this ‘democratization’ involves training the reading public to undertake the critical practices that Paterian Aestheticism demands of only a ‘select few.’ This provides an explanation as to why James, unlike Pater, is preoccupied with a desire to be a popular author in order to reach a wider audience.¹¹⁵ Moreover, this explains why James retains an eye for the marketable qualities of his fiction despite being considered as a prestige writer

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 46.

¹¹⁵ His intervention into the theatre with his play *Guy Domville* (1895) is perhaps the starkest example of James demonstrating his desire to reach a broad audience to the point at which the play’s (now well-known) unpopularity horrified James. On the play’s opening night, the auditorium heckled James, prompting him to flee the wings. He described the scene to William as: ‘an abominable ¼ of an hour during wh. all the forces of civilization in the house waged a battle of the most gallant, prolonged & sustained applause with the hoots & jeers & catcalls of the roughs, whose roars (like those of a cage of beasts at some infernal ‘Zoo’) were only exacerbated (as it were!) by the conflict.’ (Henry James, ‘Letter to William James’ (9th Jan 1895) in *Henry James Letters: 1883-1895*, p. 508).

by his publisher Macmillan who found that the cultural capital he gave to their list outweighed the lack of profitability.¹¹⁶

Across his writings, James aims to resolve the tension between an idea of a proficient reader equipped with the interpretative skills to respond to works of art that can yield an ethical response, and the notion of a broad readership which, by definition, will encompass a wide range of interpretative skills. Henry James, like other figures in the late-19th century, such as Gosse, notes the problems that accompanied the ‘democratization’ of literary culture. In ‘The Art of Fiction’ (1884), James deplores the consumption habits of the reading public. Acting as ventriloquist for this public, he writes: ‘That, I think, represents the manner in which the latent thought of many people who read novels as an exercise in skipping would explain itself if it were to become articulate.’¹¹⁷ As his brother William James would point out, this posed a problem for a novelist whose labyrinthine sentences somewhat notoriously

¹¹⁶ Macmillan’s esteem for James can be seen in the way it continued to include James on their lists even when sales of his works had been particularly weak. For example, on the publication of *The Tragic Muse* in 1890, Macmillan offered James a relatively small advancement of £70 due to the recent poor sales of his novels; this was significantly less than the ‘£500 [advancement that James received] on [the publication of] *The Bostonians* and [the] £400 [advancement] on [the publication of] *The Princess Casamassima* (Philip Horne, ‘Introduction,’ in *The Tragic Muse*, ed. Philip Horne ((London: Penguin Classics, 1995)), p. xii). Asserting his importance, James wrote to Macmillan saying that he would search for another publisher: ‘In spite of what you tell me of the poor success of my recent books, I still do desire to get a larger sum...Farewell then, my dear Macmillan, with great regret--but with the sustaining cheer of all the links in chain that remain still unbroken.’ (Henry James, ‘Letter to Frederick Macmillan’ (28th March, 1890), in *Henry James Letters: 1883-1895 (Volume III)*, ed. Leon Edel (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 275). Shortly afterwards, as various accounts inform us, James hired an agent, A.P Watt who managed to negotiate more lucrative terms with Macmillan for the publication of *The Tragic Muse*. Philip Horne informs us that: James ‘had in 1888 put his literary affairs in the hands of one of the first of the literary agents (a new breed at the time), A. P. Watt, and Watt now managed to get James an advance from Macmillan of £250 for a five-year lease of the novel—at the end of which James was still to owe Macmillan £170.’ (Philip Horne, ‘Introduction,’ p. xii). The broken chains between James and Macmillan were in turn repaired and James continued to publish with the house. Macmillan published the New York Edition in London and his autobiographical volumes, *A Small Boy and Others* and *Notes of a Son and Brother*.

¹¹⁷ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ pp. 381-2.

characterized his style. William did not need to tell his already reproachful younger brother that his novels were not convenient for ‘a crowded and hurried reading age [in which] pages that require close attention remain unread and neglected’¹¹⁸ or that ‘You can’t skip a word if you are to get the effect, and 19 out of 20 worthy readers grow intolerant.’¹¹⁹ James was aware of a tension between causal elaboration and interpretative difficulty, between stylistic verbosity and the ethics of reading that his works posed. For example, James advocates long, detailed sentences that contain multiple clauses to ensure that the writer can convey the complex and nuanced nature of experience. This stylistic mode is a vital resource for novel-writers, whom James instructs ‘to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost’¹²⁰ and be ‘finely aware and richly responsible.’¹²¹ However, this mode does not lend itself to producing accessible works of fiction in an age when readers do not have the necessary skills to engage with ‘pages that require close attention.’

In ‘The Lesson of the Master’ (1888), James thematically demonstrates how it is impossible to ascertain a work’s value in a ‘hurried and crowded reading age’ in which there are, as the story’s young novelist, Paul Overt exclaims, ‘Too many people—too many people!’ whilst ‘giving ground before the penetration of an elbow.’¹²² James often observes the problematic expansion of the reading public as that expansion takes place in other genres; in ‘The Lesson of the Master’ he uses the public gallery scene to explore his

¹¹⁸ James, *The Letters of Henry James*, p. 278.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 390.

¹²¹ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 62.

¹²² Henry James, ‘The Lesson of the Master,’ in *The Lesson of the Master and Other Stories* (Leipzig: Heinemann and Balestier, 1892), p. 36.

concerns about how the expansion of audiences for art creates conditions that undermine attentive, ‘proper’ modes of appreciation. In this quotation, James illustrates how the dynamics of the crowd assume an art-form that is much more appreciated by gallery-goers and readers of his work than the drawings on the wall:

The drawings were admirable, but the crowd in the one little room was so dense that he felt himself up to his neck in a sack of wool. A fringe of people at the outer edge endeavoured by curving forward their backs and presenting, below them, a still more convex surface of resistance to the pressure of the mass, to preserve an interval between their noses and the glazed mounts of the pictures; while the central body, in the comparative gloom projected by a wide horizontal screen hung under the skylight and allowing only a margin for the day, remained upright dense and vague, lost in the contemplation of its own ingredients.¹²³

The crowd dynamics are incompatible with the conditions needed to undertake Paterian modes of self-reflexive interpretation; it is only the omniscient

¹²³ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

narrator who offers an aerial focal point of the scene that can inform us that the ‘drawings were admirable.’ The ‘central body’ is ‘lost in the contemplation of its own ingredients,’ rather than lost in the contemplation of art. This serves as a metaphor for the relationship between the culture of reading and the formation of aesthetic judgments that James thematically dramatizes throughout. For example, when Paul Overt receives the counsel of the celebrated literary figure, Henry St George, it soon becomes apparent that the advice the ‘master’ provides is not informed by literary knowledge, which renders his advice questionable. His evaluation of Overt’s novel, *Ginistrella*, which he describes as ‘a very distinguished book’¹²⁴ is not derived from first-hand knowledge, but rather from what James had condemned as ‘this age of advertisement and newspaperism, this age of interviewing.’¹²⁵ When Paul asks, ‘how do you know it?’¹²⁶—noting that the busily engaged literary celebrity ‘hadn’t read it this afternoon’¹²⁷—we learn that St. George has ascertained this judgment from extra-literary sources. In his authoritative stance as the ‘Master,’ St George asserts ‘with the immediate familiarity of a confrère’¹²⁸: ‘Why, my dear fellow, it’s in the air, it’s in the papers, it’s everywhere’¹²⁹ and ‘You’re on all men’s lips and, what’s better, on all women’s.’¹³⁰ James appears to be implying that Overt’s ‘readership,’ which includes both men and women, extends beyond Pater’s ‘select few’ because literary culture provides means for members of the public to formulate critical opinions without reading the work itself. Overt finds St. George’s additional

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

¹²⁵ James, *The Notebooks of Henry James*, p. 148.

¹²⁶ James, *The Lesson of the Master*, p. 24.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

claim, ‘And I’ve just been reading your book’¹³¹ implausible due to his knowledge of St George’s schedule, which returns us to the way in which literary culture’s promotion of the literary celebrity rather than the literary artist prefigures a culture which renders judgments about art’s aesthetic value superficial.

James, aware of the shortcomings of the reading public, refuses to exchange his notoriously difficult style of writing for one that might accommodate a readership with a broad range of interpretative skills. The novelist, for James, must deploy a stylistic mode that gives him the ‘freedom to feel and say,’¹³² and so he insists that novel-readers should acquire the necessary proficiencies to appreciate the types of art-works that can yield an ethical response. In *The Tragic Muse*, Gabriel Nash—the novel’s self-declared aesthete—informs Nick Dormer that the artist should not feel anxious about writing against the grain of public expectation for whilst ‘People may not read you at sight, may not like you...there's a chance they'll come round.’¹³³ As I go on to illustrate, James consciously reiterates the responsibilities of novel-readers across his oeuvre when trying to resolve the tension between producing works of ‘high’ literary art that necessitate a proficient reader, and when (in turn) striving to extend the readership for those works to a public that may lack the skills required to appreciate them.

For example, in a ‘hurried and crowded reading age,’ James regards aesthetic attention as that which is conserved by readers with the *right* attitude.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 384

¹³³ Henry James, *The Tragic Muse* (London; New York: Macmillan, 1891), p. 106.

For James, the array of distraction and choice in literary culture necessitates readers committed to attentive engagement with art. In the opening chapter of *The Tragic Muse*, James' narrator implies the novel accommodates a reader with the 'right,' attentive attitude: 'The reader shall learn these things in time if he cares enough for them.'¹³⁴ On the one hand, this appears to signal James' attempts to construct an inclusive mode of literary engagement: the reader's careful attention appears to be separate from the issue of readerly proficiency. On the other hand, James' emphasis on attention does not redeem his elitism; it can instead be construed as a blind form of elitism because stipulating a 'right' attitude folds back into a demand for a skilled reader with access to the type of privileges of 'scholarly living' which Pater defines as a precondition of aesthetic engagement. A review of *The Tragic Muse* in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (1890) points this out: 'we should have to reprint whole scenes in order to make our position clear to the reader. Failing this, we can only refer him to the book itself, which is extremely clever and (for any one with ample leisure) well worth reading.'¹³⁵ It may seem, then, that despite James' concern with readerships the novel continues to reside in the 'prison-house' view of art to which Pater openly subscribes.

Indeed, *The Tragic Muse* contains several indications that James' elevation of the novel is underpinned by his demand for a highly-trained reader. Josephine Guy and Ian Small have noted that *The Tragic Muse* along with Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Walter Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* make:

¹³⁴ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 13.

¹³⁵ Anon, 'The Tragic Muse,' in *The Pall Mall Gazette* (Wednesday, August 20, 1890): 1.

use of quotation, allusion and reference—precisely those textual features which require annotation—is so complex and elusive that the annotator has to consider the possibility that a novel might deliberately address several different and mutually exclusive audiences; and that textual devices may be used by their authors to distinguish between audiences.¹³⁶

The use of quotation, allusion and reference in *The Tragic Muse* addresses an exclusive audience. This particularly becomes the case at the end of the novel when James describes the way aesthetic engagement is refracted through the collective gaze, and we consider how this might have implications for readers of the novel:

Miriam Rooth was sublime; yet it may be confided to the reader that during these supreme scenes Bridget Dormer directed her eyes less to the inspired actress than to a figure in the stalls who sat with his own gaze fastened to the stage.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *Politics and Value in English Studies: A Discipline in Crisis?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 153.

¹³⁷ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 486.

That Bridget forms her response to the performance by studying that of another spectator can be read as one of many instances which destabilize narrative authority in *The Tragic Muse*. Those critical terms that the narrator associates with Bridget's engagement with the play are immediately thrown into question when we learn that such terms are not critically deduced from her own personally-engaged spectatorship. James reinforces this destabilization of critical authority in a joke shared with those readers versed in Kantian aesthetics. In Kantian terms, an encounter with a 'sublime' aesthetic object registers a spectator's inability to calculate its 'absolute totality' and from there awakens a 'supersensible' faculty within us.¹³⁸ It is true that Bridget cannot calculate Miriam's 'absolute totality,' but this inability transpires from her lack of attention to the stage. Rather than experience a sense of hyper-affect, Bridget remains in a passive state of fixation on 'a figure in the stalls who sat with his own gaze fastened to the stage.'¹³⁹

That this destabilization of critical authority is only shared with James' erudite, 'ideal' readers suggests that he reserves his fiction for a small, elite group of educated readers. Readers unaware that the narrative frame destabilizes any notion of authority are no different from Bridget Dormer: like Bridget, these readers construct their own impression of Miriam through a refracted 'gaze.' As James had conceived it, the majority of the reading public would have been unable to appreciate the novel's complicated stylistic

¹³⁸ Immanuel Kant writes: 'The faculty of being able to think the infinite of supersensible intuition as given (in its intelligible substrate), surpasses every standard of sensibility, and is great beyond all comparison even with the faculty of mathematical estimation; not of course in a theoretical point of view and on behalf of the cognitive faculty, but as an extension of the mind which feels itself able in another (practical) point of view to go beyond the limit of sensibility.' (Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 1790 ((New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2007)), pp. 69-70).

¹³⁹ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 486.

dimensions. James had depicted this public on frequent occasions across his oeuvre as inarticulate and unable to engage with the art-novel with qualified attention, describing it as ‘broad-backed’ and ‘unable to give the smallest account of itself.’¹⁴⁰ It seems it is only those readers who possess the proficiencies to engage with the complex stylistic dimensions of the novel who will be able to overcome the potential risks of becoming susceptible to passive modes of aesthetic consumption. James’ private joke with his educated reader allows those readers to appreciate the irony which is at stake here. Characters, such as Bridget Dormer, offer different opinions which might seem to enjoy critical influence within the diegetic world of the novel, but are, in fact, borne out of anti-Paterian modes of consumption; educated readers will be aware that these terms sustain little authority within James’ theorization of literary Aestheticism.

However, the membership of Jamesian Aestheticism is more complicated than such elitist strategies may imply. To an extent, the elitism of James’ emphasis on aesthetic reading practices is redeemed in that he rewards attentive readers. As we see in the third chapter, James incorporates the psychological concept of ‘voluntary attention’ into his theory of receptivity; this is central to his aim to cultivate a readership which can carry out individualised modes of response that require high levels of readerly attention. In his fiction, James aims to stimulate the reader’s ‘remoter interests’ in order to sustain his attention. In James’ ‘The Art of Fiction,’ he asserts that ‘The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel without incurring the

¹⁴⁰ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 227.

accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting.’¹⁴¹ He echoes this view in ‘The Future of the Novel’ where he asserts: ‘[The prose picture] must, of course, hold our attention and reward it, it must not appeal on false pretences.’¹⁴² We thus move towards a model in which both perceiver and percept participate in a mutually transactional relationship. For Henry James, it is the responsibility of the author to produce interesting art whilst stimulating the interests of its readers; but the reader must also use modes of voluntary attention to remain focused and attentive to the work of literary art. This model extends Pater’s ‘a scholar writing for the scholarly,’ in which the proficiencies of the writer are equal to those of the reader, to a potentially broader public and anticipates Vernon Lee’s complex three-way relationship between writer, art-object and reader, the dynamics of which remain dependent on the co-operation of each. I explore the psychological implications of James’ views on receptivity in the third chapter.

There are times in *The Tragic Muse* when the anonymous, omniscient narrator leaves the reader to carry out his role unassisted—‘I leave the reader to estimate’¹⁴³—a position which implies that James abandons the unskilled reader altogether. Yet, in light of James’ handling of the tensions that structure the discussions around receptivity, we can interpret this comment as representing his attempt to cultivate individualised modes of readerly attention that contrast with the kind of collective ‘auditorium’ that the narrative initially sets up as a medium for its plot. In other words, *The Tragic Muse* places the reader in a position in which individual critical engagement is crucial. The

¹⁴¹ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 384.

¹⁴² James, ‘The Future of the Novel,’ p. 1.

¹⁴³ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 107.

reader should not trust the critical judgments of the auditorium, but rather depend upon his own private and personal engagements.

In order to produce fiction which cultivates individual modes of readerly response, James consciously goes against the grain of public expectation. In 'The Art of Fiction,' he writes:

the artist in fiction is regarded as a sort of meddlesome doctor who forbids agreeable aftertastes...they would all agree that the "artistic" idea would spoil some of their fun ...Its hostility to a happy ending would be evident, and it might even, in some cases, render any ending at all impossible.¹⁴⁴

James' 'hostility' to the tastes of the reading public at large evolves from his concern for specialist modes of critical enquiry which enable the individual to appreciate the unexpected formal possibilities and singularity of the art-novel. Across his fiction, he demands readers who are able to construct a response by means of attentive, first-hand engagement with the work's formal properties. As I examine below, for example, in *The Tragic Muse*, James expects the reader to ascertain the work's meaning unassisted. He conceives this as a process which requires a critic with the proficiencies 'to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a relation with

¹⁴⁴ James, 'The Art of Fiction,' p. 382.

the criticised thing and make it one's own.'¹⁴⁵ There is, of course, an element of tension here. James takes account of the less proficient reader by seeing the novelist as having a responsibility to write in a way which actively encourages an appropriate form of readerly engagement; but then, James simultaneously withdraws from the novel, leaving the reader to 'decode' for himself what are often abstruse allusions so that, paradoxically, the less proficient reader (which he seems to take account of) may not actually understand the way *The Tragic Muse* dramatises, via its narrative structure, the distinction between appropriate and consumerist readings. This tension is perhaps an inevitable consequence of James' view that the only appropriate way to gain an ethical appreciation of a work of art is to critically engage with it, independent of authorial instruction. Unlike Vernon Lee, James refuses to assist the less proficient reader by using didactic measures and it is in this way that James reminds us of Pater's claim that 'one must realise such primary data for oneself or not at all.'

James requires a reader that undertakes many of the responsibilities of the writer: he must be 'finely aware and richly responsible' of his aesthetic experience. Wilde echoes James' extension of the relationships between the acts of creation and appreciation in 'The Critic as Artist' where he writes: 'Criticism is, in fact, both creative and independent...The critic occupies the same relation to the work of art that he criticizes as the artist does to the visible world of form and colour, or the unseen world of passion and of thought.'¹⁴⁶ It is in this way that James, like Pater and Wilde, envisions the act of appreciation as a process of creation no different from that which the artist undertakes to the

¹⁴⁵ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 155.

¹⁴⁶ Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist,' Part I, pp. 112-13.

point at which he often places ‘unconscious’ emphasis upon the sensibilities and capabilities of ideal novel-readers, even when he seems to be talking about writerly priorities and predispositions. As for Pater, for James, in order for an experience to be aesthetic it must be realised for oneself.

In *The Tragic Muse*, the audience-centric nature of the theatre is at odds with Aestheticism’s specialist discourse which, as Pater had conceived it, does not need to translate aesthetic knowledge to a broader public. When Nick Dormer explains why he is an artist and tells Peter Sherringham not to be ‘ashamed’ of his involvement with the theatre, he asserts:

I ought to discriminate. You're distinguished among my friends and relations by your character of rising young diplomatist; but you know I always want the final touch to the picture, the last fruit of analysis. Therefore I make out that you're conspicuous among rising young diplomatists for the infatuation you describe in such pretty terms.¹⁴⁷

The theatre thus provides a means for James to ironize his values concerning ‘proper’ engagement with social life through testing those values within a location he had conceived as a general model for passive aesthetic

¹⁴⁷ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 49.

consumption.¹⁴⁸ James presents the theatre auditorium as a particularly useful location to critique the consumption habits of the late-Victorian public which James had described as ‘susceptible of [the] consciousness of such others.’¹⁴⁹ Each character in the novel—from Peter Sherringham to Gabriel Nash—is prone to anti-Paterian modes of passive consumption through failing to engage with art in a disinterested way, and it is in this way that the representation of evaluative criticism in *The Tragic Muse* is intentionally unreliable. Once again, individualised modes of readerly attention contrast with the modes of consumption James associated with the collective ‘auditorium.’ For the reader, as we have seen, this means that there is a disjunction between the way artistic value is discussed by characters and the way James relays artistic value to the reader through the novel’s formal properties. This requires sustained readerly attention; readers that ‘skip a word’ will not ‘get the effect.’

One way in which James creates interpretative conditions that necessitate individualised modes of response in *The Tragic Muse* is by appearing to abnegate authorial responsibility. This is particularly emphasised in the preface in which James disclaims ownership of the novel when he ‘profess[es] a certain vagueness of remembrance in respect to the origin and growth of *The Tragic Muse*’¹⁵⁰:

¹⁴⁸ It would be wrong, however, to say that James presents the theatre and literary art as antithetical to one another. For Walter Pater, ‘true aesthetic criticism’ takes place whilst working across the arts and develops a hybridised conception of aesthetic value. James’ *The Tragic Muse* acknowledges the differences between these two modes of art, but seeks the possibilities of interconnection. As the politician-turned-artist Nick Dormer says emblematically to his sister Bidy: ‘All art is one.’ (James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 8). The novel explores the possibilities of unity between the arts and there is an interesting relationship between the way James envisages moulding a readership for his fiction and the way he observes that process taking place in other genres.

¹⁴⁹ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 128.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

The influence of *The Tragic Muse* was thus exactly other than what I had all earnestly (if of course privately enough) invoked for it, and I remember well the particular chill, at last, of the sense of my having launched it in a great grey void from which no echo or message whatever would come back. None, in the event, ever came, and as I now read the book over I find the circumstance make, in its name, for a special tenderness of charity; even for that finer consideration hanging in the parental breast about the maimed or slighted, the disfigured or defeated, the unlucky or unlikely child—with this hapless small mortal thought of further as somehow ‘compromising.’¹⁵¹

James describes the compositional process with the language of Decadent uselessness (‘great grey void’) and deformity (‘disfigured or defeated’), negative qualities that tarnished the reputation of ‘art for art’s sake.’¹⁵² James’ ‘professed’ inability to recall significant elements of the novel’s compositional practice—a process which took two years—and refusal to take ownership of his work is an uncharacteristic trait for a writer who defends the importance of responsible authorship and authorial integrity. This admission of neglect is part

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² We see this in T.S. Eliot’s admonishment of Pater’s Aestheticism as cited in the above section on Pater.

of James' strategy to cultivate a readership which will 'find...a special tenderness of charity' and take ownership; by disowning the work, James transfers 'parental' responsibility to the reader. James, then, removes himself from the narrative frame in order to mould the interpretative conditions he deems necessary for the reception of his fiction. The reader's central role is reinstated in the preface in which James tells us that 'we look in vain for the artist, the divine explanatory genius, who will come to our aid and tell us.'¹⁵³ It is the reader's responsibility to recuperate or 'recover' the work from the 'grey void from which no echo or message whatever would ever come back.' In this way, James ensures that the answer to the question of art's social utility is relative to the reader's individual aesthetic experience of reading. James aims to ensure that the reader's experience of the text is aesthetic; that is, an experience which the reader has realised for himself. The following chapter on disinterestedness focuses on James' conscious reiteration of the responsibilities of novel-readers as part of his contribution to Aestheticism's cultivation of acute interpretative and affective engagements, which are private and individualistic.

1.3 The 'right kind of reader': Vernon Lee's Didactic Aestheticism

As for Walter Pater and Henry James, Vernon Lee's position within literary culture influences her theorization of Aestheticism's readerships. Despite feeling marginalised because of her gender, Lee's relatively privileged position within late-19th century literary and intellectual culture had consequences for the public dissemination of her writings to the extent of

¹⁵³ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 84.

undermining her campaign for a socially-inclusive Aestheticism. Lee could afford to maintain high levels of artistic integrity irrespective of readers, which is in tune with Paterian individualism. Lee continues to preserve Pater and James' emphasis on an 'ideal' reader, but, at the same time, her authorial strategies account for a broader readership. Whilst Lee aims to promote individualised modes of readerly response—independent of authorial instruction—her broad notion of audience means that she elevates this model in a coercive and didactic way: she refuses to relinquish her authorial agency because she does not trust the majority of readers to preserve that Paterian specialness of the writer. Lee's notion of the 'right kind of reader' is borne out of her awareness of a broad audience, and it is her concern for the very notion of a diverse readership which somewhat compromises her ability to write fiction exclusively for her ideal reader.

Like Pater and (in a more complicated way) James, Lee could afford to preserve high levels of artistic integrity 'because she was a prestige writer.'¹⁵⁴ Her interest in the reception of her works never entailed the kind of authorial compromises demanded of writers who were economically dependent on the general public. For example, Lee could afford to ensure that she maintained ownership of her writings during the publishing process by contesting displeasing editorial decisions. On 18 December 1901 Lee wrote to her loyal publisher T. Fisher Unwin: 'I greatly object to the hawking round literature to agents, syndicates, and similar arrangements.'¹⁵⁵ On the publication of her novel *Miss Brown*, Lee told her mother in a letter that she regarded alterations

¹⁵⁴ Vernon Lee quoted in Vineta Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p. 308.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

to the text as ‘an insane notion’ and that when dealing with her publisher Blackwood, she is ‘kittle cattle to drive.’¹⁵⁶ Lee’s stubborn attitude towards the publishing process reflects her desire for authorial independence. Rather than write in order to make a profit, Lee sought to provide an informed response to matters that concerned her, rather than matters popular or accessible to the masses. In perhaps one of her most extreme statements of authorial independence, Lee expresses no interest in extending Aestheticism to the reading public at large: ‘It is certain that I can never imagine what I write being read, still less by anyone in particular. (I know my writings tend more and more toward soliloquy).’¹⁵⁷ Lee is seen to embrace her small readership by dedicating *The Handling of Words* ‘To the many writers I have read and the few readers who have read me let me gratefully dedicate these studies in writing and reading.’¹⁵⁸

Lee’s educational background influences the particular type of readership she would appear to strategically target in order to preserve the high levels of authorial integrity and creative esteem formed in the early stages of her career. She ‘graduated’ from her home schooling as a prodigious talent. As Colby reminds us, the ‘twenty-four year old Violet Paget...arrived on the London literary scene as something of a prodigy.’¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Lee tended to make this impression on her acquaintances. Maurice Baring described her as

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁵⁷ Vernon Lee quoted in Vineta Colby, *The Singular Anomaly: Women Novelists of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: University Press, 1970), p. 293.

¹⁵⁸ Dedication to Lee’s *The Handling of Words*, p. v.

¹⁵⁹ Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography*, p. 78.

‘by far the cleverest person I have ever met in my life.’¹⁶⁰ The fruits of her home-schooling—fruits which had garnered critical acclaim before her arrival in London in June 1881—appeared in the form of ‘her much praised *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* ... essays on art, aesthetics, and music in prestigious journals like *Fraser’s*, *Cornhill* and the *Contemporary Review*.’¹⁶¹ Lee continued to write for an educated and well-informed readership; she would write for audiences deemed ‘truly lettered.’ And so, rather than branch out to the public at large, Lee ends up writing for a very small portion of the reading public. Her writings were, on the whole, appreciated by a ‘small and loyal readership,’¹⁶² which, by and large, consisted of her intellectual, middle-class peers. The Bloomsbury group’s Lytton Strachey acknowledged Lee’s appeal to a portion of the early twentieth-century middle-class, commenting: ‘Some like coffee, some like tea, and some are never bored by Vernon Lee.’¹⁶³ This middle-class audience is reflected in the types of journals in which she published at this time. One of her earliest publications, ‘The Art of Singing, Past and Present,’ appeared in the *British Quarterly Review*, a publication which, according to Matthew Arnold, existed ‘as an organ of the political Dissenters’¹⁶⁴ and according to R. V. Osbourn catered for ‘the Nonconformists in that intelligent and educated section of the middle class which Emerson described as a “perceptive minority” opposing and counteracting the “practical

¹⁶⁰ Maurice Baring quoted in Maxwell and Pulham, ‘Introduction,’ in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2006), p. 1.

¹⁶¹ Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography*, p. 78.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 308.

¹⁶³ Lytton Strachey quoted in Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography*, p. 183. (Angela Leighton uses this in the title of her article: ‘A Guilty Footnote: “Some Like Coffee, Some Like Tea and Some Are Never Bored by Vernon Lee,”’ *The Times Literary Supplement* ((12 September 2003)).

¹⁶⁴ Matthew Arnold, ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,’ 1864, in *Essays in Criticism* (London and Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1865), pp. 19-20.

majority.”¹⁶⁵ Publishing her work in elite forums such as these reflects Lee’s view that only a certain type of reader is capable of responding to the writer’s artistry; it also enables her to preserve a sense of artistic integrity.

Lee appreciates that her authorial independence—the ‘determination to write only to please’¹⁶⁶ herself—shapes the reception of her works by allowing her to write for only a coterie of readers. As she writes in a letter to her mother in 1893:

I don’t think it is my obscurity which prevents my being popular, but my habit & determination to write only to please myself, irrespective of readers, and by this means reach the only readers to whom I can give pleasure or profit, those who stand, naturally, in want of exactly the writer I am.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ R. V. Osbourn, ‘The British Quarterly Review,’ *The Review of English Studies*, 1 (1950): 147.

¹⁶⁶ Vernon Lee quoted in Irene Cooper-Willis, *Vernon Lee’s Letters* (London: Privately Printed, 1937), p. 359.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Providing ‘pleasure and profit’ to a readership receptive to what she had to say, Lee is able to maintain her authorial independence and integrity. Yet, despite her ‘determination to write...irrespective of readers,’ Lee devotes a significant portion of her oeuvre to theorizing ‘the right kind of reader.’ Her essay ‘Reading Books’ cites her view that literature is not for the inexperienced, general reader at all, but instead for the highly erudite: ‘One has to have read a great, great deal in order to taste the special exquisiteness of books, their marvellous essence of long-stored up, oddly mixed, subtly selected and hundredfold distilled suggestion.’¹⁶⁸ In the same essay, Lee writes: ‘I felt acutely how true it is that a book (for the truly lettered) can do its work without being read,’¹⁶⁹ which might appear to favour an accessible aesthetic practice for the untrained reader, but in fact, as the words within the parentheses reveal, demands the equivalent of Pater’s educated scholar. On the one hand, this statement repudiates Pater’s emphasis on Aestheticism as a specialized practice while on the other, it insists on the reader’s exposure to a broad literary tradition. This exposure was, by and large, not afforded to the general reader. Yet, this notion of a ‘right kind of Reader’ does not disregard the unqualified reader: we soon learn that Lee’s emphasis on an ideal reader evolves out of her concern for a broad notion of audience. In *The Handling of Words* (1923), a collection of essays written across the breadth of her career, Lee deploys the term ‘class of Readers’ when considering the relationship between reader response and the formation of literary value: ‘The efficacy of any word or class of words depends upon the particular nature and experience of the individual

¹⁶⁸ Vernon Lee, ‘Reading Books,’ in *Hortus Vitae: Essays on the Gardening of Life* (London: John Lane, 1904), p. 20.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

reader or class of Readers.’¹⁷⁰ Lee provides subcategories of this term which situate readers on a spectrum of proficiency: at one end, there is ‘the right kind of Reader’ and at the other ‘the stupid or tired Reader.’¹⁷¹ Lee’s classification of readers reveals that her Aestheticism does not exclusively account for the ‘right kind of Reader.’ Not only does Lee account for a certain type of reader who will be capable of attending to literary art in the ‘correct’ and ‘attentive’ way she is recommending, she also takes into consideration those readers who will ‘lay...hold of the wrong portion of a page or a sentence.’¹⁷²

Lee holds a rather cynical view of the common reader; she does not trust this individual to co-operate with the demands of the literary artist. In ‘On Style’ she assumes that ‘the Reader is perpetually on the point of stopping, of turning round, or going off at a wrong turning, let alone his yawning from side to side.’¹⁷³ To overcome this problem, Lee stipulates that the writer should aim to engineer the ‘correct’ type of response he has in mind:

¹⁷⁰ Vernon Lee, ‘On Style,’ in *The Handling of Words*, p. 44. This part of Lee’s essay ‘On Style’ originally appeared as ‘The Craft of Words’ in the *New Review*, December 1894, pp. 571–80. *The Handling of Words* is a problematic work to use in the context of assessing Lee’s ‘late’ response to Aestheticism due to its status as a collection of essays. This practice of collecting critical essays published—or simply written—over a substantial period of time is a common practice in the late-Victorian period. For writers such as Pater and James, the process of collecting essays offers an opportunity to self-edit their earlier works in accordance with their ‘later’ or more ‘developed’ critical views. The essays are thus composed in an accretive way. This also provides the opportunity to make distinct ‘general conclusions.’ According to the preface to *The Handling of Words* (1923), this seems to be the way she perceives the process: ‘Half a lifetime of additional reading and writing, and of ruminating over what I have read and have written, has brought some general conclusions clearer and clearer to my mind, the implicit growing explicit’ (Lee, *The Handling of Words*, p. vii). Having said this, Lee fittingly contradicts herself, acknowledging the inconsistent and contradictory nature of the collection; she invites her “alert student” to make coherent sense of the collection: ‘So it is just as well for my alert student, besides being far more convenient for my rather weary self, that it be left to him to put such order as may be lacking into this bundle of random studies’ (Ibid).

¹⁷¹ Lee, ‘Aesthetics of the Novel,’ pp. 72 and 1.

¹⁷² Lee, ‘On Style,’ p. 42.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 41.

[The Reader] has to be kept awake, always kept awake, and kept awake whenever a new turn is coming, so that much of the craft of writing consists in preventing the Reader from anticipating wrongly on the sense of the Writer, going off on details in wrong directions, lagging behind or getting lost in a maze of streets. Few persons realize that the Writer has not only to make his Reader think or feel the right thing, but also to prevent his perpetually thinking or feeling the wrong one.¹⁷⁴

She thus places a great deal of emphasis on the responsibilities of the writer in directing the untutored reader. Yet, Lee expects the reader to return the writer's levels of co-operation and assigns a proportional amount of responsibility to him; she places emphasis on a co-operative relationship in which the reader responds to the 'suggestions of the Writer,' stating that she 'conceive[s] the actual book or poem or essay to be but a portion of the complete work of literary art, whose completion depends upon the response of the Reader to the suggestions of the Writer.'¹⁷⁵ This echoes Pater's assertion that the writer's commitment to offering aesthetically complex detail invites the laborious activity of the reader's attention. Lee reiterates this Paterian principle, writing, the 'activity of the Reader when he makes a sufficiently complete response, is stimulated and kept alive by the swiftness and certainty demanded of it, and by

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 41-2.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

the constant need for perceiving and co-ordinating a variety of items.¹⁷⁶ As this statement implies, Lee's Aestheticism—like that of James—envisions a writer who consciously sets out to produce works that stimulate the reader's response, but requires a reader who is able to attend to the precise formal properties that the writer offers. Unlike Pater, both James and Lee do not see the writer and reader as necessarily equal, but nonetheless require a reader who offers that same mode of hyperactive attention that Pater implies in his envisioning of 'that sort of reader who will go (full of eyes) warily, considerately.' The key difference is that whilst Pater, James and Lee register similar interactions and exchanges between reader, writer and literary art, Lee makes it much clearer that all parties, particularly that of the writer, should be conscious of their responsibility to co-operate and argues that the writer should attempt to assist the reader in formulating his 'ideal,' individualised type of response. Lee's mistrust of the reader means that she cannot afford to leave the reader to undertake his responsibilities to 'complete' the work of literary art unassisted.

Lee's fiction shares Henry James' ambition to inculcate readers in certain rules of engagement, rules which efface 'ordinary' consumption habits common to the reading public at large. Both writers' thematic preoccupations with modes of readerly engagement evolve from a desire to engage a broad reading public, and to cultivate an individuated readership. However, whilst James is prepared to transfer his interpretative agency to the reader, Lee is much more coercive and didactic: she refuses to hand over her authorial agency

¹⁷⁶ Lee, 'The Handling of Words,' 1910, in *The Handling of Words*, p. 232.

to the reader in quite the same way. There is a paradox at stake in the way she uses didactic strategies to cultivate a readership which will construct meaning without the aid of authorial instruction. In 1887, Pater would notice this didactic element in Lee's writings, commenting in an anonymous review of *Juvenilia* that he senses 'a touch of something like Puritanism'¹⁷⁷ in her works. Lee's didactic Aestheticism is best exemplified in 'A Wicked Voice,' a tale in which she uses a moral framework to promote her view that art's value is relative to experience (as opposed to a predetermined set of moral values). In this supernatural tale, Lee allegorically drives her preoccupation with ideal modes of critical engagement to the point at which she 'disciplines, restrains and purifies'¹⁷⁸ Aestheticism's opponents in order to elevate a model of appreciation that preserves that Paterian 'specialness' for the artist. In short, the tale marks Lee's allegorization of the legacies of Paterian thought.

The allegorical direction of Lee's 'A Wicked Voice' charts a shift in the way the antagonist, the Norwegian composer, Magnus, partakes in the act of musical appreciation. On arriving in Venice, he plans to compose the music for his Wagnerian opera, *Ogier the Dane*—for which he has 'long finished writing the words.'¹⁷⁹ However, he is soon haunted by the 'tripping flourishes and languishing phrases'¹⁸⁰ of the eighteenth-century Venetian castrato, Zaffirino, to the point at which he can no longer compose in his preferred style: 'I can never lay hold of my inspiration. My head is filled with music which is

¹⁷⁷ Walter Pater, 'Vernon Lee's "Juvenilia,"' *Pall Mall Gazette* (5 August 1887): 5.

¹⁷⁸ Vernon Lee, 'The Riddle of Music,' *Quarterly Review*, 204 (1906), p. 226.

¹⁷⁹ Vernon Lee, 'A Wicked Voice,' in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, eds. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2006), p. 163.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

certainly by me, since I have never heard it before, but which still is not my own, which I despise and abhor.’¹⁸¹ Those with a knowledge of Lee’s opinion of Richard Wagner would have been aware that she had much more in common with the tastes of the Venetian public, for she disliked ‘the element of degenerate priesthood’¹⁸² in his music, regarding it as engendering a type of ‘self-complacent...auto-religion.’¹⁸³ All this, she felt, left the listener ‘devitalised as by the contemplation of a slug.’¹⁸⁴ In this manner, Lee ridicules and punishes Magnus by subjecting him to Zaffirino’s spontaneous cadenzas, which—in contrast to his preferred Wagnerian aesthetic—reset the link between aesthetic value and formulaic expectation, and prompt active modes of auditory attention. As Lee portrays it, form and content are treated as separate parts of a musical score in the Wagnerian tradition, whilst in the Venetian, the interplay between form and content is more subtle and indistinguishable: Zaffirino’s cadenza takes ‘an ineffable quality, full, passionate, but veiled, as it were, in a subtle, downy wrapper.’¹⁸⁵ This returns us to the way Lee celebrates the production and appreciation of vague and indistinct formal properties as a means for the artist to convey his impressions.

The allegorical momentum of the tale reaches its climatic moment when Magnus is punished for partaking in the act of aesthetic appreciation in the *wrong* way, and is forced to hear in the *right*, appreciative way; he is cursed with an obsessive desire to hear only the sounds of Zaffirino: ‘is it necessary that, at the moment when I curse, the longing to hear thee again should parch

¹⁸¹ Ibid., p. 181.

¹⁸² Vernon Lee quoted in Ethel Smyth, *Maurice Baring* (London: Heinemann, 1938), p. 209.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Lee, ‘A Wicked Voice,’ p. 167.

my soul like hell-thirst?’¹⁸⁶ The story’s cyclical narrative form—the introduction mirrors the conclusion in which he informs us that his curse is ‘a strange and deadly disease’¹⁸⁷—appropriates the Romantic technique deployed to chart an individual’s quest for redemption through the constant re-telling of his crime. However, the story does not map Magnus’ redemption. Instead, it charts the restoration of artistic integrity and creative esteem in the aesthetic tradition of Venetian music. Magnus is converted to this musical tradition: ‘They have been congratulating me again today upon being the composer of our days...who has despised the new-fangled nonsense of Handel and Gluck and the divine Mozart, to the supremacy of melody and the respect of the human voice.’¹⁸⁸ Lee’s treatment of Magnus coerces the reader into appreciating art’s elusiveness, unpredictability and indistinguishableness: the reader does not want to be associated with the ridiculed, melodramatically-portrayed Wagnerian scholar; most directly, it coerces the reader into appreciating the elusive, musical qualities of Lee’s style of writing.

When he arrives in Venice, Magnus represents the type of tourist that refuses to suspend his own habits and interests in order to appreciate the local culture; Magnus is too preoccupied with his Wagnerian opera to connect with his surroundings in a disinterested way. Magnus arrives in Venice amongst a hub of expatriate artists who have travelled to Venice in pursuit of creative inspiration. Lee sought to challenge this type of activity as a prosaic and faddish whim. In ‘On Modern Travelling’ (1894), with disdain she writes: ‘The Oxford or Cambridge man...will have similar raptures in some boarding-house

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., p.181

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 154.

at Venice or Florence, raptures rapturous in proportion almost to his ignorance of the language and the people.’¹⁸⁹ He maintains that he is dragged away from his opera by the faddish interests of his fellow boarders who make him reel off disposable scraps of trivia about art objects given to him by an ‘American etcher...knowing [him] to be mad about eighteenth-century music and musicians.’¹⁹⁰ In this particular case, it is the portrait of the singer, Zaffirino; a cultural object of great importance to the neighbouring Venetian natives who revere the castrato highly but who is of little significance to Magnus. His interest in this subject extends no further than that which he can find ‘out of a battered little volume called’¹⁹¹:

*The Theatre of Musical Glory; or, Opinions upon
the most Famous Chapel-Masters and Virtuosi of
this Century, by Father Prosdocimo Sabatelli,
Barnalite, Professor of Eloquence at the College
of Modena, and Member of the Arcadian
Academy, under the Pastoral name of Evander
Lilybaen, Venice, 1785, with the approbation of
the Superiors.*¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Vernon Lee, ‘On Modern Travelling,’ 1894, *Limbo and Other Essays* (London: G. Richards, 1897), p. 102.

¹⁹⁰ Lee, ‘A Wicked Voice,’ p. 154.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

At this stage, Magnus is like contemporary scholars who consider a work of art in the social and historical context in which it was produced, but fail to appreciate its aesthetic dimensions. Lee's inclusion of this long-winded patter emphasises the irrelevance of Magnus' despondent bookish engagement with the singer: 'And I hear my own voice, as if in the far distance, giving them all sorts of information, biographical and critical.'¹⁹³ The 'battered' state of this history book suggests Magnus' dependence on it and other scholarly materials that underpin his claims to have a 'mad' interest in 'eighteenth-century music and musicians.'¹⁹⁴ Magnus is the type of systematic scholar that Lee describes in her 1881 *Belcaro*: he simply hands over his 'copy book...to his fellow-pupils, who may have understood as much of the lessons as himself.'¹⁹⁵ This mode of passive engagement with the history of the castrato results in his lack of appreciation for the singer he calls a 'vocal coxcomb.'¹⁹⁶ As we see in the next chapter, Lee uses her supernatural fiction to warn against such scholarly modes of detachment because it does not constitute immediate and interactive modes of appreciation.

As a corrective to this type of appreciation, Lee subjects Magnus to being haunted by Zaffirino's voice at irregular intervals. The unpredictability and spontaneity of this interaction means that Magnus is prompted to construct his response by reference to the aesthetic qualities of the castrato's song. When Magnus throws Zaffirino's portrait into the canal and the castrato's voice

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁹⁵ Vernon Lee, *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: W. Satchell, 1881), p. 5.

¹⁹⁶ Lee, 'A Wicked Voice,' p. 161.

‘fill[s] all that reach of the canal with its strange quality of tone, exquisite, far-fetched’¹⁹⁷ the Wagnerian composer notes the voice’s singularity:

They were long-drawn-out notes, of intense but peculiar sweetness, a man’s voice which had much of a woman’s, but more even of a chorister’s voice without its limpidity and innocence; its youthfulness was veiled, muffled, as it were, in a sort of downy vagueness, as if a passion of tears withheld.¹⁹⁸

Whilst the bookish composer claims to be familiar with the voice at this point—‘How well I knew that voice!’¹⁹⁹—Magnus is one of several who cannot describe the singer in non-aesthetic, biographical terms:

The strangest thing in this strange business was, that even among those learned in music there was no agreement on the subject of this voice: it was called by all sorts of names and described by all manner of incongruous adjectives; people went so far as to dispute whether the voice belonged to a man or a woman.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 170.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

By resisting categorization, the voice's ambiguity promotes spontaneous and individualised modes of engagement with art. This unpremeditated type of response is a crucial component of Magnus' 'conversion' to appreciate and compose in the Venetian tradition. This reflects how the theme of 'ideal' modes of response shapes the allegorical direction of *A Wicked Voice*. His conversion to this tradition subjects Magnus to a type of appreciation which affords him the liberation to construct his own response in a way that is receptive to art's singularity, but the coercive way in which this mode of engagement is enforced imprisons Magnus and reveals that this freedom is paradoxically imposed on Magnus via the deployment of an inflexible, pre-determined moral framework. The fact that Lee forces Magnus to appreciate art in the appropriate way reveals her view that the writer should be able to construct a text such that it elicits a certain type of response. Yet, the didactic qualities of *A Wicked Voice* undermine the spontaneous and individualised nature of the type of response she seeks to promote.

By assisting the reader, Lee does not subscribe to Pater and James' notion that 'one must realise such primary data for oneself or not at all.' Her envisioning of the reader and writer as interacting within an explicitly supportive and collaborative framework reflects her refusal to presuppose the same homosocial relationship between writer and reader that Pater assumed. Unlike James, Lee does not abandon the unskilled reader because, as she puts it, he may 'lay...hold of the wrong portion of a page or a sentence.' Yet, as James had appeared to anticipate, the form of didacticism which Lee deploys coerces the reader into prescriptive rules of engagement and thus undermines

individualised modes of response that should be undertaken independent of authorial instruction.

Conclusion: The Evolution of Aestheticism's Readerships

Aestheticism's prioritization of an ideal reader evolves from its awareness of an unprecedented broader readership for fiction. Pater excludes readers whom he deems unqualified to undertake the specialist critical practice that his works invite, a practice which is crucial in preserving the ethical consequences of aesthetic engagement. Moreover, Pater could afford to allow individualism to justify his elitism because he did not need to depend upon public expectation to sell his work. Henry James, by contrast, was less sanguine about the issue of public reception, and for him preserving the creative and intellectual integrity of 'a select few' was more problematic. Like Pater, James does not assist the untutored reader, but equally does not evade the reading public altogether. He aims to cultivate a readership for his fiction by creating interpretative conditions that necessitate individualised modes of response. This is central to his democratization of Aestheticism and his ethical envisioning of an extensively represented 'house of fiction' and the admission of more people with 'ear' to 'the concert of literature.' Lee, like Pater, can afford to exclude the reading public but her desire for Aestheticism to include a wider range of social groups prefigures her deployment of authorial strategies that extend Aestheticism's fields of reception to a broader public. Like James, then, she aims to cultivate a readership for her fiction, but she uses didactic measures to promote modes of response that are inherently opposed to

instruction. This means that rather than create interpretative conditions which necessitate individualised modes of response, in which the reader carries out his responsibilities unassisted, Lee offers authorial assistance, and in the process coerces the reader into prescriptive rules of engagement. It has been my aim in this chapter to interrogate how each writer seeks to cultivate a readership that has the skills and proficiencies to undertake a kind of reading that has an ethical element. In the following chapter, I proceed to interrogate how each writer conceives that ethical element.

—CHAPTER TWO—

**‘TO SEE THE OBJECT AS IT REALLY IS’:
AESTHETICISM AND DISINTERESTEDNESS**

Authors and critics associated with British Aestheticism move away from Victorian culture’s propensity to equate a work of art’s aesthetic value with its moral function. In *The Renaissance*, Walter Pater incorporates Théophile Gautier’s phrase *l’art pour l’art* to declare that aesthetic experience should inform valuations of art objects first and foremost: ‘the love of art for art’s sake has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments sake.’¹ Oscar Wilde and Henry James later extend this mode of criticism in their own writings on aesthetic appreciation. Wilde states ‘There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book’² whilst James insists ‘There are bad novels and good novels...but that is the only distinction in which I see any meaning,’³ qualifying this view with the assertion that the artist should be most concerned with ‘questions (in the widest sense) of execution’⁴ as opposed to ‘questions of morality,’⁵ which, he asserts, are ‘quite another affair.’⁶ Such declarations have been perceived as disengaging art from issues of morality altogether. However, these statements seek to reconfigure the relationship between art’s aesthetic value and its moral function by encouraging the reader to appreciate art’s ethical dimensions as subject to his aesthetic experience,

¹ Pater, ‘Conclusion,’ in *The Renaissance*, p. 213.

² Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1890/ 91, ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), p. 3.

³ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 392.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

which will be relative to each experiencing individual. Crucially, such manifestos mark a conscious reconfiguration of the Arnoldian view that literature is inseparable from a moral or political vision.

This chapter begins by revisiting Matthew Arnold's view that it is possible to pursue objective standards, one which underscores his definition of disinterestedness as 'see[ing] the object as it really is.' To practice disinterested criticism, the critic must subordinate his own self-interests; however, as I examine, this openness is undermined by Arnold's elitism which presupposes a critic who possesses the knowledge to pursue art's objective, moral standards. The purpose of my reading of Arnoldian disinterestedness does not rest in its originality *per se*; rather, its purpose rests in the way it proceeds to trace the legacy of Arnoldian criticism through Pater, James and Lee. The chapter interrogates the (dis)continuities of Arnold's framework of 'ideal' modes of response to works of art in the writings of Pater, James and Lee, considering how each implies a kind of reading that has an ethical element, but how various forms of elitism continue to compromise that ethical imperative; it then focuses on the way each writers' appropriation of Arnoldian disinterestedness informs modes of critical detachment.

2.1 '[T]he best that is known and thought in the world': Matthew Arnold, Normativity and Disinterestedness

Force and right are the governors of this world; force till right is ready. *Force till right is ready;* and till right is ready, force, the existing order of things, is justified, is the legitimate ruler. But right is something moral, and implies inward recognition, free assent of the will; we are not ready for right,--*right*, so far as we are concerned, *is not ready*,--until we have attained this sense of seeing it and willing it. The way in which for us it may change and transform force, the existing order of things, and become, in its turn, the legitimate ruler of the world, will depend on the way in which, when our time comes, we see it and will it.¹

In 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1865), Arnold maintains that criticism is responsible for attributing literary value to works that convey essentialist moral principles. This practice, he asserts, offers a 'force' that prevents culture's descent into anarchy because it 'sets standards in a number of directions, and creates, in all these directions, a force of educated opinion, checking and rebuking those who fall below these standards, or who set them

¹ Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism,' p. 3

at nought.’² The critic is responsible for the task of attributing literary value to works of literature in accordance with his identification of ‘the best that is thought and known in the world’³ by canonizing those works which possess qualities of moral excellence. In order to identify the ‘best’ works of literature, the critic must assess whether a work’s moral dimensions are essential to it as a work of art. These dimensions are those that ‘deal...with life’⁴ because ‘the question, *how to live*, is itself a moral idea.’⁵ For example, Arnold esteems Wordsworth’s poetry for the way it offers a ‘powerful application to his subject, of ideas “on man, on nature, and on human life.”’⁶ Arnold attributes the highest literary worth to works that articulate moral values in a lucid and transparently mimetic way. He terms this artistic mode the ‘grand style’⁷ and explains that it arises ‘when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject matter.’⁸ Literary form, for Arnold, is not an instrument which discovers new modes of expression in order to ‘express the whole compass of souls’—as Pater terms the role of art’s innovative possibilities in ‘Denys L’Auxerrois’—nor does it offer a resource for the artist to analyse his impressions of the world. It enables, instead, the ‘synthesis and exposition’⁹ of ‘a certain order of ideas...of dealing divinely with these ideas, presenting them in the most effective and attractive

² Matthew Arnold, ‘The Literary Influence of Academies,’ in *Essays in Criticism* (London and Cambridge: Macmillan, 1865), p. 55.

³ Arnold, ‘The Function of Criticism at the Present Time,’ pp. 38-9.

⁴ Matthew Arnold, ‘Wordsworth,’ in *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (London; New York: Macmillan, 1896), p. 147.

⁵ To this end, Arnold argues that ‘a poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards life.’ (Ibid., p. 143).

⁶ Ibid., p. 140.

⁷ Matthew Arnold, ‘Last Words on Translating Homer,’ 1873, in *On the Classical Tradition: The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, Volume 1, ed. R.H Super (Michigan: Ann Arbor, 1960), pp. 128, 136 and 189.

⁸ Ibid., p.136.

⁹ Arnold, ‘The Function of Criticism,’ p. 6.

combinations.’¹⁰ Arnold makes it clear that the artist is not responsible for the tasks of ‘analysis and discovery,’ which are, instead, the ‘business of the philosopher.’¹¹ It is because Arnold sees the artist as responsible only for offering a particular arrangement of ‘the existing order of things,’ that he leaves the possibility of an objective valuation of a literary work to the critic.

It is the Arnoldian critic’s role ‘to see the object as it really is’ and to illuminate the work’s ‘knowable and codifiable set of norms.’ The critic must be committed to selecting works that offer a set of moral standards. This practice involves ‘appreciat[ing] the wide difference between’¹² that which belongs to ‘the class of the truly excellent’¹³ and ‘all work which has not the same character’¹⁴ in order to distinguish ‘the best that is known and thought in the world.’¹⁵ The Arnoldian critic should practice an anthologizing mode of criticism that selects ‘lines and expressions of the great masters’ of which ‘one should have always in one’s mind’¹⁶ and ‘apply them as a touchstone to other poetry.’¹⁷ These touchstones serve as barometers of poetic quality when discriminating between works of literature. In ‘The Study of Poetry’ in which he envisions a hierarchical restructuring of literary value, he writes:

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ For Aestheticism, by contrast, where style is valued as an end in its own right, opaque and ‘difficult’ stylistic properties are valued for their capacity to construct singular modes of expression.

¹² Arnold, ‘The Study of Poetry,’ in *Essays in Criticism: Second Series*, p. 10.

¹³ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

we shall find them, when we have lodged them well in our minds, an infallible touchstone for detecting the presence or absence of high poetic quality, and also the degree of this quality, in all other poetry which we may place beside them. Short passages, even single lines, will serve our turn quite sufficiently.¹⁸

He deploys this critical practice when attempting to revise Wordsworth's reputation in line with his own standards. In his essay on the poet, he argues that Wordsworthians must 'lay aside every weight which hinders our getting him recognized.'¹⁹ By this, Arnold instructs critics of Wordsworth's poetry to dispense with those 'lines [which] carry us really not a step further than the proposition which they would interpret' and 'are a tissue of elevated but abstract verbiage.'²⁰ He orders critics to focus, instead, on those works which (as cited above) offer a 'powerful application to his subject, of ideas "on man, on nature, and on human life."' This trim selection of carefully chosen lines reflects the instrumentality that underpins Arnold's conception of discrimination: he encourages the critic to appropriate the 'best' works for a purpose extrinsic to a valuation of formal dimensions appreciated as an end in their own right. It is in this way that literary value, as far as Arnold is concerned, is assumed to be absolute and so beyond debate.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Arnold, 'Wordsworth,' p. 162.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 150.

Whilst Aestheticism later theorized value-judgments as relative to an individual's aesthetic experience, Arnold theorizes judgments of a work's literary value as subject to a set of laws and principles. It is for this reason that Arnold reserves the membership of literary criticism for those 'exempt from all concern with edification'²¹; that is, those who are in possession of the knowledge required to identify works which possess qualities of moral excellence. In 'The Bishop and the Philosopher' (1863), he refers to such figures as the 'the superior man' and the 'individual genius,'²² the latter being a term that Arnold does not define. The public or 'the multitude'²³ (as Arnold refers to them) is not deemed capable of making judgments of literary value and, as such, must receive such judgments from a cultural or intellectual elite who are qualified to satisfy Arnold's desire for a normative criticism. He elevates the status of the critic as 'the men of Culture,'²⁴ 'the true apostles of equality.'²⁵ Arnold insists that these works will aid the 'self-preservation of humanity' and writes: 'The world is forwarded by having its attention fixed on the best things.'²⁶ The 'great men of culture,'²⁷ Arnold asserts, are able 'to make it [the best that is thought] efficient outside the clique of the cultivated

²¹ Arnold, 'Dr. Stanley's Lectures on the Jewish Church,' in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold: Volume III*, ed., R.H Super (Michigan; University of Michigan Press, 1962), p. 79.

²² Matthew Arnold, 'Heinrich Heine,' in *Essays in Criticism* (London and Cambridge: Macmillan, 1865), p. 170. (Arnold uses this term and variations of it in other works).

²³ Matthew Arnold, 'The Bishop and the Philosopher,' in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold: Volume III*, p. 50.

²⁴ Matthew Arnold, 'Sweetness and Light,' in *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1869), pp. 4 and 49. (Arnold writes: 'This is the *social idea*; and the men of culture are the true apostles of equality. The great men of culture are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.' ((Arnold, 'Sweetness and Light,' p.49))).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Arnold, 'Wordsworth,' p. 127.

²⁷ Arnold, 'Sweetness and Light,' p. 49.

and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light.’²⁸ By selecting ‘the best that is thought and known in the world,’ the critic dissolves social divisions by introducing the public to morally edifying works of art that civilise and perfect the individual.

The critic’s elite status evolves not only out of Arnold’s concern for authoritative knowledge, but also out of his concern for those able to practise specialized modes of critical enquiry that appeal, as Amanda Anderson describes it, to ‘an ideal of temperament or character, whose key attributes bespeak...impartiality, tact, moderation, measure, balance, flexibility, detachment, objectivity, composure.’²⁹ There are then conditions that underlie the critical practice that Arnold envisions as being necessary for the identification of a work’s ‘knowable and codifiable set of norms.’³⁰ This process, as Arnold states, ‘depend[s] on the way in which...we see it and will it.’³¹ Crucially, the ‘thinking few’ must commit to an attitude of disinterestedness as the ‘proper’ way to make judgments of literary value: he defines criticism as ‘the *disinterested* endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world’³² (italicization is mine). This type of critical activity must keep ‘aloof from practice’ and ‘refuse to lend itself to any of those ulterior, political, practical considerations about ideas’³³ so that the critic can ‘see the object as it really is.’ This means that the critic must

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton, New Jersey; Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 115.

³⁰ Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 161, n. 5.

³¹ Arnold, ‘The Function of Criticism,’ p. 13.

³² Ibid., p. 37.

³³ Ibid., p.18.

remain detached to achieve an objective valuation of art; he must not subordinate criticism to any 'ulterior' purpose. As Arnold's re-assessment of Wordsworth's reputation exemplifies, the critic must dispense with those poems that appeal to the critic's preferential tastes and select, instead, those that serve 'an interest wider than that of individuals.'³⁴ The critic's elite status affords him the aloofness required to pursue objective assessments of literary value by helping him to maintain his 'ideal' which 'is [that of] thought and thought only.'³⁵ These men, Arnold writes, 'stand apart, and have an existence separate from that of the mass of mankind...the region which they inhabit is a laboratory wherein are fashioned the new intellectual ideas which, from time to time, take their place in the world.'³⁶ This aloofness precludes subjective value-judgments and enables the critic to identify that which serves 'an interest wider than that of individuals.'

It is well-known that Arnold is opposed to the predominance of Philistinism in English culture because of the way it anchors the critic's interests to a provincial, individual frame of reference. Arnold cites the periodical press as both facilitating and exemplifying this provincialism or parochialism:

our organs of criticism are organs of men and parties having practical ends...we have the *Quarterly Review*, existing as an organ of the Tories, and for as much play of mind as may suit

³⁴ Arnold, 'Doing as One Likes,' in *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 56.

³⁵ Arnold, 'Dr. Stanley's Lectures on the Jewish Church,' p. 66.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

its being that; we have the *British Quarterly Review*, existing as an organ of political Dissenters.³⁷

These two examples of the several he provides highlight the contrast between Arnold's desire for a normative criticism—one which identifies 'the best that is thought and known in the world'—and the aesthete's emphasis on individual modes of critical expression: both Pater and Lee publish in these periodicals.³⁸

Pater, Lee and James embrace articulations of 'difference'; each writer articulates aesthetic judgments across their writings that foreground the individual and this correlates with their marginal relation to turn-of-the-century culture. By contrast, as Josephine Guy and Ian Small note, Arnold 'was

³⁷ Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism,' pp. 19-20. R. V. Osbourn describes the *British Quarterly Review* journal as catering for 'the Nonconformists in that intelligent and educated section of the middle class which Emerson described as a 'perceptive minority' opposing and counteracting the "practical majority."' (R. V. Osbourn, 'The British Quarterly Review,' *The Review of English Studies*, 1 ((1950)): 147).

³⁸ Yet, Arnold, needing money, was not above contributing to magazines and papers he affected to despise (such as the *The Times*). Like Pater, James and Lee, Arnold published in *Macmillan's Magazine*. It is interesting that Arnold's essay 'The Bishop and the Philosopher' (1863) argues that 'Knowledge and truth, in the full sense of the words, are not attainable by the great mass of the human race at all,' which is comparable to Pater's aesthetic individualism in his 'imaginary portraits' that were each published in the magazine between March 1885 to the spring of 1887 (Arnold, 'The Bishop and the Philosopher,' p. 44). In addition, James, Lee and Arnold contributed to the *Cornhill Magazine*. Arnold's notable contribution was 'The Literary Influence of Academies,' *Cornhill Magazine*, 10 (1864): 154–172 in which he argues that England needs a centralized institution of learn to cultivate 'prose without the note of provinciality—classical prose, prose of the centre.' (Arnold, 'The Literary Influence of Academies,' p. 61). This view challenges the parochialism of the journal. The magazine's editor, William Thackeray did not seek to 'expound prodigious doctrines and truths' or to 'edify new social or political structures' (William Makepeace Thackeray, 'To "A Friend and Contributor,"' 1 November 1859; quoted in Spencer L. Eddy, *The Founding of the Cornhill Review* ((Muncie, Indiana: Ball State University, 1970)), p. 19). It is not surprising then that Arnold 'finally abandoned the *Cornhill* because he 'wanted to discuss topics to which the magazine had to give a wide berth' (R. G. Cox 'The Reviews and Magazines,' in *From Dickens to Hardy: The New Pelican Guide to English Literature ((Volume 6))*, ed. Boris Ford (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958, rpt. 1983), pp. 188-89). James published several works of fiction in the *Cornhill Magazine* including *Washington Square* (1880) and *Daisy Miller* (1879) whilst Lee published works such as 'Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art' (1880) in the magazine; likewise James published works of fiction in *Macmillan's Magazine*, including: *The Portrait of a Lady*. October 1880-November 1881 (monthly) and *The Reverberator*, February-July 1888 (monthly), and Vernon Lee contributed essays, including 'Midsummer Magic,' *Macmillan's Magazine*, 66 (July 1892): 206-11 and 'On Modern Travelling,' *Macmillan's Magazine*, 69 (Feb 1894): 306-11.

generally suspicious of articulations of “difference.”³⁹ He perceived fashionable modes of criticism as offering a means by which the critic could pursue interests that match—rather than extend—his own world-view and thus prevent him from pursuing new moral standards. He had been dissatisfied with the way the English follow ‘stock notions and habits’⁴⁰ and envisioned disinterested criticism as a remedy that would open English culture to ‘a current of true and fresh ideas.’⁴¹ Arnold aims to formulate this remedy by relieving criticism of narrow-mindedness and self-interest. Arnold had perceived subjective critical values as at odds with the pursuit of objective standards because they disrupt the certainty of claims about the political or moral functions of literature. As Max Saunders explains, ‘Subjectivism...is a particular problem for ethics, since any value judgement can be dismissed as merely an expression of the emotional state of its utterer.’⁴² Those ‘passions’ which represent a heightened mode of consciousness in Paterian Aestheticism are, by contrast, synonymous with narrow-minded Philistinism for Arnold because of the way they impede the attainment of an objective view by giving value-judgments a complexion which consists of critical presuppositions, expectations and unconscious pre-judgments.⁴³ Arnold aims to ensure that criticism serves concerns that extend beyond the individual’s subjective responses.

³⁹ Josephine M. Guy and Ian Small, *The Routledge Concise History of Nineteenth-Century Literature* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 107.

⁴⁰ Matthew Arnold, ‘Conclusion,’ in *Culture and Anarchy*, p. 262.

⁴¹ Arnold, ‘The Function of Criticism,’ p. 20.

⁴² Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiographical Fiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 44.

⁴³ Arnold writes: ‘This treatment of politics with one’s thought, or with one’s imagination, or with one’s soul, in place of the common treatment of them with one’s Philistinism and with one’s passions, is the only thing which can reconcile...any serious person to politics, with their inevitable wear, waste, and sore trial to all that is best in one.’ (Matthew Arnold, Letter of 1854; quoted in Ludwig Lewisohn, ‘A Study of Matthew Arnold,’ in *The Sewanee Review*, 10, 3 (Jul., 1902): 315).

Of course, literary theorists have dismissed disinterestedness' aim to achieve impartiality as 'a fantasy.'⁴⁴ Herbert Tucker has argued that disinterestedness is 'at best a calisthenically useful ideal for keeping critics on their toes, at worst a drug impounding critics in their ivory tower...Criticism is...despite what Arnold says, inescapably interested.'⁴⁵ However, such views misunderstand the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of Arnoldian disinterestedness. Stefan Collini reminds us that "disinterested" does not, it ought to be unnecessary to say, mean "uninterested."⁴⁶ More recent commentators, such as Timothy Peltason and Amanda Anderson have sought to recuperate disinterestedness as a credible critical activity for literary scholarship. Peltason, for example argues that 'our personal and subjective judgments should aspire to the groundedness and transmissibility of disinterested argument.'⁴⁷ Rather than overlook the possibility of subjective value-judgments, Arnold rethinks the role 'interested' modes of critical enquiry play in the formation of those literary judgments that 'will ever attain any real authority' and in doing so anticipates impersonal modes of critical judgment. These are, as Peltason explains, 'judgments of value...that are personal without being in any limiting sense merely personal.'⁴⁸ Impersonal modes of criticism account for the inevitability of personal judgments, but aim to achieve judgments that are free of self-interest. As Kevin McLaughlin has argued,

⁴⁴ Herbert Tucker, 'Arnold and the Authorization of Criticism,' *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture*, ed. Suzy Anger (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), p.119.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Tucker's failure to comprehend this is evident in a further remark which contests the term: 'Criticism is, like the literature to which it belongs and contributes, an activity that is always contexted, politically contested, and therefore an activity that is always contested, and therefore, despite what Arnold says, inescapably interested.' (Ibid).

⁴⁶ Stefan Collini, *Arnold* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 56.

⁴⁷ Timothy Peltason, 'Seeing Things as They Are: Literary Judgment and Disinterestedness,' *Literary Imagination*, 12: 3 (November 2010): 178.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 179.

Arnold aims to ‘exclude the possibility that consciousness could be self-interested.’⁴⁹ Impersonal critical judgments are integral to the formation of moral character because they cultivate an outward-looking individual capable of making judgments that cater for the concerns of others. Anderson goes as far to claim that Arnold strives ‘to make detachment ultimately indistinguishable from moral stance or ethos’ and thus describes ‘the distanced viewpoint as a positive achievement of character and culture.’⁵⁰ Arnold defines ‘our best self’⁵¹ as flourishing when ‘we are united, *impersonal*, at harmony’⁵² (italicization is mine). This reveals the way impersonal modes of critical judgment are central to Arnold’s theorization of criticism as a disinterested pursuit of objective valuation which provides a means for culture to perfect the individual. It enables the individual to move beyond his personal frame of reference by endowing his subjective responses with wider, universal meaning.

To achieve modes of impersonal critical judgment, Arnold creates what Amanda Anderson terms a ‘productive tension’⁵³ between two incompatible strands of Kantian aesthetic philosophy. Arnoldian disinterestedness comprises aesthetic disinterestedness which is traditionally ‘associated with the free play of the mind and autotelic detachment’⁵⁴ and critical reason which involves ‘the interrogation of custom and the self-conscious authorization of principles.’⁵⁵ ‘A free play of the mind’ must comprise forms of subjectivism to lend suppleness,

⁴⁹ Kevin McLaughlin, ‘Culture and Messianism: Disinterestedness in Arnold,’ in *Victorian Studies*, 50, 4 (Summer 2008): 617.

⁵⁰ Anderson, *Powers of Distance*, p. 115.

⁵¹ Arnold, ‘Doing as One Likes,’ p. 89.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Amanda Anderson describes Arnoldian disinterestedness as ‘terminologically and conceptually unsystematic, comprising what are elsewhere in the tradition distinguished as clearly different forms of detachment’ (Anderson, *Powers of Distance*, p. 92).

⁵⁴ Anderson, *Powers of Distance*, p. 92.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

flexibility and thus ensure that the critic remains receptive to the variegations of aesthetic experience, which is a ‘pleasure in itself.’⁵⁶ As Anderson notes, this component of Arnoldian disinterestedness ‘anticipates the tenets of the Aesthetic Movement.’⁵⁷ This preliminary stage ensures that critics approach objects of criticism in an openly speculative way which prevents the formation of predetermined critical judgments, and precludes the application of criticism to some other purpose. However, the problem here is, of course, that Arnold’s theory of ‘infallible touchstones’ closes down that openness by predetermining judgments. We can trace a tension between open, flexible modes of critical engagement and pre-given judgments across Arnold’s works. For example, he issues two injunctions which instruct the critic to ‘never...let oneself become abstract’⁵⁸ and not to become ‘an abstract law-giver.’⁵⁹ These injunctions contradict his touchstone theory, which places emphasis on objective standards of taste and depends upon abstractions, laws and rules.

This tension highlights the fact that certain ‘conditions’ underlie the critic’s alleged freedom. First of all, the critic’s status as an elite figure—‘whose ideal, whose demand, is thought, and thought only’⁶⁰—is necessary to ensure that modes of detachment supervise the mind’s ‘free play.’ Arnoldian disinterestedness demands a private and accretive mode of critical engagement that delays the articulation of its judgments so that the critic can call on his intellect to determine a work’s moral properties and, in turn, measure its literary value. It is a mode of criticism that does ‘not hurry on to the goal

⁵⁶ Arnold, ‘The Function of Criticism,’ p. 16.

⁵⁷ Anderson, *Powers of Distance*, p. 92.

⁵⁸ Arnold, ‘The Function of Criticism,’ p. 38

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Arnold, ‘Dr. Stanley’s Lectures on the Jewish Church,’ p. 66.

because of its practical importance'⁶¹: 'It must be patient, and know how to wait; and be flexible, and know how to attach itself to things and how to withdraw from them'⁶² so that 'as we get an idea or half an idea'⁶³ we are 'running out with it into the street, and trying to make it rule there.'⁶⁴ The critic's detachment from his personal modes of response is central to his pursuit of seeing the object in terms of its embodiment of laws and principles. Secondly and crucially, Arnold's reservation of the critic's role for the 'individual genius' means that this figure possesses knowledge required to identify those judgments that are 'right' and moral. This figure is able to dispense of those properties that are irrelevant to abstract laws and principles. That is, reason and logic underpin the critic's freedom by determining the way he discriminates between his critical suppositions. This reveals that Arnold utilizes 'a free play of the mind' to formulate an impartial mode of criticism that is free of parochialism, but that does not circumvent normative prescriptions of literary value.

2.2 To 'know one's own impression as it really is': Walter Pater, Impressionistic Disinterestedness and Sympathy

We can align Arnoldian disinterestedness to the elitism of Paterian aesthetic philosophy by tracing the way Pater's ideas evolve out of a concern for specialist modes of critical enquiry. As we have seen in the previous chapter, like Arnold, Pater reserves the act of criticism for a culturally elite group of 'men of a finer thread'⁶⁵ by asserting that 'the critic should

⁶¹ Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism,' p. 33.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Pater, 'Style,' p. 31.

possess...a certain kind of temperament.’⁶⁶ Pater goes further than Arnold to the point at which his polemic excludes the general reader and the reading public at large from participating in literary culture altogether and highlights ‘a central need of a select few.’⁶⁷ Pater challenges Arnold’s key injunction to the critic that he must share his ‘new ideas’ with the public at large by theorizing literary judgments as only a consequence of individual perception. The type of criticism that Pater prescribes envisions moral values as relative to the individual’s aesthetic experience to the point at which, as the first chapter noted, his experiences only become aesthetic when realised by himself. As a consequence, there is no essentialist moral message that can be communicated to a broader public. He writes a ‘great picture has no more definite message for us than an accidental play of sunlight and shadow...caught as the colours are in an Eastern carpet.’⁶⁸ As I have indicated, the mode of criticism that Arnold prescribes is problematic for Paterian Aestheticism. Whilst, for Arnold, disinterestedness is in the service of a moral essentialism, discerning the ‘best that is thought and known in the world,’ Paterian disinterestedness embraces ‘difference’ and so challenges the normative and prescriptive nature of Arnold’s use of this concept. Pater’s philosophy that moral values are relative to human experience—‘nothing is, or can be rightly known, except relatively and under conditions’⁶⁹—renders essentialist value-judgments provisional and

⁶⁶ Pater, ‘Preface,’ p. x.

⁶⁷ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 31.

⁶⁸ Pater, ‘The School of Giorgione,’ p. 138.

⁶⁹ Walter Pater, ‘Coleridge,’ 1865/ 80, in *Appreciations*, p. 65.

makes the authority of claims made about the moral functions of art ‘much more difficult to sustain.’⁷⁰

To account for this, Pater theorizes an intuitive and heuristic criticism which requires the critic to analyze his sensory aesthetic response so that he can ‘see the object as in itself it really is.’⁷¹ Pater introduces this in the ‘Preface’ to *The Renaissance* whereby he inverts the Arnoldian pursuit of objective standards—or what he terms as ancient philosophy’s attempt to ‘fix thought in a necessary [and absolute] formula’⁷²—by arguing that ‘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.’⁷³ At first sight, Pater’s half-quotation bears the hallmarks of the normative direction of Arnoldian disinterestedness. The difference, of course, is that Pater requires the individual to know himself and his impressions—that is, his experience—rather than those ‘infallible touchstones.’ Henry James later writes in ‘The Art of Fiction,’ ‘it may be said that impressions are experience.’⁷⁴ Like James, Pater theorizes a phenomenological type of subjective evaluation that is impressionistic—that is, one based on the singular experiences of the individual critic—and he inculcates readers in this mode of critical engagement by deploying the literary mode of impressionism in his fictional works. Pater uses the critical activity Arnold theorizes for the pursuit of objective standards to prescribe a mode of criticism which ‘drives directly at the discrimination and

⁷⁰ Guy and Small, *Politics and Value in English Studies*, p. 163. (Guy and Small state that Aestheticism’s ‘wider project’: ‘had the effect of making any subsequent claims about the political or moral functions of literature much more difficult to sustain; at the very least they ensured that such functions could no longer simply be taken for granted’ ((Ibid.))).

⁷¹ Pater, ‘Preface,’ p. viii.

⁷² Pater, ‘Coleridge,’ p. 72.

⁷³ Pater, ‘Preface,’ p. viii.

⁷⁴ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 389.

analysis'⁷⁵ of aesthetic experience. The critic who 'experiences these impressions strongly'⁷⁶ and discriminates and analyzes his experientially-rendered impressions will make qualified judgments of literary value.⁷⁷

Paterian disinterestedness encourages subjectivist critical judgments to ensure that aesthetic value is correspondent to a view of the world in which 'scientific truth'⁷⁸ is conceived as relative to experience. The critic must analyze his impressions—which, he will find, are 'unstable, flickering, inconsistent'⁷⁹—in a disinterested way to ensure that he understands the intricate nature of his experience. In *Appreciations*, Pater describes this as the 'power of distinguishing and fixing delicate and fugitive detail.'⁸⁰ As far as Pater is concerned, it is only the untrained eye that can claim to recognise those ostensibly coherent patterns of laws and principles that Arnold orders the critic to identify in his pursuit of seeing 'the object as it really is': 'it is only the roughness of the eye,'⁸¹ Pater asserts, 'that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike.'⁸² The trained or cultivated eye will possess the skills to distinguish and reflect upon the complex epistemological significance of 'external objects.'⁸³ Whilst these 'external objects' might appear to press 'upon us a sharp importunate reality...when reflexion begins to play upon [them] they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems

⁷⁵ Pater, 'Preface,' p. viii.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Pater uses Arnold's phrase 'disinterested lover' to denote this ideal reader as a figure whose appreciation of art results from a mode of disinterested criticism, which analyses his subjective response.

⁷⁸ Pater, 'Coleridge,' p. 72.

⁷⁹ Pater, 'Conclusion,' p. 209.

⁸⁰ Pater, 'Coleridge,' p. 66.

⁸¹ Pater, 'Conclusion,' p. 211.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 208.

suspended like some trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions—colour, texture—in the mind of the observer.’⁸⁴ By ‘driv[ing] directly at the discrimination and analysis’ of his aesthetic experience, the critic will appreciate the way epistemological values are, like his impressions, ‘constantly re-forming.’⁸⁵

The critic’s aesthetic tastes or preferences must not influence his judgement of art’s affective dimensions because this precludes the possibility of distinguishing the relationship between art’s aesthetic value and its moral function, which, being relative to the critic’s aesthetic experience, is unpredictable. This presupposes a suspension of self-interest or prejudice. Pater echoes Arnold’s dissatisfaction with ‘stock notions and habits’ when he writes ‘Failure is to form habits; for habit is relative to a stereotyped world.’⁸⁶ A ‘free play of the mind’ is crucial to both Arnoldian and Paterian disinterestedness. Pater incorporates that Arnoldian activity of ‘keeping aloof from practice’ into his theorization of the critic’s analytical endeavour to ensure that he can know art’s affect precisely. He must suspend his expectations of art’s use-value to the point at which his ‘whole nature becomes a complex medium of reception.’⁸⁷ Pater, in a similar way to Arnold, combines Kantian disinterestedness with that of critical reason: he asserts that the critic must regard ‘all objects with which he has to do, all works of art and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 209.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 209-210.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 210-211.

⁸⁷ Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean: His Sensations and Ideas*, Volume 1 (London: Macmillan, 1885), p.142.

forces producing pleasurable sensations'⁸⁸ which he must 'explain, by analysing and reducing it to its elements.'⁸⁹ To be more precise, Pater appropriates Arnold's reconfiguration of Kantian aesthetics to theorize a complex model of 'ideal' aesthetic response which involves two distinct types of critical attention working synergistically together. For Pater, as Jeffrey Wallen describes it, the 'stance of the aesthetic critic depends on a capacity to be deeply moved, to receive the influences and to yield to oneself'⁹⁰ as well as on an ability to 'watch over what is happening, to note, to analyze the powers in things, and convey their effects to others.'⁹¹ 'A free play of the mind,' for Pater, requires the critic to be susceptible to as many new aesthetic experiences as possible and to realise these experiences for himself. This promotes a selfless receptivity to experience that heightens the critic's receptivity to a broader range of aesthetic experiences and eliminates the possibility of his predispositions and preferences from influencing critical judgments, which he forms whilst observing aesthetic objects. However, self-interest will enter again in that process of discrimination and realization, which requires the critic 'to note, to analyze the powers in things.'

Pater writes that the critic should attribute the highest aesthetic value to those works that produce the most powerful affect. In order to judge whether works of literary art possess this value, the critic must distinguish

⁸⁸ Pater, 'Preface,' pp. viii-ix.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. ix.

⁹⁰ Jeffrey Wallen, 'Physiology, Mesmerism and Walter Pater's Susceptibilities to Influence,' in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, eds. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2002), p. 86.

⁹¹ Ibid.

his impressions, foregrounding his sensations at the centre of analysis. This contrasts with mid-Victorian criticism's subordination of art's affective dimensions in favour of an emphasis on art's moral properties. In 1846, John Ruskin writes, 'I wholly deny that the impressions of beauty are in any way sensual; they are neither sensual nor intellectual, but moral.'⁹² For Pater, works which possess aesthetic value enhance the individual's quality of life by heightening his consciousness and, in turn, making him more receptive to his actual experience in the world. As I mentioned earlier, art, for Pater, pledges to offer 'nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.' This qualitative type of aesthetic experience provides an antidote to Pater's agnosticism and his suspicion that 'we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more'⁹³; art which produces strong sensations in the critic allows the individual to expand 'his own brief existence,'⁹⁴ allowing him to get 'as many pulsations as possible into the given time.'⁹⁵ This sentiment appears in both *The Renaissance* and *Marius the Epicurean*:

Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself
is the end. A counted number of pulses only is
given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How
may we see in them all that is to be seen in them
by the finest senses? How can we pass most
swiftly from point to point, and be present always

⁹² John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Volume 2, 1846, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, Volume 4, ed. Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903), p. 42.

⁹³ Pater, 'Conclusion,' p. 212.

⁹⁴ Pater, 'Pico Della Mirandola,' p. 35.

⁹⁵ Pater, 'Conclusion,' p. 212.

at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?⁹⁶

From that maxim of life as the end of life, followed, as a practical consequence, the desirableness of refining all the instruments of inward and outward intuition, of developing all their capacities, of testing and exercising one's self in them, till one's whole nature became one complex medium of reception, towards the vision...of our actual experience in the world.⁹⁷

In both accounts, a 'free play of the mind' proves crucial to the critic's valuation of works for their affective qualities because it makes him more receptive to as many new aesthetic experiences as possible. Yet, whilst this 'free play' is necessary to maximise experiences, not all will yield aesthetic pleasure. For the latter to happen, the critic must discriminate between his experiences.

In the 'Conclusion,' Pater adds the proviso: 'Only, be sure that it is passion, that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness.'⁹⁸ In order for the critic to realise which experiences heighten the quality of his life, he must 'develop' an ability to make refined, analytical judgments at the same time as receiving influences in a passive

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 210.

⁹⁷ Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, pp. 143.

⁹⁸ Pater, 'Conclusion,' pp. 212-13.

and indiscriminating way. Pater's description of the critic as 'one complex medium of reception' refers to the tension between the two-stage process that Wallen describes in which the critic's selfless passivity informs judgments inflected with self-interest. In this way, Pater's conception of aesthetic edification excludes collective rulings and principles, and thus contests Arnold's notion of a communal canon that consists of the 'best' works. The critic cannot make those works 'efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned'⁹⁹ because their values are relative to and only directly benefit the individual who experiences the work's affective dimensions for himself. Crucial to Paterian Aestheticism is that the nature of analysis requires the individual to remain in his 'isolation' and 'solitary' because it demands that he discriminates aesthetic experience for *himself*.

The writer should cultivate this phenomenological type of impressionistic evaluation by deploying 'good' literary style (as Pater defines it). We are reminded of this in 'Style,' which extends the polemic of *The Renaissance* (which is about *all* forms of art, but especially pictorial art) by dealing specifically with literature. Pater writes that the reader will be rewarded for a high level of attention to stylistic detail, for 'the attention of the writer, in every minutest detail'¹⁰⁰ should be regarded as 'a pledge that it is worth the reader's while to be attentive too.'¹⁰¹ The writer is, in this way, entitled to assume an ideal reader, one who will respond attentively to his artistry. Due to his status as a 'prestige writer' and a scholar, Pater himself, of course, could afford to construct a relationship between the reader and writer,

⁹⁹ Arnold, 'Sweetness and Light,' p. 79.

¹⁰⁰ Pater, 'Style,' p. 10.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

the ‘scholar writing for the scholarly,’ in which effort is reciprocated. Pater states that the literary artist in ‘his self-criticism’¹⁰² ‘supposes always that sort of reader who will go (full of eyes) warily, considerately’¹⁰³ and that the ideal reader will demonstrate ‘the sort of scholarly attentiveness of mind’¹⁰⁴ he claims to be ‘recommending’¹⁰⁵ by being ‘a lover of words for their own sake, to whom nothing about them is unimportant, a minute and constant observer of their physiognomy.’¹⁰⁶ The reader’s conscientious attention requires the suspension of his own values in order to appreciate the singularity of the work, and this type of attention rewards the reader by extending his world-view. Aesthetic complexity (or ‘difficulty’) is designed to activate an attentiveness which preconditions the reader for sympathetic interactions with others by equipping him with the skills to be ‘Alive to the value of an atmosphere in which every term finds its utmost degree of expression.’¹⁰⁷ Pater anticipates that formally complex works of art, those which require what he terms ‘a critical tracing out of that conscious artistic structure,’¹⁰⁸ will receive rigorous critical attention. It is a type of attentiveness which requires the individual to differentiate and make discriminations between the various ‘component’ elements of a complex work of art, which is an exercise that preconditions the individual to utilize those same skills in everyday life when acquiring knowledge of ourselves and others.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

We thus arrive at a point where detachment is ethical, for Pater, because it enables the individual to orientate himself within a complex ‘world of fine gradations’ and to use this newly acquired self-knowledge to become more sympathetic towards others. Social interaction requires the individual to know himself before he can relate to others, which justifies his initial and apparently anti-social detachment. In ‘Style,’ Pater defines ‘great art’ as that which is ‘devoted...to the enlargement of our sympathies with each other.’¹⁰⁹ Sympathy poses as an ethical model which has the potential to address social problems—such as disparities of wealth—and that is committed to the cultivation of feeling; it is largely regarded as a private activity, in which modes of detachment afforded the appropriate conditions to nurture one’s sympathetic capacities. Rachel Ablow notes, ‘sympathy was increasingly [in the nineteenth-century] identified with the private sphere,’¹¹⁰ whilst Stefan Collini points out that even though

nineteenth-century political thought...was distinguished above all by its emphasis upon the egoism and rationality of individual agents...the texture of moral response among the most prominent Victorian intellectuals was marked at least as much by an obsession with the role of

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

¹¹⁰ Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), p. 3.

altruism and a concern for the cultivation of feeling.¹¹¹

Sympathy is an ethical model which can be seen to complement a commitment to individualism. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 19th-century definitions of ‘sympathy’ vary, and it is important to note that Pater’s definition of ‘sympathy’ is very specific. Most closely resembling Paterian sympathy are two definitions that appear under the third set of definitions which account for:

3b. The quality or state of being affected by the condition of another with a feeling similar or corresponding to that of the other; the fact or capacity of entering into or sharing the feelings of another or others; fellow-feeling. Also, a feeling or frame of mind evoked by and responsive to some external influence.

3 c. *spec.* The quality or state of being thus affected by the suffering or sorrow of another; a feeling of compassion or commiseration.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 61-62.

¹¹² ‘sympathy,’ n. OED Online. July 2011. Oxford University Press. [5 July 2011] <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/196271?rskey=CTjzTJ&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>. (Dates of usage for 3b: 1662-1907 and dates of usages for 3c: 1600-1893).

Rather than presupposing a reciprocal interaction between certain things, both definitions focus on how one thing can affect another, and in this way mirror what I have argued is central to the ethical imperative of Paterian Aestheticism in which the individual is ‘affected by the condition of another’ and sympathy is conceived as a ‘frame of mind evoked by’ his responsiveness ‘to some external influence.’¹¹³ Lee, as we shall see, seeks to revise Paterian sympathy so as to remove the element of detachment, which preconditions the individual to relate sympathetically towards others but permits him to remain within his ivory tower; for Lee the latter isolation means that the Paterian aesthete need not be committed to ethical action. Yet, Pater is not unaware of the tensions that underscore his model of sympathy, and he uses his fictional works to explore the social impact of individualism.

The semi-autobiographical titular character of Pater’s novel, *Marius the Epicurean* discovers that this ‘vein of subjective philosophy, with the individual for its standards of all things’¹¹⁴ puts pressure on ‘received morality’¹¹⁵ by creating ‘in his intellectual scheme of the world and of conduct ... a certain

¹¹³ Other definitions include: ‘1 a. A (real or supposed) affinity between certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence on another (esp. in some occult way), or attract or tend towards each other. *Obs. exc. Hist.* or as merged in other senses’; this definition presupposes interaction and so is incompatible with Paterian sympathy. [Dates of usage: 1579-1883]. ‘2 Agreement, accord, harmony, consonance, concord; agreement in qualities, likeness, conformity, correspondence’ is equally problematic because it suggests sympathy arises from compatibility between two things; this definition overlooks Pater’s emphasis on the detachment of the critic as a means for appreciating the ‘otherness’ of objects different from himself. [Dates of usage: 1587-1847]. 3a. ‘Conformity of feelings, inclinations, or temperament, which makes persons agreeable to each other; community of feeling; harmony of disposition’ is not applicable to Paterian elitism because it does not account for sympathy as a private activity, in which the critic does not need to translate his feelings into ethical action [Dates of usage: 1596-1876]. ‘sympathy, n.’. OED Online. July 2011. Oxford University Press. [5 July 2011] <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/196271?rskey=CTjzTJ&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

¹¹⁴ Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, p. 31.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

incapacity wholly to accept other men's valuation'¹¹⁶ and opens him to a new way of seeing the world. Meanwhile, for the titular character of *Gaston de Latour* private meditation with art objects also opens him to 'a privileged apprehension'¹¹⁷ of his environment and leads to the discovery of 'new words for perennially new things.'¹¹⁸ These texts dramatize aesthetic appreciation as a process that helps 'the individual in his isolation'¹¹⁹ to establish personalised social interactions between himself and others. However, in *Imaginary Portraits*, Pater highlights the potentially damaging consequences of individualism. In 'Sebastian van Storck,' Pater registers the dangers of acting upon idealistic philosophy in an excessively literal manner and encourages us to ground abstractions within 'the sensible world,'¹²⁰ that is, to ensure our detachment from the world, which is a necessary precondition for social interaction, leads to acts of sympathy. Pater depicts Sebastian as a figure determined to extend 'his theorems' into ethical actions: 'he will always seek as a matter of course, the effective equivalent to—the line of being which shall be the proper continuation of—his line of thinking.'¹²¹ However, Sebastian's nihilistic philosophy that 'the world and the individual alike' are 'divested of all effective purpose'¹²² leads to his renunciation of life and to his desire to 'fade out of the world like a breath.'¹²³ In 'Sebastian van Storck,' Pater registers the importance of viewing modes of detachment as necessary preconditions for

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

¹¹⁷ Walter Pater, *Gaston de Latour; an Unfinished Romance* (London; New York: Macmillan., 1896), p. 54.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 72.

¹¹⁹ Pater, 'Conclusion,' p. 209.

¹²⁰ Walter Pater, 'Sebastian van Storck,' 1886, in *Imaginary Portraits*, p.129.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 94.

¹²² Ibid., p.127. (His theorem that 'There can be only one substance' leads to the corollary that 'it is the greatest of errors to think the non-existent, the world of finite things seen and felt, really is.' Ibid., pp. 122-23).

¹²³ Ibid., p. 115.

the acquisition of self-knowledge and forms of social interaction. It warns against viewing modes of detachment as implicating a separation of oneself from others.

Sebastian's detachment from the world is reinforced further by Pater's deployment of a third-person narrator who stands 'outside' the events that take place and mediates our knowledge of Sebastian's perspective to the point at which it is difficult to discern whether he should be classified as a protagonist or an antagonist. Also, the narrator may have acquired knowledge of Sebastian's philosophical views from the journal that 'circulated among the curious'¹²⁴ and from the judgments of those readers: 'There were some who held that such opinions should be suppressed by law; that they were, or might become, dangerous to society.'¹²⁵ This creates further narrative frames that extend our distance from Sebastian. Pater reinforces this detachment by his use of transitive passive sentences in which the agent is embedded within a prepositional phrase of a multi-clause sentence. In this sentence, 'Sebastian van Storck, on the contrary, was determined, perhaps by some inherited satiety or fatigue in his nature, to the opposite issue of the practical dilemma,'¹²⁶ the agent is discreetly presented within the fourth clause of a five-clause sentence. In this particular example, Pater aims to distance the reader from Sebastian's motivations (that 'inherited satiety or fatigue in his nature'), which reinforces

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 130.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid., pp. 124-25.

the way his intellectually-driven commitment to idealistic philosophy removes him from others, which includes ourselves as readers.¹²⁷

Sebastian perceives ‘the ideal of an intellectual disinterestedness’¹²⁸ as ‘the desire to put one’s subjective side out of the way, and let pure reason speak’¹²⁹; it is a ‘mere reaction against an actual surrounding of which every circumstance tended to make him a finished egotist.’¹³⁰ This critical practice drives Sebastian’s attachment to idealistic philosophy. It is useful to the point at which it helps him to acquire self-knowledge: ‘he could,’ we are told, ‘make “equation” between himself and what was not himself.’¹³¹ In addition, he can appreciate how abstract theorems can induce ‘a renewed value for the finite interests around and within us.’¹³² However, ultimately, Pater portrays this definition of disinterestedness as having destructive consequences because of its failure to account for self-interest. In ‘Plato and Platonism,’ Pater would term the type of ‘literal negation of self’¹³³ (that Sebastian practices) as a ‘kind of moral suicide.’¹³⁴ Sebastian exercises a mode of ‘Detachment’¹³⁵ which encourages Sebastian to ‘fold up one’s whole self’¹³⁶ and to fall ‘in love with death; preferring winter to summer’¹³⁷ rather than to realise ‘the presentment of new or old truth about ourselves

¹²⁷ Jöttkandt has argued also that the opening ‘winter-scene’ ‘directs us to recognize the way that art performs a form of alienation comparable to that of philosophical reflection, “freezing” the very life that it would portray.’ (Jöttkandt, ‘Effectively Equivalent: Walter Pater, “Sebastian van Storck,” and the Ethics of Metaphor,’ *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 60 ((2: Sep., 2005)): 184.

¹²⁸ Pater, ‘Sebastian van Storck,’ p. 120.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 132.

¹³² Ibid., p. 124.

¹³³ Walter Pater, *Plato and Platonism* (London: Macmillan, 1893), p. 33.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Pater, ‘Sebastian van Storck,’ p. 127.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 113.

and our relation to the world.’ His enjoyment of ‘the sense of things seen from a distance, carrying us, on wide wings of space itself, out of one’s actual surroundings’¹³⁸ does not correlate with Pater’s envisioning of detached perception as a precondition for social interaction.

This ‘literal negation of self’ determines Sebastian’s relationship with art objects. As Sigi Jöttkandt puts it, in this portrait, Pater depicts ‘art as a sort of corresponding manifestation of the alienating process of philosophical reflection.’¹³⁹ Sebastian’s nihilistic view that the self and the world have no purpose underlies his perception of ‘all definite forms...as [being] no more than a troublesome irritation on the surface of the absolute mind.’¹⁴⁰ Perceiving art as largely contributing to ‘the monotonous tide of competing, fleeting existence,’¹⁴¹ his attitude towards it is one of ‘tolerance.’¹⁴² This attitude, we are told, ‘appeared to be summed up in his refusal to take his place in the life-sized family group... painted about this time.’¹⁴³ When his ‘mother expostulated with him on the matter’¹⁴⁴ he declares that this particular kind of art—that is, one associated with the celebration of bourgeois materialism—opposes his commitment to ‘duties towards the intellectual’¹⁴⁵ because it offers a ‘forced and artificial’¹⁴⁶ means to immortalize that which is inherently transient and fleeting. His refusal to observe ‘filial duty’ by sitting for this portrait represents the way Sebastian

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 101.

¹³⁹ Sigi Jöttkandt, ‘Effectively Equivalent,’ 184

¹⁴⁰ Pater, ‘Sebastian van Storck,’ p. 119.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 100.

¹⁴² The precise phrase is: ‘the arts were a matter he could but just tolerate’ (Ibid).

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 100.

rejects a form of art that is used as a means to display bourgeois values. At the same time, Sebastian's rejection of the portrait represents the way his philosophising about art leads to a nihilistic type of detachment from social life, which fails to serve as a precondition for the 'enlargement of our sympathies with each other'; by refusing to join the portrait, Sebastian figuratively removes himself from the familial commune. The portrait allegorically re-emphasizes Pater's theorization of discrimination as an activity which cautions against the complete subordination of self-interests and withdrawal from social life; at the same time, the portrait reminds us that Paterian discrimination is an activity which requires the critic to suspend his commitment to 'cold' and abstract philosophical frameworks that may predetermine the value of a work of art.

There are moments in the narrative when we learn of Sebastian's aptitude for aesthetic receptivity. We are told 'The fine organisation and acute intelligence of Sebastian would have made him an effective connoisseur of the arts'¹⁴⁷ and he demonstrates this capacity when engaging 'in readings difficult indeed'¹⁴⁸ whereby his 'all-absorbing interest [which] seemed almost like an illicit pleasure'¹⁴⁹ and makes him 'aware just then' of 'a sense of kinship with certain older minds.' Sebastian's 'all-absorbing interest'¹⁵⁰ is one of self-absorption and self-interest; it leads him to discover a 'new or old truth about' himself and his 'relation to the world.' Reading helps him to assess 'whether there were, or had been, others possessed of

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 123.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

like thoughts.’¹⁵¹ However, Sebastian views these ‘passing “affections”’¹⁵² as ephemeral and, having no sustainable qualities, they presuppose ‘no necessary or proper right to be.’¹⁵³ He then realises this to be a foregone conclusion, which ‘might be foreseen, in the premises’¹⁵⁴:

By a singular perversity, it seemed to him that every one of those passing “affections”...was forever trying to be, to assert itself, to maintain every incident of its hypothetical existence it had protested that its proper function was to die.¹⁵⁵

Sebastian appears to appreciate the singularity of his aesthetic experience. The phrases ‘a singular perversity’ and ‘it seemed to him’ echo the language of *The Renaissance* when Pater describes the critic’s attempt to perceive his fluctuating impressions. His analysis could serve to remind us that the consequences of Paterian aesthetic contemplation do not always satisfy its ethical aims. The ambiguous ending of ‘Sebastian van Storck’ makes this difficult to discern: it is unclear as to whether Sebastian’s mysterious death amongst the flooded ‘sands of the Helder’¹⁵⁶ is an act of ‘self-destruction’¹⁵⁷ or as an act of self-sacrifice. When his body is recovered ‘certain circumstances seemed to indicate’¹⁵⁸ that Sebastian had lost his life in saving a child who ‘lay asleep, swaddled warmly in heavy furs, in an upper room of

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 125-6.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 126.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p.131

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.133.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

the old tower, to which the tide was almost risen.’¹⁵⁹ We are told that this act is the ‘deliberate and final change in his manner of living’¹⁶⁰ that offers a means for Sebastian to restore an equilibrium between his theorems and actions. The question at stake is whether Sebastian self-consciously demonstrates concern for others or whether it is a nihilistic act. There is also the possibility that this act satisfies both outcomes and thus returns us to Pater’s ideal that the detachment of the critic is a necessary precondition for social interaction. The ambiguity that Pater creates registers the possibility that there is no premeditated correlation between aesthetic contemplation and ethical action, and, as we will see, this prefigures the way Henry James envisions the ethical consequences of aesthetic experience. Nonetheless, prompting the reader to formulate his own interpretation, the ambiguous ending of this imaginary portrait promotes the individualistic structure of the philosophy that is under examination.

Having said this, there are signs within the narrative that imply Sebastian’s engagement with art is not disinterested at all; therefore, Pater may not doubt a correlation between aesthetic contemplation and ethical action. There are signs within the narrative where Sebastian’s extreme commitment to idealistic philosophy predetermines his engagement with those ‘readings [that are] difficult indeed.’ Earlier in the story, we learn that Sebastian’s aesthetic sensibilities are the corollary of his theorems: he ‘attained the poetic quality only by the audacity with which he conceived the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

whole sublime extension of his premises.’¹⁶¹ Furthermore, Sebastian’s ostensibly heuristic and intuitive literary experience is undermined by those ‘moments of genuine theoretic insight’ which he arrives at having ‘died to self’¹⁶²; while the intellect attains ‘a freedom of its own through the vigorous act.’¹⁶³ Rather than attempt to ‘know’ his impressions and remain focused on these ‘affections,’ as I have mentioned already, he dismisses them as ‘passing’ and ‘having no proper place.’ He then proceeds to associate his reading with abstract circumstances:

There have been dispositions in which that abstract theorem has only induced a renewed value for the finite interests around and within us...It has allied itself to the poetical or artistic sympathy, which feels challenged to acquaint itself with and explore the various forms of finite existence all the more intimately.¹⁶⁴

Sebastian’s ‘literal negation of self’ prefigures a self-conscious attempt to construct value-judgments which refer to and are ‘changed into the terms of’¹⁶⁵ intellectual reason rather than into terms that relate to his own experiences and intuitions. We learn that this underlies Sebastian’s Arnoldian and anti-Paterian pursuit of identifying an ‘essential value’ in objects of critical interest. My latter reading here indicates that ‘Sebastian

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 112.

¹⁶² Ibid., p.126

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 124.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.121.

van Storck' offers an allegorical portrait that charts the destructive consequences of intellectually-driven detachment as leading to the individual's isolation from—and renunciation of—the 'actual world' rather than a precondition for social interaction. It implies too that approaching art works in an openly speculative way could have assuaged Sebastian's self-destructive impulse which the narrator describes in negative terms such as an 'intellectual malady,'¹⁶⁶ a 'black melancholy'¹⁶⁷ and 'dark fanaticism.'¹⁶⁸

2.3 An 'impression distinct from every other': Jamesian Impressionism, Detachment and the Idiosyncratic

Henry James challenges normative prescriptions of what constitutes aesthetic value by arguing that the artist should be most concerned with 'questions (in the widest sense) of execution' as opposed to 'questions of morality,' which, he asserts, are 'quite another affair.' James dismisses the Arnoldian mode of ethical criticism as a redundant practice by rejecting the distinction that it seeks to make: 'There are bad novels and good novels... but that is the only distinction in which I see any meaning.' In his essay 'The Art of Fiction,' James is challenging Walter Besant's lecture of the same name, in particular contesting Besant's Arnoldian view that literature should have 'a conscious moral purpose.'¹⁶⁹ He promotes a mode of criticism that elevates a model of aesthetic autonomy by ensuring critical judgments are indifferent to common taste and sympathies, and valorising the stylistic treatment of a subject over and above the work's moral qualities.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 114.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 129.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ James, 'The Art of Fiction,' p. 404.

In the preface of *The Tragic Muse*, James appears to incorporate this indifference into his commentary of the actress, Miriam, whereby his artistic preoccupations appear to overwrite the moral questions that arise from his decision to present her in a way that barely acknowledges her perspective, despite using free indirect discourse to portray the interior (albeit mediated) thoughts of every other character in the novel. This is clear when James uses the impersonal, gender-neutral pronoun ‘it’ interchangeably with ‘her’ in reference to Miriam when asking ‘How can we perceive Miriam as central to our narrative when we have no direct exhibition of hers whatever, that we get it all inferentially and inductively, seeing it only through a more or less bewildered interpretation of it by others?’¹⁷⁰ and ‘how—with such an amount of exposed subjectivity all round her—can so dense a medium be at the centre?’¹⁷¹ This appears to reject concerns about how the novel’s stylistic choices reflect the treatment of the actress in the world of the Victorian theatre; James appears to depict Miriam as a commodity at the expense of her own agency in *The Tragic Muse*. Yet, once again, the moral implications of Miriam’s portrayal are dependent upon the reader’s aesthetic experience. Whilst Miriam may not have a central position within the narrative, James implies it is possible to see her in these terms when he tells us that she is the ‘structural centre’ of the novel. James confesses that Miriam is not easy to find, writing: ‘I urge myself to the candid confession that in very few of my productions, to my eye, has the organic centre succeeded in getting into proper

¹⁷⁰ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 8.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

position’;¹⁷² ‘again and again, perversely, incurably the centre of my structure would insist on placing itself not, so to speak, in the middle.’¹⁷³ Yet, he indicates that it is possible to locate this ‘structural centre’; when meditating on the novel’s reception, he notes that ‘the reader with the idea or the suspicion of a structural centre is the rarest of friends and of critics.’¹⁷⁴ Failure to locate this centre makes us no different from members of the auditorium such as Bidy Dormer who ‘sees’ Miriam through the collective gaze. If we ‘abandon’ Miriam, it is our moral responsibility which is in question. This provides an example of the way in which James transfers responsibility to novel readers in order to promote individualised modes of response which do not simply rehearse normative prescriptions of what constitutes aesthetic value.

As I examined in the first chapter, attending to the novel’s stylistic properties constitutes a method of reading which encourages the reader to realise the work’s aesthetic value for himself rather than through extra-literary means, such as the collective gaze that the culture of ‘advertisement and newspaperism’ constructs. James’ conscious production of fiction which prompts the reader to become more conscious of his individualised perception of the world—and thus develop his alertness to that which he knows already—encourages the individual to appreciate literature’s singularity in order to diminish the influence of outside forces. This is not to say that the interpretative values James appears to invite are immune from ‘contamination’ from extra-literary agendas, aims and preferences. Rather, it

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

is to say that James seeks to promote a method of first-hand readerly engagement which cultivates the individual's ability to make judgments that are unique to his idiosyncratic system of values.

In turn, James theorizes a reading practice that does not presuppose any ethical consequences; the reader's response may even lead to morally deviant behaviour. In his recent meditations on the ethics of literature, Derek Attridge registers this prospect:

There is no necessary correlation between being a good reader...and being a good person, just as there is no necessary correlation between being a good artist and a good person; nevertheless, some of the same values are at work in both spheres.¹⁷⁵

In the case of James' 'The Turn of the Screw' (1898), it is precisely this unpredictability and mutability of the work's ethical affect that constitutes its intervention into the gothic genre which, as David Punter has noted, does not offer 'a rock onto which we might cling...as Gothic literature has always sought to demonstrate to us, there are no such rocks, there is no sure foundation.'¹⁷⁶ In the preface, James asserts:

There is...no eligible absolute of the wrong; it remains relative to fifty other elements, a matter

¹⁷⁵ Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature*, p. 130.

¹⁷⁶ David Punter, *A Companion to the Gothic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. x.

of appreciation, speculation, imagination—these things moreover quite exactly in the light of the spectator's, the critic's, the reader's experience. Only make the reader's general vision of evil intense enough...and his own experience, his own imagination...will supply him quite sufficiently with all the particulars. Make him think the evil, make him think it for himself, and you are released from weak specifications.'¹⁷⁷

This is part of James' project to produce literature which functions to demonstrate that ethical values are relative to individual experience and to heighten the reader's awareness of his own moral values as opposed to directly altering those values in the pursuit of making him a better, more ethically-engaged individual. This latter function of Jamesian fiction marks a distinct step away from Pater. Whilst Pater registers his awareness of a tension underlying his suggestion that the detachment required to undertake aesthetic contemplation has ethical consequences, a great portion of his *oeuvre* remains committed to the view that the heightening of self-awareness makes us more sympathetic and so more ethically-engaged. By contrast, Jamesian disinterestedness does not prescribe any ethical consequences.

As the previous chapter illustrated, James demonstrates his concern for—and attempt to engineer—the relationship between modes of readerly

¹⁷⁷James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 176.

ethics and artistic responsibility to ensure the reader realises the work's value for himself, but he does not try to control the social consequences of 'appropriate' engagement with literary art. Whilst those sharpened judgments register the nuances of one's environment and thus help the individual to establish an ethical relationship with the world, they have potential to evade moral values altogether and cultivate deviant behaviour in the individual, as Wilde would dramatize in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890/91). Instead, James demonstrates his commitment to the promotion of individualised and idiosyncratic modes of response by relinquishing his interpretative agency as author to the reader. James' self-conscious transference of authorial responsibilities to the reader means that the social consequences of Jamesian disinterestedness are left open to an unpredictable set of social relations. This, as we shall see, is anchored to the way Jamesian disinterestedness foregrounds individual experience in the broadest possible sense in his fiction to the point at which it does not 'suffer from being marked out, or fenced in, by prescription.'¹⁷⁸

James' engineering of the relationship between reader and writer is more devoted to cultivating a reading public that can appreciate the artistic qualities—not the moral qualities—of the novel. For James, this is crucial for training a broader public to realise aesthetic value without assistance and to apply this appreciation to the production of literary art. We can read his instructions to the novelist to write 'from experience' as an instruction to the reader; the reader should also offer a phenomenological and impressionistic

¹⁷⁸ James, 'The Art of Fiction,' p. 384.

mode of subjective evaluation. James' aim to democratize Aestheticism is central to his attempts to extend the novel's formal possibilities. Readers with the skills to appreciate literary works will be able to contribute to a form that 'will stretch anywhere...[and] will take in absolutely anything...it has the whole human consciousness.' James' conscious reiteration of the responsibilities of novel-readers is part of his contribution to Aestheticism's wider project of foregrounding individual experience in both the consumption and production of works of art, and, in turn, of disbanding normative prescriptions of aesthetic value.

James' theorization of a phenomenological type of subjective evaluation that is impressionistic uses the same components as Paterian disinterestedness, but with slightly different aims and consequences. James places much more emphasis than Pater on the organic character of aesthetic prose to the point at which Jamesian impressionism is characterized by modes of artistic improvisation, and thus differs from the kind of pre-meditated specificity that characterizes Paterian impressionism. James describes his novel as offering 'the most elastic'¹⁷⁹ literary form and defines his fiction as 'the perfect paradise of the loose end,'¹⁸⁰ placing them in the category of the 'loose baggy monster.'¹⁸¹ This improvised stylistic 'looseness' and 'elasticity' allows the artist to articulate what Pater had described as his 'absolutely sincere apprehension of what is most real to him'¹⁸² and thus offers a malleable medium through which the writer can

¹⁷⁹ James, 'The Future of the Novel,' p. 1.

¹⁸⁰ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 114.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Pater, 'Style,' p. 34.

articulate the singularity of his experience. The difference between Paterian and Jamesian impressionism is due to the way both writers incorporate the concept of free play; it is this difference which accounts for Paterian precision and Jamesian improvisation.

Like Pater, James uses the concept of 'free play' to ensure that the art novel foregrounds individual experience. When defining the novel as 'in its broadest definition a personal impression of life; that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression,' James asserts 'But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say.'¹⁸³ Yet, whilst Pater prioritises a qualitative empiricism in which each element of experience is discriminated to ensure the individual selects only pleasurable moments, James' model of aesthetic experience aims 'to be typical, to be inclusive' in its selection. This difference is in large part due to both writers' contrasting epistemological concerns. Pater perceives empirically-derived knowledge as that which can take the form of a comprehensive structure and asserts that 'The first condition' of knowing 'the actual value of what one says...must be, of course, to know yourself, to have ascertained your own sense exactly'¹⁸⁴ and that as a result it is wholly possible for 'an artist' to say 'to the reader': 'I want you to see precisely what I see.'¹⁸⁵ Indeed, owing to the precision of Pater's aesthetic, Thomas Hardy regarded him as 'one carrying weighty ideas without spilling

¹⁸³ James, 'The Art of Fiction,' p. 384.

¹⁸⁴ Pater, 'Style,' p. 28.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

them.’¹⁸⁶ Of course, like Pater, James privileges the opacity of the impression as a cipher for evoking the complexity of experience. By contrast, however, James views experience as ‘never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads.’ And so whilst Pater can theorize a literary mode ‘which makes the most of a word, in the exaction from every sentence of a precise relief,’ James theorizes a much looser style in order to demonstrate how that process of acquiring self-knowledge is a continual, perpetual process which is ‘never complete.’ Jamesian impressionism, therefore, constitutes a literary mode that advocates a Kantian philosophy that is much less concerned ‘with things known, [than] with knowledge itself.’¹⁸⁷

James’ appropriation of ‘free play’ is anchored to literary experimentation which relieves the artist from deploying an ‘exact’ and ‘precise’ style so that he can ‘improvise with extreme freedom.’¹⁸⁸ This ‘extreme freedom’ allows the artist to see his experience as it really is without being constrained by premeditated forms of self-knowledge or self-interest to ensure the novel form does not ‘suffer from being marked out, or fenced in, by prescription.’ He tells the artist: ‘All life belongs to you, and don’t listen either to those who would shut you up into corners of it and tell you that it is only here and there that art inhabits.’¹⁸⁹ Moreover, this freedom preserves the organic character of the novel, which James describes as ‘a living thing...like

¹⁸⁶ Thomas Hardy, *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy by Thomas Hardy*, ed., Michael Millgate (London: Macmillan, 1985), p.187.

¹⁸⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Vasilis Politis (London: J.M Dent, 1993), p. 43.

¹⁸⁸ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 172.

¹⁸⁹ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 407.

every other organism'¹⁹⁰; it ensures that the novel form is subject to conveying 'the strange irregular rhythm of life...whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet'¹⁹¹ rather than being subject to artistic conventions or aesthetic proscriptions. In 'The Art of Fiction,' James asserts: 'In proportion as in what she offers us we see life *without* rearrangement do we feel that we are touching the truth; in proportion as we see it *with* rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention.'¹⁹² Here, James implies that artistic conventions hamper the novelist's attempts to convey his experience in terms which record its perceived reality.

By contrasting Jamesian improvisation with Paterian precision, I do not intend to diminish the significance of Paterian relativity and the notion of an 'imaginative sense of fact' which is 'modified by human preference in all its infinitely varied forms.'¹⁹³ Nor is it to overlook the way Paterian Aestheticism seeks to cultivate 'a sympathy for humanity in its uncertain condition'¹⁹⁴ nor, indeed, the formal dimensions of his writings, which as Angela Leighton notes, 'express the sense of uncertainty and fallibility which characterizes knowledge in the modern world.'¹⁹⁵ Instead, this comparison aims to account for two key differences in the way both writers aim to portray the individual's impressions as they seem to him. Firstly, Pater assumes that each 'sense of fact' can take a comprehensive, knowable form. As Gerald Monsman has argued, Pater's aesthetic rests on 'the

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 392.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 398.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Pater, 'Style,' p. 7.

¹⁹⁴ Pater, 'Sandro Botticelli,' 1870, in *The Renaissance*, p. 49.

¹⁹⁵ Angela Leighton, *On Form*, p. 38

objective “givens” of experience (ideas or individuals).’¹⁹⁶ Secondly, literary art, for Pater, conveys the artist’s premeditated thoughts. By contrast, James’ fiction of the 1880s and 1890s does not appear to lend an objective hand to subjective experience. As I examine in the next chapter, ‘The Turn of the Screw’ demonstrates the way Henry James incorporates William James’ frameworks of introspective psychology into the forms of his fiction. The first-person narrative reflects the governess’ attempt to understand her experiences, but these do not lead to the acquisition of a self-knowledge which enables her to establish the precise co-ordinates of the relationship between herself and others: such relations remain ‘obscure.’¹⁹⁷ James’ incorporation of the concept of free play into his impressionism not only works towards disabling normative judgments of aesthetic value to create scope for individual judgments, it also creates scope to reflect the process of formulating those judgments, and creates potential for those judgments to remain unknown. Jamesian improvisation reserves room for the stylistic components of his impressionism to convey a sense of uncertainty. Whilst Pater would provide a portrait of humanity ‘in its uncertain condition’ and anticipate James’ view that knowledge is not fixed and subject to delicate and relative conditions, he requires the impressionist ‘to know himself’ by knowing his experiences; that is, he should ‘explain, by analysing and reducing it to its elements’ his experience. The improvised element of Jamesian impressionism—which is more concerned about portraying the acquirement of self-knowledge than portraying a distilled analysis of

¹⁹⁶ Gerald Monsman, ‘Introduction: On Reading Pater,’ in *Walter Pater: An Imaginative Sense of Fact*, ed., Philip Dodd (London: Cass, 1981), p. 4.

¹⁹⁷ Henry James, ‘The Turn of the Screw,’ in *The Turn of the Screw and Other Stories*, 1898, ed. T. J. Lustig (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2008), p. 234.

experience—is designed to afford artistic freedom which provides conditions for the portrayal of his experiences in the broadest possible sense and at the level of germination.

‘This freedom,’ according to James, ‘is a splendid privilege, and the first lesson of the young novelist is to learn to be worthy of it.’ One of the ways in which the ‘young novelist’ should ‘learn to be worthy’ of the privileges of ‘freedom’ is to learn certain rules attached to it; Jamesian improvisation does not hinge solely on the liberties of ‘free play.’ Alongside the concept of ‘free play,’ James incorporates modes of detachment into the artistic rendering of the idiosyncratic nature of the experiencing individual’s impressions. As for Pater, for James, our detachment from the world is simultaneously a necessary precondition for us to establish our own unique relationship with it. This is evident in James’ description of the artist on whom he bestows a figurative ‘field-glass...for observation’; this ‘unique instrument,’ which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as ‘a hand-held optical instrument for viewing distant objects outdoors’¹⁹⁸ is used to ensure ‘the person making use of it an impression distinct from every other.’ This detached perspective ensures that the artist can make fine-grain distinctions between his experiences.¹⁹⁹ Lee later satirically portrays the Jamesian aesthete in her story ‘Lady Tal’ where the male aesthete, Jervase Marion,

¹⁹⁸ ‘field glass, n.’ OED Online. June 2011. Oxford University Press. 25 June 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/69934?redirectedFrom=field-glass>>. (An entry for this word was first included in *New English Dictionary*, 1896).

¹⁹⁹ Oscar Wilde summarises this antisocial stance of detachment in a letter in response to a review of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: ‘the pleasure that one has in creating a work of art is a purely personal pleasure, and it is for the sake of this pleasure that one creates. The artist works with his eye of the object. Nothing else interests him...He is indifferent to others.’ (Oscar Wilde, ‘Letter to the Editor of the *Scots Observer* (9 July 1890) in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde*, ed., Richard Ellmann ((Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982)), p. 247).

who is described as ‘a kind of Henry James,’ is a figure for whom social detachment is ‘the necessary complement to his power of intellectual analysis.’²⁰⁰ Lee identifies an element of self-absorption and egotism in this type of detachment, but James defends its integrity by suggesting that it ensures the experiencing individual can undertake responsibilities to make the most of his freedom. This detachment, for James, offers a vantage-point from which ‘to survey the whole field’²⁰¹ of experience (in a slightly different context, he claims conducting a holistic survey of this field is the ‘essence of moral energy’²⁰²) and ensures that he can make appropriate selections to convey his experience in art.

In ‘The Future of the Novel,’ James asserts that this detached perspective from which the individual can ‘select,’ ‘take’ or ‘leave’ experience, requires an individual who has ‘a rare faculty or great opportunities for the extension of experience—by thought, by emotion, by energy—at first hand.’²⁰³ As James asserts, the writer should be ‘finely aware and richly responsible’²⁰⁴ and, as I have noted, ‘be one of the people on whom nothing is lost.’ Such responsible authorship lends authority to the selection of experience. James requires an individual who has capacious experience in order to preserve the element of ‘free play’ that ensures art is ‘inclusive.’ He writes: ‘Art is essentially selection, but it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive’²⁰⁵ and ‘He has to take a great

²⁰⁰ Lee, ‘Lady Tal,’ in *Vanitas: Polite Stories* (London: William Heinemann, 1892), p. 53.

²⁰¹ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 406.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ James, ‘The Future of the Novel,’ p. 1.

²⁰⁴ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 62.

²⁰⁵ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 398.

many in order to select a few.’²⁰⁶ In this way, James theorizes a particular interplay between modes of detachment and ‘free play’ which ensures the individual offers a broad, unrestricted account of his experience that goes beyond his personal self-interest but in a way that preserves its idiosyncratic features by conveying those elements that are ‘most personal to him.’ These personal selections are made in a way that is irrespective of artistic conventions and, in turn, the reader’s expectations. Moreover, modes of detachment are designed to give control to the artist and his work without undermining his ‘extreme freedom.’ In the preface to ‘The Turn of the Screw,’ James says the writer should ‘improvise with extreme freedom and yet at the same time without the possibility of ravage, without the hint of a flood.’²⁰⁷ Elsewhere James asserts it gives definition to one’s impressions, by ‘giving an impression of the highest perfection and the rarest finish’ yet still achieving its ambition to move ‘in a luxurious independence of rules and restrictions.’²⁰⁸ It is this control over the artist’s materials which ensures the novel has an ‘air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it.’²⁰⁹ In the next chapter, I examine how James envisions the artist ‘take[ing] possession’ of his experience in relation to his engagements with physiological psychology.

James dramatises this productive tension between ‘free play’ and modes of detachment in his portrayal of the artist in *The Tragic Muse*: he characterizes figures who misunderstand a work of art’s artistic and

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 391.

²⁰⁷ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 172.

²⁰⁸ James, ‘The Future of the Novel,’ p. 1.

²⁰⁹ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 376.

philosophical underpinnings or who fail to achieve the appropriate modes of detachment required to produce and appreciate works of art. Gabriel Nash is one such figure; Gabriel may talk in a manner which implies he is a prolific author of aesthetic prose, but he represents the type of purist that James could not afford to be. Gabriel insists that he has ‘no interest...to push, no nostrum to advertise, no power to conciliate, no axe to grind’ and that he subscribes to the ‘aesthetic life’ by engaging with ‘the spectacle of the world’ in this disinterested manner. Yet, as for Pater, for James, modes of aesthetic detachment must not lead to a complete removal from the world as they do for Gabriel who admits that he does not commit to the ‘convictions and doctrines and standards...that will make the boat go’;²¹⁰ he does not ‘get in’ this ‘boat’ with everyone else. Acting as mentor to the former politician and aspiring painter, Nick Dormer, Gabriel offers counsel for Nick who worries about his status as an amateur. He reassures Nick that his lack of artistic talent should not pose a problem by recapitulating popularised claims that the ‘true artist’ is inward-looking and unaccountable to others: ‘Oh having something to show's such a poor business. It's a kind of confession of failure.’²¹¹ This goes against James’ instruction to the artist to simply ‘Go in!’ if he is ‘to make as perfect a work.’²¹² Gabriel does not appear to appreciate that detachment offers a means by which he can gain purchase on his experiences, rather than lead to a complete withdrawal from social concerns.

Furthermore, Gabriel’s modes of detachment lead to his complete withdrawal from the world because they are directed towards a desire to be

²¹⁰ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 103.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-10.

²¹² James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 408.

removed from the concerns of everyday life, rather than towards the extension of his own world-view. On one occasion, his inwardness is revealed: ‘Do you mean you like everything?’ asks Nick, to which Gabriel responds, ‘Dear me, no! But I look only at what I do like.’²¹³ By limiting his range of aesthetic interests to those that match his own world-view, he becomes more prototypically like himself, a practice which does not prefigure ‘that [Paterian] continual vanishing away, that strange perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves.’²¹⁴ Gabriel’s consumption habits go against the grain both of Arnoldian disinterestedness and its emphasis on flexible and open-minded modes of critical enquiry; as well as Paterian disinterestedness and its demand that the practitioner should subordinate his own range of interests in order to appreciate the unexpected, singularity of art. That is, Gabriel appears to eliminate the element of ‘free play’ which aims to lend impartiality to one’s experiences so that artistic appreciation and creation can be ‘inclusive.’ Gabriel is, then, more of a consumerist art-collector than a Paterian disinterested aesthetic practitioner. Gabriel’s ready encouragement of Nick Dormer’s artistic career adds to our misgivings about his commitment to the artistic and philosophical ideals that we associate with Paterian Aestheticism and this, in turn, adds to any doubts we may have about Nick’s talents as a painter. Nick declares that he cannot paint, but Gabriel is hopeful that he will be a great talent.

In a slightly different way, James presents Nick Dormer as another artistic figure who cannot achieve appropriate modes of aesthetic detachment.

²¹³ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 19.

²¹⁴ Pater, ‘Conclusion,’ p. 210.

His decision to leave his political career for an artistic one represents his view that art is separate from the concerns of everyday life, which leads to a kind of exploitative reliance on aesthetic detachment to compensate for his inability to complete works of art that are derived from perceptual experience. The artist, James writes, ‘will give it [the novel work of the impression] up only when life itself too thoroughly disagrees with him. Till the world is an unpeopled voyage there will be an image in the mirror.’²¹⁵ Retiring from politics to work as an artist does, of course, demonstrate his need for detachment, but his understanding of it is based on his view that politics and art are antithetical to one another. When Nick informs Mr. Carteret of his decision he asserts: ‘I’ve made up my mind, after no end of reflexion, dear Mr. Carteret, to work on quite other lines. I’ve a plan of becoming a painter. So I’ve given up the idea of a political life.’²¹⁶ James uses this theme of the separation between art and life to contrast the ‘purist’ artist with the profiteers in the theatre.

As mentioned in the last chapter, Nick perceives the theatre as failing to offer the ‘last fruit of analysis’ or ‘final touch to the picture,’ but it is a mode much more aware of its commitment to portraying life. Miriam declares ‘I go in for the book of life!’²¹⁷ and we are told ‘she is made for public life’²¹⁸ whilst a newspaper extract reads that Nick ‘is about to give up his seat and withdraw from public life in order to devote himself to the practice of portrait-painting.’²¹⁹ Indeed, Nick represents James’ ‘notion of a young man who

²¹⁵ James, ‘The Future of the Novel,’ p. 1.

²¹⁶ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 328.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

should amid difficulty—the difficulties being the story—have abandoned “public life” for the zealous pursuit of some supposedly minor craft.’²²⁰ It is evident that Nick is unable to practice the ‘aesthetic life’ in a way that demonstrates he is worth the privileges that its freedom affords. We learn that, like Gabriel, Nick is not open to experience as a means that will lead to self-expansion; he fails to ‘view life that counted out the need of learning; it was teaching rather as to which he was conscious of no particular mission.’²²¹ We learn also that he is conscious of not being able to master modes of detachment required to process the material he attains from life: ‘He was on his guard...against making an ass of himself, that is against not thinking out his experiments before trying them in public.’²²² Instead, then, modes of aesthetic detachment become for Nick a means by which he can conceal his lack of artistic talent—or at least his artistic diffidence.

As such, for Nick (as for Gabriel) modes of detachment provide a means to hide his lack of artistic talent from others. When painting Miriam’s portrait, we only see (as James puts it in the preface) ‘the back he turns to us as he bends over his work.’²²³ The only time the reader gains access to the portrait that remains unfinished is when Biddy and Peter unveil it without Nick’s knowledge or permission. At this point, we are told, the portrait is ‘strong, vivid and assured, it had already the look of life and the promise of power,’ and Peter wonders ‘where his kinsman had learned to paint like that.’²²⁴ Given our

²²⁰ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 81.

²²¹ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 159.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 96.

²²⁴ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 295.

knowledge of Peter as a figure who is not equipped to make aesthetic judgments, to invest our faith in him would be to formulate our judgment of the work by reference to a shared experience of art and, in turn, cause us to evade aesthetic experience altogether. This point is reinforced when we learn that Peter Sherringham regards the unfinished portrait as ‘tremendously good,’²²⁵ but it is implied that this judgment is refracted through the collective gaze. As at the end of the novel when sat in the auditorium, Bidy only focuses on another person’s spectatorship, here ‘she only watched, in Peter’s eyes, for this gentleman’s impression of it’²²⁶ and Peter only articulates his response after ‘measur[ing] her impression—her impression of *his* impression.’²²⁷ The implication is, then, that Nick uses modes of detachment in order to conceal his inability to complete the portrait, which remains unfinished. He cannot call on ‘questions of execution’ to achieve an attitude of indifference towards his commentators because, to use Nash’s phrase, he has ‘nothing to show.’

James dramatises Nick’s exploitative reliance on modes of detachment even further when we learn that such modes are used to conceal his status as an amateur painter. In the preface, James (regretfully) categorises Nick as ‘the artist deluded, diverted, frustrated or vanquished.’²²⁸ We begin to learn this when he affects detachment from public taste and opinion when he ‘leave[s] behind him the little chatter his resignation would be sure to produce in an age of publicity which never discriminated as to the quality of events.’²²⁹ We are

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 97.

²²⁹ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 337.

told that he ‘laid the weight of explanation on his commentators, meeting them all on the firm ground of his own amusement’²³⁰ and that:

He saw he should live for months in a thick cloud of irony, not the finest air of the season, and he adopted the weapon to which a person whose use of tobacco is only occasional resorts when everyone else produces a cigar—he puffed the spasmodic, defensive cigarette.²³¹

This ‘thick cloud of irony’ represents Nick’s attempt to affect a posture of detachment. Andrew Eastham has incisively defined ‘this form of ironic withdrawal’ as ‘the constitutive gesture of Aestheticism—a cultivated performance which grounds and protects art’s autonomous sphere.’²³² This ‘cloud of irony,’ however, protects Nick’s own autonomy and freedom, rather than that of the art he wishes to create. The fact that it is his ‘spasmodic, defensive’ handling of a cigarette that metaphorically creates this ‘thick cloud of irony’ conveys the weakness of Nick’s condition of detachment. We return to Nick’s status as an amateur, a figure who is unable to master the philosophical and artistic ideals of his creative practice. It is ironic that the condition Nick seeks to affect in order to conceal his status as an amateur is

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 339.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Andrew Eastham, “‘Master of Irony’: Henry James, Transatlantic *bildung* and the Critique of Aestheticism,” *Symbiosis* 12.2 (October 2008): 168.

ineffective because he lacks mastery of the aesthete's exclusive models of detachment and control.

Nick's amateurish traits further reveal themselves and remove him from this ideal condition of detachment when he submits to the tutorship of Gabriel Nash. Nick's reverent attitude towards Gabriel's counsel demonstrates his naivety and parodies those disciple 'aesthetes' who style themselves on Pater without critically engaging with his claims; this parody of discipleship is made all the more stark when he notes, 'Gabriel might have been the angel of that name.'²³³ In short, Nick fails to understand aesthetic principles for himself. James also refers to Gabriel as an 'excellent touchstone,'²³⁴ which alludes to Matthew Arnold's notion of criticism as an activity in which the work's moral values are normative, rather than relative to the individual's own aesthetic experience. The fact that Nick heeds Gabriel's advice that 'having something to show... [is] a kind of confession of failure' reveals his inability to form his own judgments, or engage critically with the claims of others, which reflects his lack of the detachment that is required to undertake the demands of the 'aesthetic life.' As Eastham argues, the fact Nick 'mimics the irony of Gabriel Nash' means that he is thus 'condemned to his position of angelic inaction.'²³⁵ Nick's lack of artistic independence and responsibility is further implied in his surname, Dormer, which the *Oxford Dictionary of English Surnames* cites as that which is derived from the French *dormeur*, meaning 'sleeper, sluggard.'²³⁶

²³³ James, *The Tragic Muse*, p. 340.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

²³⁵ Eastham, "'Master of Irony,'" p. 184.

²³⁶ P.H. Reaney and R. M. Wilson. *A Dictionary of English Surnames*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 139.

He maps onto the nascent consumer culture which Jamesian Aestheticism challenges in its requirement of a ‘finely aware and richly responsible’ practitioner. Rather than resist public taste, Nick is controlled by his commentators; he defends himself from the critical agency of his detractors. Neither Nick nor Gabriel can self-fashion modes of critical detachment; they are destined to remain practitioners of consumerist habits that James deplored. This constitutes the satirical element of *The Tragic Muse*, which appears to wallow in what its author most abhors when elevating an appropriate model of critical detachment. It returns us to the way James regards disinterestedness as constituting a ‘proper’ mode of aesthetic practice, which is antithetical to the consumption habits of late-Victorian culture. James uses *The Tragic Muse* to register the difficulties and pitfalls of cultivating a broader public that can undertake this demanding activity and returns us to his refusal to ease ‘the difficult terms on which it [the “artistic life”] is at the best secured and enjoyed.’ It requires specialist skills and proficiencies to ensure the individual is able to ‘secure and enjoy’ the philosophical and artistic ideals that his model of disinterestedness affords.

2.4 ‘Something outside ourselves’: Vernon Lee’s Elusive Aesthetics and Eliminating Detachment

After reading William James’ *Principles of Psychology* (1890-1891), Vernon Lee wrote, ‘The things in our mind, due to the mind’s constitution and its relation with the universe, are, after all, realities; and realities to count with,

as much as the tables and chairs and hats and coats.’²³⁷ Like Pater and James, Lee views ‘reality’ as relative to human experience. She describes experience in a highly Paterian way, explaining that ‘impressions brought to a focus, personified, but personified vaguely, in a fluctuating ever-changing manner’²³⁸ constitute it. Echoing Pater’s statement that it is ‘not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them,’²³⁹ Lee goes on to describe ‘the personification [of impressions as] being continually altered, reinforced, blurred out, enlarged, restricted by new series of impressions from without, even as the shape which we puzzle out of congregated cloud-masses fluctuates their every moment.’²⁴⁰ Lee’s envisioning of art as conveying the artist’s idiosyncratic impressions returns us to Aestheticism’s aim to move away from collective value-judgments. In a statement which echoes *art for art’s sake*’s contestation of Arnold’s assumption that literary art should possess moral values, Lee argues that there is often ‘no relation’ between art and morality: ‘the world of the physically beautiful is isolated from the world of the morally excellent: there is sometimes correspondence between them and sometimes conflict...most often there is no relation at all.’²⁴¹ She had bemoaned the way John Ruskin had ‘made morality sterile and art base in his desire to sanctify the one by the other.’²⁴² Like James, Lee is committed to producing works of art that inculcate the reader in certain rules of engagement, particularly individualised modes of response. It is for

²³⁷ Vernon Lee, *The Renaissance Fancies and Studies* (New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons; London, Smith, Elder, & Co., 1896), pp. 238-239.

²³⁸ Vernon Lee, *Belcaro*, p. 76.

²³⁹ Pater, ‘Conclusion,’ p. 209.

²⁴⁰ Lee, *Belcaro*, p. 75.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

²⁴² Vernon Lee, ‘Ruskinism’, in *Belcaro*, p. 225.

this reason that she is very dismissive of normative prescriptions of aesthetic value in works such as ‘Deterioration of Soul’ (1896; rpt. 1908) in which Lee criticizes Max Nordau’s *Degeneration* for its titular term, ‘Degeneracy: I would willingly get rid of this detestable word, leave it to the mad doctors or criminologists.’²⁴³ Lee refuses to value Nordau’s moralizing analysis of literature—‘who cares for his literary and artistic criticism?’²⁴⁴—and condemns his authoritative Arnoldian attempt to assess literature for its risk to ‘spiritual public safety.’²⁴⁵ The instrumentality of a work of art is, for Lee, dependent on the way it conveys the obscurity, vagueness and elusiveness of human experience. In order for it to achieve this function, Lee promotes a literary mode which opposes that which Max Nordau had aimed to regulate: artistic convention and, in turn, normative prescriptions of aesthetic value.

Like James, Lee moves away from Pater by promoting an improvised aesthetic which is more concerned with the way art conveys the acquirement of empirical knowledge. But Lee also departs from James because she is not as optimistic about literary art’s elasticity and formal possibilities, and thus she is not as open to literary experimentation. James does, of course, encounter problems of representation, but whilst he remains assured that the novel has ‘for its subject...the whole human consciousness,’²⁴⁶ Lee registers her awareness of art’s limitations, viewing the process of composition as inherently antithetical to artistic perception. In *Baldwin: Being Dialogues on Views and Aspirations* (1886), Lee describes the ideal writer as:

²⁴³ Vernon Lee, ‘Deterioration of Soul,’ in *Gospels of Anarchy and Other Contemporary Studies* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1908), p. 79.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

²⁴⁶ James, ‘The Future of the Novel,’ p. 1.

He [who] perceives, more than most people, perhaps even too much, the complexity of human nature; and what to you or me is a complete moral portrait is to him a mere partial representation...It is not morally correct, any more than it is artistically correct, to see the microscopic and the hidden.²⁴⁷

Here Lee is arguing that attempting to portray that which cannot be perceived by the reader is both morally and artistically incorrect.²⁴⁸ She describes Pater's aesthetic as that which 'sometimes almost amounts to a visual hyperaesthetica,'²⁴⁹ arguing that his emphasis on re-ordering experience in objective, self-interested terms creates an 'orderly vision of detail'²⁵⁰ which does not portray the authenticity of the artist's perceptual experience.

She interrogates the opposition between artistic perception and composition in her essay 'Faustus and Helena,' which considers the artistic portrayal of encounters with the supernatural. She argues that whilst 'the supernatural is nothing but ever-renewed impressions, ever-shifting fancies...art is the definer, the embodier, the analytic and the synthetic force of

²⁴⁷ Vernon Lee, *Baldwin: Being Dialogues on Views and Aspirations* (London: T Fisher Unwin, 1886), p. 190.

²⁴⁸ She anticipates Jacques Derrida's theory 'that any presence is (to the extent of our ability to analyze it) the trace of an absence; we can talk only about what is "not there."' (Jacques Derrida quoted in Bruce F. Kavin, *The Mind of the Novel: Reflexive Fiction and the Ineffable* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 235).

²⁴⁹ Lee, 'On Style,' p. 39.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

form.²⁵¹ Art is, then, antithetical to the vague imprecise forms that are typically associated with the supernatural as a literary genre: ‘For the supernatural is essentially vague, and art is necessarily essentially distinct: give shape to the vague and it ceases to exist.’²⁵² She describes those forms which give ‘definite and enduring shape’²⁵³ to the vague as ‘merely empty sepulchres’²⁵⁴ because they fail to portray the ‘oscillat[ing]’ and ‘transform[ative]’ nature of the artist’s impressions; ‘artistic embodiment[s] of impressions or fancies’²⁵⁵ results in their ‘isolation’ and thus leads to the ‘destruction of their inherent power.’²⁵⁶ As Catherine Maxwell has noted, Lee ‘was certainly aware of the inherent difficulties of writing a supernatural tale, anxious that the textual bodying out of her stories might in some way deprive them of their power.’²⁵⁷ Art, for Lee, poses a representational problem because its ‘synthetical definiteness...is as sceptical as the analytical definiteness of logic.’²⁵⁸ As such, she struggles to come to terms with the concept of a prescriptive formulation for what constitutes literary art and contests the Arnoldian notion of ‘critical reason’ on the grounds that it ‘is a solvent’²⁵⁹ which ‘reduces the phantoms of the imagination to their most prosaic elements.’²⁶⁰ As for James, for Lee, artistic conventions are insufficient means for the artist to convey the idiosyncratic nature of his impressions.

²⁵¹ Lee, *Belcaro*, p. 85. (‘Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art’ was first published in *Cornhill Magazine*, 42 ((1880)), and reprinted in *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* ((London: W. Satchell, 1881)), pp. 70-105).

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Catherine Maxwell, *Second Sight*, p. 142.

²⁵⁸ Lee, *Belcaro*, p. 75.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.74-5.

To evade artistic conventions which tend to recuperate the ‘microscopic and the hidden,’ Lee celebrates structures of incompleteness, elusiveness and vagueness in her supernatural fiction, which she regards as a genre that requires the writer to convey the elusive nature of the artist’s modes of perception. Lee cultivates a supernatural aesthetic which is based on ‘The virtue of paucity, the stimulus of the insufficient and the unfinished, the spell of the fragment, forcing us to furnish what it lacks out of our own heart and mind.’²⁶¹ Paterian and Jamesian literary impressionism—of which this quotation constitutes a partially paraphrased description—proves central to the formal traits of Lee’s own supernatural tales. For instance, she regards *A Wicked Voice* as ‘a thoroughly carried out impressionistic study of Italian things properly lit up and perspectived.’²⁶² The word ‘properly’ operates to place emphasis on art’s responsibility to convey the artist’s impressions in the form in which he experiences them. Catherine Maxwell notes that Lee ‘believes that there are representational ruses by which the supernatural can come into play’²⁶³ and argues that her supernatural aesthetic ‘shuns sharp definition and finds its expressive means in obscurity as a precondition for the sublime.’²⁶⁴ For Lee, impressionistic methods of representation offer a means by which the artist can work ‘within art’s limits.’²⁶⁵ Lee is acutely aware that there is a crucial difference between artistic perception and artistic execution; the ‘mature artistic conscience,’ as she terms it, is able to execute his

²⁶¹ Vernon Lee, ‘Out of Venice at Last,’ in *The Golden Keys and Other Essays on the Genius Loci* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1925), p. 89.

²⁶² Vernon Lee, *For Maurice: Five Unlikely Stories* (London & New York: John Lane, 1927), p. xxxvi.

²⁶³ Maxwell, *Second Sight*, p. 142.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

²⁶⁵ Lee, *Belcaro*, p. 87.

impressions in a way that does not destroy ‘their inherent power’²⁶⁶: ‘He [the mature artist] might be quite as conscientious as his earliest predecessor, but his conscience has become an artistic conscience, he sees only as much as is within art’s limits.’²⁶⁷ This awareness leads to one of Lee’s most Jamesian statements about artistic ‘treatment’: ‘The art,’ she writes, ‘is now an all-engrossing aim; unconsciously, perhaps, to himself, the artist regards the subject as merely a pretext for the treatment; and where the subject is opposed to such treatment as he desires, he sacrifices it.’²⁶⁸ This statement does, of course, have Paterian resonances, too—it echoes Pater’s assertion that the artist will ‘dread [surplusage...] as the runner of his muscles’²⁶⁹—but most strikingly it shares the ambitious tone of James’ envisioning of the writer’s dual ‘aim at [portraying his subject with an] absolute singleness, clearness and roundness, and yet to depend on an imagination working freely, working (call it) with extravagance; by which law it wouldn’t be thinkable except as free and wouldn’t be amusing except as controlled.’²⁷⁰ Lee, that is, shares James’ emphasis on an improvised ‘free play of the mind on all subjects,’ and the subsequent discrimination of these impressions. The difference is that whilst James would elevate the artist as a figure ‘on whom nothing is lost’ and whose perceptions can recuperate the capaciousness of his experiences, Lee would promote an artistic mode in which the artist is a figure on whom much is lost and whose perceptions should recuperate the indistinct, vague and limited nature of his experiences. For Lee, aiming to relay the vagueness of artistic perception in the formal dimensions of literary art represents experience in the

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 16.

²⁷⁰ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 176.

most authentic of terms. As I consider in the latter part of this section, this bears implications for Lee's attempt to inculcate readers in disinterested modes of criticism: she demands a reader with the proficiencies to appreciate the elusive qualities of her aesthetic.

We see Lee's elusive aesthetic come into play in her collection of supernatural fiction, *Hauntings* (1890), in which she uses imagery which reflects the way objects are described in idiosyncratic, perceptual terms. For example, in 'A Wicked Voice,' Magnus' psychological state of disorientation informs his perception of nature as replicating tourist commodities: 'The table on which they [his fellow artists at the boarding house] lean after is strewn with...heaps of huge hard peaches, which nature imitates from the marble shops of Pisa.'²⁷¹ In this part of the narrative, Magnus' sensual engagement with his surroundings shapes his description of the Venetian landscape. For example, Magnus' respiratory difficulties mediate his description of his first night in Venice: 'It was a breathless evening under the full moon.'²⁷² When he re-tells the way 'Venice seemed to swelter in the midst of the waters, exhaling, like some great lily, mysterious influences, which make the brain swim and the heart faint,'²⁷³ the oppressive Venetian heat continues to inform his perception of the scenery; the verb 'seem' and use of similes ('like some great lily') registers his perceptive, provisional and impressionistic tone. This reflects Lee's investment in Paterian relativism, particularly his claim that 'it is only the roughness of the eye that makes two persons, things, situations, seem alike.' In addition to Lee's deployment of imagery, there are several instances

²⁷¹ Lee, 'A Wicked Voice,' p. 156.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

in *Hauntings* whereby she appropriates narrative devices that Pater had used in *Imaginary Portraits* (1887). For example, in ‘Amour Dure’ and ‘Dionea,’ Lee appropriates the diary form of Pater’s ‘A Prince of Court Painters’ which contributes towards the narrative’s unresolved ending. In ‘Amour Dure,’ the tale ends before the revelatory point; when the historian Spiridion Trepka encounters his mysterious female subject, Medea, the narrative concludes with a note: ‘Here ends the diary of the late Spiridion Trepka.’²⁷⁴ This is similar to the unresolved ending of Pater’s ‘A Prince of Court Painters’ which ends with the statement: ‘He was always a seeker after something in the world that is there in no satisfying measure, or not at all.’²⁷⁵ Lee and Pater are not prepared to subject the diary form to a contrived resolved ending. This refusal to offer closure undermines the resolution offered by those formulaic elements which made the mid-Victorian ghost story popular and in this way exploits a popular genre to suit Aestheticism’s agenda to demonstrate that ‘nothing is or can be known, except relatively and under conditions.’²⁷⁶

Lee envisions an ideal mode of readerly response which appreciates the obscure and indefinable formal properties of her supernatural works. She recognises that her supernatural aesthetic requires a reader prepared to subordinate his own interests in order to appreciate the obscurity and elusive nature of the artist’s singular impressions. In a letter to her elder half-brother, Eugene Lee-Hamilton, she asserts:

²⁷⁴ Lee, ‘Amour Dure,’ in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, eds. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham, (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2006), p. 76.

²⁷⁵ Walter Pater, ‘A Prince of Court Painters,’ 1885, in *Imaginary Portraits*, p. 48.

²⁷⁶ It should be noted that unresolved endings are not unique to the short fiction of Lee, James and Pater; they choose this form because it departs from narrative resolution, which is typically associated with the Victorian novel.

As regards obscurity in the narrative, I think that if you read it three months hence that would not strike you; for you will regain a habit of twiggings suggestions and of easily following tortuosities of narrative which is the habit of consecutive reading. You will then, I think, agree with me that such a story requires to appear & reappear & disappear, to be baffling, in order to acquire its supernatural quality. You see there is not real story; once assert the identity of Dionea with Venus, once show her clearly, & no charm remains.²⁷⁷

In a similar way to James, Lee defends the narrative's 'obscurity' by referring to the responsibility of the reader: it is his duty to appreciate, by exerted attention, the work's formal 'tortuosities' as integral to its 'supernatural quality.' The reader must not strive to pin down the 'identity' of the tale's elusive figures in order to satisfy his anti-Paterian impulse to 'fix it in absolute formulas'; as she had stated earlier in 'Faustus and Helena,' once we are told 'the character and history of those vague beings...the ghost is gone.'²⁷⁸ She goes on to note that: 'We have all of us the charm wherewith to evoke for ourselves, a real Helena on condition that...we...remain satisfied if the weird

²⁷⁷ Vernon Lee to Eugene Lee-Hamilton, Letter of 31 August 1893; quoted in Vernon Lee, *Vernon Lee's Letters*, ed. Irene Cooper Willis (Privately Printed, 1937), pp. 363-4.

²⁷⁸ Lee, *Belcaro*, p. 94.

and glorious figure haunt only our own imagination.’²⁷⁹ The reader’s personal, imaginative construal of ethereal figures should retain an appreciation of their fictive and mystic properties. In this instructive letter, it is clear that Lee demands an attentive reader, able to ‘follow’ the work’s ‘baffling’ formal qualities. Across her oeuvre, Lee reinstates her recommendation of what she terms ‘reiterated perception’; that is, her demand for a reader willing to participate in a process of aesthetic engagement that requires repeated and active communion with the art object. Rather than making the work more transparent or accessible—that is, less ‘baffling’—Lee anticipates that the attentiveness she recommends will result in an appreciation of the work’s formal obscurity, and the subordination of the reader’s own expectations or self-interests.

This envisioning of an ‘ideal’ readerly response resembles that of Pater and James who both require readers capable of appreciating the singularity of the artist’s impressions. Indeed, similarly, as we shall see, Lee’s disinterestedness consists of two mutually dependent stages of critical enquiry that can be broadly categorised as ‘receptivity’ and ‘discrimination.’ Moreover, Lee contributes to the agenda of Paterian and Jamesian disinterestedness to the extent that she opposes consumerist modes of aesthetic consumption. In *Laurus Nobilis* (1909), Lee argues that ‘the notion of ordinary possession is a mere delusion’²⁸⁰ and ‘this wearisome act of self-assertion leaves little power for appreciation, for the appreciation which others can have quite equally, and

²⁷⁹ Lee, *Belcaro*, p. 105.

²⁸⁰ Vernon Lee, *Laurus Nobilis: Chapters on Art and Life* (London: Bodley Head, 1909), p. 56.

without which there is no reality at all in ownership.²⁸¹ Lee noted the way in which the consumerism of art compromises aesthetic appreciation because it leads to a desire to ‘self-assert...ownership’ and thus results in viewing art ‘with reference to ourselves.’²⁸² For Lee, such consumerist attitudes fail to appreciate art’s value in the appropriate way because they fail to appreciate the singularity of art. In *Belcaro*, she argues that ‘To appreciate a work of art means, therefore to appreciate that work of art itself, as distinguished from appreciating something outside it, something accidentally or arbitrarily connected with it.’²⁸³ As such, Lee aims to promote a specialized manner of critical engagement with form which is entirely divested of self-interest. Such a view is similar to those expressed by Pater and James for whom disinterestedness also constitutes a critical practice that requires the critic to subordinate his own self-interests in order appreciate the singularity of art. The crucial difference, however, is that whereas Pater and James promote detachment as that mode of enquiry which ensures the critic remains aloof from concerns that may compromise disinterested aesthetic appreciation, Lee identifies in critical detachment a problematic element of self-absorption. She regards detachment *per se* as compromising the idea that aesthetic engagement is a type of activity which can precondition the individual practitioner for social interaction.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²⁸² Lee, *The Beautiful*, p. 63.

²⁸³ Lee, *Belcaro*, pp. 61-2. It should be noted that Lee makes this statement at a relatively early stage in her career when she regarded Aestheticism as a movement divorced from ethical commitments. In her essay, ‘Ruskinism’ in the same collection of essays, she writes: ‘Beauty, in itself, is neither morally good nor morally bad: it is aesthetically good, even as virtue is neither aesthetically good nor aesthetically bad, but morally good.’ This Jamesian view would extend into her later works, but she also added a statement which undermines her ‘later’ emphasis on aesthetic empathy: ‘Beauty is pure, complete, egotistic: it has no other value than its being beautiful’ (Lee, *Belcaro*, p. 210). She would reconsider this view and theorize modes of ethical attention in order to ensure the aesthetic dimensions of art have value beyond ‘its being beautiful.’

Another way of putting this is to say that whereas Paterian disinterestedness is concerned with the extent to which our perceptive qualities activate a mode of self-consciousness that equips the individual with a ‘new or old’ type of self-knowledge, which makes him more finely attuned to others, Lee’s theorization of disinterestedness centres on how our perceptive qualities establish a reciprocal relationship with the object under observation. It is, in this sense, a mode of critical practice that demands a greater degree of attentiveness towards the ‘otherness’ and ‘unfamiliarity’ of the object.²⁸⁴ It is for this reason that Lee removes detachment from the process of aesthetic engagement as an activity which preconditions the individual for social interaction because, she argues, such modes of detachment prefigure a state of self-absorption which prevents the critic from suspending his own values and expectations to appreciate the singularity of art. As we have seen above, Paterian detachment is central to Jamesian impressionism, and it is clear Lee had a problem with this concept: for example, as I briefly referred to earlier, in her short story ‘Lady Tal,’ she disparages the Jamesian aesthete, Jervase Marion. Lee satirises Marion—whom she explicitly characterizes as a ‘psychological novelist’²⁸⁵ and ‘a kind of Henry James’—as a figure for whom social detachment—‘this shinkingness of nature (which foolish persons called egoism)’²⁸⁶—is ‘the necessary complement to his power of intellectual analysis.’ She portrays Marion as regarding familial relationships as ‘things which invade a man’s consciousness without any psychological profit,’ and as

²⁸⁴ Lee, *The Beautiful*, pp. 48 and 135.

²⁸⁵ Lee, ‘Lady Tal,’ pp. 11 and 94.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

preferring, instead, ‘a world of acquaintances, of indifference.’²⁸⁷ The author’s detachment from the world enables Marion to achieve his novelistic ambitions: ‘any departure from the position of dispassioned spectator of the world’s follies and miseries would mean also a departure from his real duty as a novelist.’²⁸⁸ As Lee views it, such modes of detachment enable him to understand ‘the feelings and motives of his neighbours’²⁸⁹—and in this way empower him to make a credible intervention into the genre of psychological realism—but, ultimately, they render his artistic practice as one which is self-centred. Lee’s commitment to a more ‘outward-looking’ Aestheticism constitutes her attempt to address this problem inherent in Aestheticism and to cultivate a mode of criticism which is entirely devoted to the art object to which the critic is attending.

In other words, Lee aims to shift the emphasis away from what is ‘perceived as going on in ourselves’ and towards what is perceived as ‘moving outside us’ so that we can ‘think rather in terms of “it is” than in those of “I am.”’²⁹⁰ This concern for an ‘outward-looking’ mode of aesthetic appreciation which is divested of self-interest underscores the concept of empathy which Lee introduced into the study of British aesthetics and constitutes a shift of emphasis that registers a concern with the social utility and ethics of aesthetic appreciation. This concern, which distinguishes her Aestheticism from that of Pater and James, stems from her earlier anti-aestheticist polemic in works such as *Miss Brown* (1884) and ‘Lady Tal’ (1892) whereby Lee had interpreted Pa-

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Vernon Lee, *Music and its Lovers: an Empirical Study of Emotional and Imaginative Responses to Music* (London : G. Allen & Unwin, 1932), p. 111.

terian Aestheticism's emphasis on the individual as hedonistic. As I hinted in Chapter One, the feminist-led nature of her recuperation, which stresses Lee's unequivocal commitment to an anti-aestheticist New Woman politics in the 1880s and early 1890s, has tended to overshadow critical recognition of her later affiliations with Paterian Aestheticism. Vineta Colby presents Lee as a figure for whom Aestheticism meant 'self-indulgence, affectations and ultimately moral corruption'²⁹¹ and which had 'perverted the nature of art by reducing it to hedonism.'²⁹² Of course, this element of her thinking would inform her appropriation of that Arnoldian notion of 'moving outside' ourselves, one which underscores Lee's critique of what she perceives to be the immoral selfishness of Paterian individualism. However, it is important to note that Lee's notion of 'empathy' should be read as a modified version of Paterian sympathy, and that her deployment of this concept across her writings does not therefore represent an attempt to move *away* from Pater's notion of sympathy and its elitist implications, which prioritise the individuality of the critic and the singularity of art. It is rather that Lee felt it necessary to rewrite the element of self-absorption that is a precondition for social interaction within Pater's aesthetic theory. What emerges in Lee's writings is the implication that sympathy can provide a credible model of ethical responsibility *only* when empathy precedes it: empathy, she asserts, is 'an act necessarily preceding all sympathy.'²⁹³ When she discusses the social utility of aesthetic sympathy, Lee is accounting for it as a model of ethical responsibility that includes empathy.

²⁹¹ Vineta Colby, *Vernon Lee: A Literary Biography, Victorian Literature and Culture Series* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2003), p. 96.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, p. 47.

Lee's concept of 'empathy' resembles certain 19th-century definitions of 'sympathy,' notably as that which presupposes an 'affinity between—certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence on another (esp. in some occult way), or attract or tend towards each other. *Obs. exc. Hist.* or as merged in other senses.'²⁹⁴ In contrast to the detachment of Paterian sympathy, Lee's empathy is based on interaction and intersubjectivity. Suzanne Keen's *Empathy and the Novel* (2002) notes that empathy is a 'spontaneous, responsive sharing of an appropriate feeling as *empathy*' which is distinct from 'the more complex, differentiated feeling for another as *sympathy*.'²⁹⁵ It is an ethical model which shifts sympathy into the public sphere so as to guarantee social interaction, but, as we shall see, without relinquishing Pater's emphasis on the individuality of the perceiver. Lee's aesthetics of empathy is arguably a more workable model of ethics than Paterian sympathy, to the extent that its practitioners depart from their 'ivory towers.' In a recent study of Lee's writings on empathy, Carolyn Burdett has argued that this concept anticipated 20th-century preoccupations with the cultivation of human relations: 'Eventually, the specifically aesthetic connotations of empathy faded away to be replaced with our current sense of empathy as denoting a relation between self and (human) other rather than self and object.'²⁹⁶ I suggest that Lee's revision of Paterian 'sympathy' constitutes one of the ways Aestheticism's emphasis on the individuality of the critic modulates into a type of aesthetic criticism which suited the cultural climate of

²⁹⁴ 'sympathy, n.'. OED Online. July 2011. Oxford University Press. [5 July 2011] <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/196271?rskey=CTjzTJ&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>. (Dates of usage for this sub-definition: 1579-1883).

²⁹⁵ Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 4.

²⁹⁶ Carolyn Burdett, "'The subjective inside us can turn into the object outside": Vernon Lee's Psychological Aesthetics,' in *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, No 12 (2011): 26.

the early twentieth-century, one which placed pressure on the ‘ivory tower’ of Paterian sympathy.

Lee’s empathy is anchored to her concern for a broader notion of audience because there is no need for the scholarly detachment that underlies the homosocial membership of Paterian Aestheticism. However, simply by removing detachment from the equation, Lee’s aesthetics of empathy is not free from Paterian elitism: it does not therefore mean that her Aestheticism is open to the public at large. Lee’s aesthetics of empathy refines Paterian sympathy as an activity which attunes us to others by removing the element of detachment, but the appreciation of art’s singularity still depends upon critical activities which demand a skilled practitioner. Lee, therefore, does not discontinue assuming an ‘ideal’ reader who will preserve that Paterian ‘specialness’ for the writer. Without the element of detachment, it seems Lee’s aesthetic practitioner has to exert more energy to gain an appreciation of the art work. In *Music and its Lovers: An Empirical Study of Emotional and Imaginative Responses to Music* (1932), Lee promotes a type of discrimination which is interactive and works towards the establishment of a reciprocal engagement with the art object:

those activities of discrimination and correlation
are not perceived as going on in ourselves but are
merged into what we are attending to, i.e. become
the character, the *quiddity* of the particular piece
of music, and thus until some of our activities

begin to flag, and instead of the piece of music clearly moving outside us, we notice a sense of difficulty or fatigue in ourselves.²⁹⁷

The critic appreciates the art work by becoming its ‘character’ and ‘quiddity.’ In this way, Lee promotes a vicarious and spontaneous mode of aesthetic engagement in which appreciation of art can only be achieved by assuming its very qualities. This vicarious activity is physically demanding, requiring the exertion of energy to sustain engagement with that which is ‘outside ourselves.’²⁹⁸ As I examine in the following chapter, Lee’s muscular disinterestedness extends Pater’s emphasis on the corporeality of aesthetic experience as a means to preserve the critic’s impartiality at all stages of engagement with art. Nonetheless, Lee’s Aestheticism is distinct from that of Pater and James for whom detachment preserves an element of egotism so that the individual can gain a purchase on his experiences, which threaten to engulf or control him. Lee, by contrast, is not prepared to allow egotism to compromise an interactive model of critical engagement, which aims to ensure that the aesthetic object which the critic has chosen to consider is central. She goes as far as to argue that egotism represents ‘our incapacity for keeping it [active attention] up.’ And so whilst, as Gerald Monsman has argued, the Paterian critic can ‘co-opt or turn that Other into a reordered reflection of his own image,’²⁹⁹ Lee makes it clear in her essay ‘On Style’ that her critic should ‘reproduce the object and trust...its reproducing...impressions’³⁰⁰ in order to

²⁹⁷ Lee, *Music and its Lovers*, p. 111.

²⁹⁸ Lee, *The Beautiful*, p. 62.

²⁹⁹ Gerald Monsman, ‘Introduction: On Reading Pater’, p. 4.

³⁰⁰ Lee, ‘On Style,’ p. 39.

appreciate its otherness and unfamiliarity in terms defined by the object under observation. As Kristin Mahoney notes, Lee hopes that this sort of relationship will ‘lead to the loss of mastery, dominance and control on the part of the subject.’³⁰¹ Lee anticipates that this type of appreciation of aesthetic empathy preserves (by reproducing) the obscure elusiveness of her writings.

She argues that active modes of attention are the most selfless and, in turn, the most morally substantive. Active attention, she argues, is ‘the most altruistic of all things’ because it prompts us to appreciate ‘something outside ourselves.’ We can trace elements of Arnoldian disinterestedness in Lee’s writings; for example, her assertion (which I quoted earlier) that ‘the moralist will recommend us to think rather in terms of “it is” than in those of “I am,”’ reminds us of Arnold’s emphasis on the morality of devoting criticism to ‘an interest wider than that of individuals.’ Here, we are reminded of the paradoxical nature of her critical frameworks: she uses Arnoldian frameworks, which are underscored with a dislike of difference and parochialism, in order to elevate a model of criticism which appreciates forms of art that constitute idiosyncratic expressions of perception. As I suggested earlier, Stefano Evangelista has argued that Lee subscribes to the view that ‘The duty of the critic is to keep questioning what societies construct as normative and not to censor or wage phobic wars on minorities.’³⁰² Lee is, to use her own phrase, ‘inclined to moralising allegories’ and in her supernatural fiction, as we have

³⁰¹ Kristin Mahoney, ‘Haunted Collections: Vernon Lee and Ethical Consumption,’ in *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*. 48 (Winter 2006): 43.

³⁰² Stefano Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 164.

seen, she frames her elusive aesthetic within such ‘moralising allegories’ in order to promote appreciation of an aesthetic that evades artistic convention in a didactic and instructive way. This is even more paradoxical when we take into account that Lee’s aesthetics of empathy promotes a mode of social interaction in which the practitioner’s identity is constantly in flux; she offers a more extreme version of Pater’s notion that we may be but a ‘a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream.’³⁰³ Lee’s removal of detachment from the process of discrimination and her emphasis on discrimination as a vicarious process in which the critic must ‘become the character, the quiddity’ of the work leads to her view that ‘The *Self* is a highly variable and perpetually varying spiritual (for I know you hate the words *psychological* and *subjective*) complex.’³⁰⁴ She revises the structure through which the individual could redefine himself and anticipates twentieth-century concepts of identification, in which, to quote Mikkel Borch-Jacobson, ‘the other...gives me my identity.’³⁰⁵

In her supernatural fiction, Lee often mocks scholarly modes of detachment as that which prefigures social interaction. As we have seen, in ‘A Wicked Voice,’ Lee punishes the Norwegian composer, Magnus, for his assumption that an adequate understanding of Zaffirino can emerge from ‘a battered little volume.’ She does this by forcing Magnus to engage with the castrato on the ghostly figure’s own terms, a process which subjects Magnus to appreciating the affective qualities of the singer’s ‘wicked voice.’ Lee extends this mockery in ‘Amour Dure’ (1887, 1890) in which the Polish historian,

³⁰³ Pater, ‘Conclusion,’ pp. 209-10.

³⁰⁴ Vernon Lee, *Satan the Waster, Satan the Waster: A Philosophic War Trilogy with Notes and Introduction* (London: John Lane, 1920), p. 192.

³⁰⁵ Mikkel Borch-Jacobson quoted in Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds*, p. 1.

Spiridion Trepka, embarks on a research trip to rediscover the ancient ‘town of Urbania, forgotten of mankind, towered and battlemented on the high Apennine ridge.’³⁰⁶ Unlike Magnus, the historian is aware of the way scholarship precludes first-hand understanding of cultural artefacts, writing in his diary:

Is this folly? Is it falsehood? Am I not myself a product of modern, northern civilisation; is not my coming to Italy due to the very modern scientific vandalism, which has given me a travelling scholarship because I have written a book like all those other atrocious books of erudition and art-criticism? Nay, am I not here at Urbania on the express understanding that, in a certain number of months, I shall produce just another such book?³⁰⁷

Here, Spiridion articulates his awareness of the way historical scholarship is corruptively self-interested in both its design to impose modern-day priorities onto our understanding of the past and its subjection of the scholar to the pressures of producing the types of books Lee admonishes in ‘A Wicked Voice’ and elsewhere in her oeuvre.³⁰⁸ Throughout, Spiridion aims

³⁰⁶ Lee, ‘Amour Dure,’ in *Hauntings*, p. 42.

³⁰⁷ Lee, ‘Amour Dure,’ in *Hauntings*, p. 41.

³⁰⁸ In *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Medieval in the Renaissance* (1884), for example, she argues that ‘You find everywhere your facts without opening a book.’ (Vernon Lee, *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Medieval in the Renaissance* ((London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1884)), p.19; quoted in Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p. 141).

to overcome these limitations by gaining immediate social interaction with Medea da Carpe of Urbania who is presented as a notorious female antagonist with a reputation for violence in the Euripedes' myth. He is nonetheless subjected to the profession of 'modern scientific vandalism,'³⁰⁹ which undermines his desire to gain first-hand interaction with Medea. He claims to feel 'attracted by the strange figure of a woman' prior to 'coming here,' but this attraction, he informs us, 'appeared from out of the dry pages of Gualtero's and Padre de Sanctis' histories of this place.'³¹⁰ He pursues this attraction further via the same modes of detached scholarly research, spending hours in the Urbanian archives to construct a body of work that, he claims, offers a sense of Medea. He claims to gain an understanding that emerges from his 'sense of fact': 'And still it seems to me that I understand her so well; so much better than my facts warrant.'³¹¹ He overlooks those accounts which present Medea as a violent figure, insisting that they are the 'product[s] of modern, northern civilisation,' arguing that 'First we must put aside all pedantic modern ideas of right and wrong. Right and wrong in a century of violence and treachery does not exist, least of all for creatures like Medea.'³¹² Nonetheless, Lee registers how Spiridion is not exempt from the self-interested methods of scholarship which he claims to counteract when Spiridion asks 'Am I turning novelist instead of historian?' His status as a detached scholar allows him to re-order the facts in order to 'co-opt or

³⁰⁹ Lee, 'Amour Dure,' in *Hauntings*, p. 41.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-6.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

turn that Other into a reordered reflection of his own image.’³¹³ She thus critiques the Paterian scholar’s ‘sense of fact.’

Spiridion, like Magnus, is punished for his bookish engagement with the Medea myth. His decision that Medea has been marginalised by scholarship leads him to locate the site that he anticipates will allow him to interact with this figure. The fact that scholarship ill-prepares Spiridion for this pursuit is registered in his failed attempts to locate the site; Lee, in a mocking tone, demonstrates how scholarship is antithetical to first-hand experience:

We returned home late, my companion in excessively bad humour at the fruitlessness of the expedition...I sang and shouted, to my companion’s horror. This will be a bad point against me if reported at Berlin. A historian of twenty-four who starts and sings, and that when another historian is cursing at the snow and the bad roads.³¹⁴

Lee contests the purposeful intentions of the modern traveller in her essay ‘On Modern Travelling,’ in which she ‘plea[s] against our modern, rapid, hurried travelling,’³¹⁵ claiming ‘there is to decent minds a certain element of

³¹³ Gerald Monsman, ‘Introduction: On Reading Pater,’ p. 4.

³¹⁴ Lee, ‘Amour Dure,’ p. 60.

³¹⁵ Lee, ‘On Modern Travelling,’ p. 95.

humiliation therein.³¹⁶ Magnus' frustration at the 'fruitlessness of the expedition' demonstrates the way he is unprepared to engage empathetically with his surroundings. Had Magnus connected with the landscape and intuitively registered its hostility, he may not have pursued his subject. In the same way that Magnus does not register the resistance of his local surroundings, he fails intuitively to acknowledge the powerful notoriety of his historical subject. When he eventually locates the site, Medea kills Spiridion.

Vernon Lee's version of the Medea myth contests late-19th-century recuperations of this figure as a 'culturally marginalised Other.'³¹⁷ This includes Amy Levy's dramatic monologue 'Medea' in which the titular figure narrates the way she feels 'confined/ In limits of conception.'³¹⁸ This is markedly different to other appropriations—such as Lee's 'Amour Dure'—in which Medea is a peripheral presence and her alleged victims are the narrative focus. Lee seems to challenge sympathetic recuperations of the Medea myth on the grounds that writers such as Levy do so to benefit their own social amelioration, rather than appreciate the otherness and obscurity of this figure. As Edward Philips notes, Amy Levy's portrayal of Medea seeks to rediscover her as 'a resource of resistance and a narrative of displacement, through which she could examine the gender and racial politics of the late Victorian period and her own status as a culturally

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Edward Philips, 'Amy Levy's "Medea": Hellenism and Anarchy', in *Medea: Mutations & Permutations of a Myth* (University of Bristol, July 2006), p. 1.

³¹⁸ Levy, 'Medea (A FRAGMENT IN DRAMA FORM, AFTER EURIPIDES),' *A Minor Poet And other Verse* (T. Fisher Unwin: London, 1891), p. 35.

marginalised Other.³¹⁹ Lee's portrayal of the scholar who utilizes culture in order to suit his own theoretical agenda is part of her wider elevation of impressionistic criticism, which, unlike historical criticism, is disinterested and not pre-emptive. This interpretation of Lee's preoccupations challenges Christa Zorn's argument that 'Amour Dure' exposes the 'limitations of conventional (male) historiography.'³²⁰ Whilst Lee is indeed challenging the self-interested perspective of traditional historiography, she is not particularly interested in critiquing gender: her point is rather that historians should not be sympathetic towards a violent figure such as Medea simply because she is a culturally marginalised figure.³²¹

It is ironic that we learn of Spiridion's death in the form of a peripatetic, editorial gloss, which contrasts with the historian's short, emotively frantic tone as he expresses his alarmed pleasure at coming face-to-face with Medea:

A step on the staircase! It is she! it is she! At last,
 Medea, Medea! Ah! AMOUR DURE—DURE
 AMOUR!

³¹⁹ Edward Philips, 'Amy Levy's "Medea,"' p. 1.

³²⁰ Zorn, *Vernon Lee*, p. 162.

³²¹ Lee's meta-narrative of late 19th-century appropriations of historical figures is fitting considering that the reputation of Vernon Lee in the 1980s and 1990s typically reflected the priorities of feminist scholars who sought to show that she aimed to extend aestheticism's fields of reception to a broader audience. Like Spiridion who aims to overwrite accounts of Medea as a violent figure, scholars in the late 20th-century overlooked Lee's status as an elite figure, or as a somewhat intimated Henry James noted: 'a tiger cat!' (James quoted in Leon Edel, *Henry James Letters: 1883–1895* (London: Macmillan, 1980)), p. 403).

NOTE—Here ends the diary of the late Spiridion Trepka. The chief newspapers of the province of Umbria informed the public that, on Christmas morning of that year 1885, the bronze equestrian statue of Robert II had been found grievously mutilated; and that Professor Spiridion Trepka of Posen, in the German Empire, had been discovered dead of a stab in the region of the heart, given by an unknown hand.³²²

This peripheral scholarly note—written in the past tense and supported with biographical detail—draws our attention to the fact that we are reading the diary extracts collated by another scholar who is equally capable of re-ordering the facts to suit his own agenda. This detail underlines the allegorical direction of Lee's supernatural fiction which aims to demonstrate that scholarly detachment does not offer the appropriate means of understanding the affective qualities of the 'Other.' In turn, she aims to subtly instruct readers to engage with art in a particular way, an ambition which, as we have seen, evolves from her mistrust of the reader and refusal to relinquish her authorial responsibility.

Conclusion: Aestheticism and the Ethics of Detachment

For Pater, detached modes of response are ethical because they enable the critic to extend his self-knowledge and, in turn, refine his ability to relate to

³²² Ibid., p. 30.

others. The reader's detachment from the world is a precondition for social interaction. As we have seen, Pater nonetheless registers the tensions which underscore his claim that aesthetic appreciation makes us more sympathetic: he uses his fiction to highlight the way this ethical model does not necessarily commit us to ethical action and may lead to hedonistic, nihilistic behaviour. Pater's elite practitioner is not *required* to depart from his ivory tower once he has been conditioned for social interaction. Henry James continues to preserve Paterian detachment in order to promote idiosyncratic aesthetic experience, which is ethical because it cultivates individual judgments that undermine normative prescriptions of artistic expression. It is this element of detachment which constitutes Jamesian elitism. James, however, does not anticipate the precise social consequences of aesthetic experience: such consequences are left open to an unpredictable set of social relations. This circumstance represents a further demonstration of James' commitment to the idiosyncratic nature of human experience, which is 'never complete.' It is anchored to the way James regards the acquirement of self-knowledge as a continual process and his concern with how art conveys this process of *acquiring* knowledge, rather than with how art conveys the manner in which the artist knows himself and how he has 'ascertained' his 'own sense exactly.' Meanwhile, Lee removes this element of detachment in order to ensure that the aesthetic practitioner departs from his 'ivory tower' to promote a spontaneous and vicarious mode of engagement. However, simply by removing detachment from the equation, Lee's aesthetics of empathy is not free from elitism: it does not therefore mean that her Aestheticism is open to the public at large. Lee's aesthetics of empathy refines Paterian sympathy as an activity which attunes us to others by removing

the element of detachment, but the appreciation of art's singularity still depends upon critical activities which demand a skilled practitioner. Lee, therefore, also presupposes an 'ideal' reader who will preserve that Paterian 'specialness' for the writer. Without the element of detachment, it seems Lee's aesthetic practitioner has to exert more energy to gain an appreciation of the art work.

—CHAPTER THREE—

‘MIND IN STYLE’: AESTHETICISM AND
PSYCHOLOGY

In 1886, Walter Pater insisted that style of high quality should ‘aim at the combination of as many excellences as possible.’¹ As a practitioner of his own theoretical proposals, Pater’s style absorbs a diverse range of references from literary and intellectual culture to the point at which these components become features of the work’s distinctive and innovative characteristics. In *The Renaissance*, Pater’s half-acknowledged borrowing of Arnold’s definition of disinterested criticism demonstrates his dextrous ability to appropriate other sources to suit his own theoretical agenda, in this way constructing a mode of literary expression which reflects the individual priorities and singular experiences of the writer. In 1883, Pater terms this practice ‘personification’; celebrating Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s style, he describes it as requiring the artist to manage his materials ‘with the force of a Frankenstein.’² As Jason Camlot has demonstrated, Pater assimilates ‘foreign’ sources and makes them his own. Camlot’s account of Pater’s writing process seeks to ‘show how Pater positions himself against a climate of linguistic xenophobia and intellectual professionalization by analyzing his theorization of writing as one of a laborious assimilation of eclectic cultural influence.’³ In ‘Style,’ Pater continues to elaborate on the densely intertextual stylistic dynamics of his

¹ Pater, ‘English Literature,’ p. 15.

² Walter Pater, ‘Dante Gabriel Rossetti,’ 1883, in *Appreciations*, p. 232.

³ Camlot, *Style and the Nineteenth-Century British Critic*, p. 9.

writing, describing his works as ‘product[s] of a myriad various minds and contending tongues, compact of obscure and minute association’ which in turn become formulations of ‘often recondite laws.’⁴ Here, Pater is defending Aestheticism’s traditional emphasis on the relationship between artistic integrity and the esoteric nature of a work’s stylistic properties which assumes readers with ‘really strenuous minds.’⁵ Moreover, he is defining literary innovation as a process that involves the reworking of other sources and influences in terms that are relative to the individual writer, thus prefiguring T.S Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919). Read in this light, the diffuse yet precise nature of Paterian style invites ‘a critical tracing out’ of its ‘conscious artistic [intertextual] structure.’

In 1978, Ian Small alerted our attention towards the importance of identifying the sources which shape the ‘highly specialized...set of terms and concepts’⁶ of Pater’s impressionistic criticism. It becomes apparent, Small argues, that:

Pater was adapting for his own special purposes terms and ideas that had been generated by a discourse at first sight completely removed from literary and art-criticism—that of British

⁴ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 9.

⁵ Ibid., p.14.

⁶ Ian Small, ‘The Vocabulary of Pater’s Criticism and the Psychology of Aesthetics,’ in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 18 (1, 1978): 81.

Psychology in the eighteen-sixties and early
eighteen-seventies.⁷

Small concludes by noting that the permeability between psychology and aesthetics may evolve from the way ‘a description of the human mind proposed itself as the legitimate object of their respective discourses.’⁸ This permeability is further enhanced by the fact that writers of physiological psychology (e.g. Alexander Bain, Herbert Spencer and James Sully) and aesthetes (e.g. Pater, James and Lee) published in the same leading Victorian periodicals, such as *The Fortnightly Review*, *Westminster Review* and *The Contemporary Review*. Indeed, Pater’s diffusive style provides a particularly fertile medium for psychological discourse to infuse his writings on aesthetic criticism with details of the psychological and physiological mechanisms that construct those modes of response that are properly attuned to form. In addition, the highly self-conscious nature of his style with its aim ‘to do consciously what has been done hitherto for the most part unconsciously’⁹ builds psychology’s theories of consciousness into the formal dynamics of his writings.¹⁰ This view of Pater’s aesthetic extends Angela Leighton’s thesis that his very style of creativity is a commentary on those values to which he most urgently draws attention: Pater’s aesthetic manifesto, Leighton asserts, is embodied within ‘the whoozy sway of his sentences.’¹¹ This stylistic mode allows Pater to explore the various links between aesthetic form, human consciousness and ethics in a demonstrative

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 87.

⁹ Pater, *Appreciations*, p. 260.

¹⁰ In ‘Style,’ Pater writes: ‘a condition of literary art, which, in contradistinction to another quality of the artist himself, to be spoken of later, I shall call the necessity of *mind* in style.’ (Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 18).

¹¹ Ibid, p.78.

way, while at the same time enabling him to construct interpretative conditions that invite a critical practice which develops the ethical consciousness of its practitioners. As the previous chapter argued, this critical practice presents a complex tension between ethics and elitism because, whilst it preconditions its practitioners for social interaction, it requires a specialist to undertake it. This chapter aims to re-explain how that tension inhabits disinterestedness (as a critical and philosophical concept) by examining how it is formulated by reference to psychological concepts.¹²

As I have suggested in the previous two chapters, the degree of responsibility Pater, Lee and James are prepared to transfer to the reader determines the ways in which each writer is able to construct interpretative conditions that prompt individualised modes of response. The writer's construction of the dynamics that exist between reader and writer determines the social implications of his or her model of 'ideal' aesthetic response. I have argued in earlier chapters that Aestheticism promotes elitist frameworks of readerly engagement as essential for the cultivation of those individualised and private modes of response which precondition the individual for social interaction. My concern in the present chapter is with the ways in which late-19th-century psychological discourses might further inform our understanding of this tension between elitism and ethics which inhabits the critical concepts that Pater, James and Lee deploy. I consider how attention to contemporary

¹² It is important to remember 'that the conceptual heritage derived from philosophical discussion determined to a great extent the appearance and substance of the leading psychological issues addressed by nineteenth-century minds.' (Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 40).

psychological discourses can help us to understand or illuminate the suggestion by Pater, James and Lee that to be attuned to form one must respond to a literary work in a special way. I focus on those terms which feature as subcategories of the broader critical concept of ‘disinterestedness,’ such as ‘impressions,’ ‘experience’ and ‘discrimination,’ arguing that they emerge from attention to complex interior states. In this way I hope to offer a new account of those problems associated with the way the social implications of Aestheticism are undermined by but also held to depend upon an elitist set of requirements that precondition the reader’s responsiveness to literary works.

3.1 ‘Brain-Building’ and ‘Sympathetic Link[s]’: Pater’s Muscular Aestheticism, Physiological Psychology and The Formation of an Ethical Consciousness

Pater makes it difficult for us to ascertain the interactions between modes of response that are intuitive on the one hand, and those which are discriminatory on the other. Whilst these modes of response constitute two different stages of aesthetic appreciation as a developmental process, their interplay is not unidirectional: they are mutually dependent upon one another. As I go on to argue, the complex nature of this model means that it is unclear as to whether aesthetic appreciation is a taught activity or whether it is reserved for those with an innate ability to be receptive to and discriminatory of new impressions simultaneously. The complexity of this model is, of course, part of Pater’s elitism: the critic must become ‘one complex medium of reception’ in order to be considered qualified as an aesthetic practitioner. At the same time, it is important to understand how the complexity of this model is important for

the construction of those individualised modes of response that precondition the individual for social interaction.

This interplay between intuitive and discriminatory critical practices which structures Paterian disinterestedness marks a shift in the way late-Victorians re-conceived the ‘mind’ as a physiological concept, thus arguing that our intellectual life is located in brain physiology and the body generally.¹³ This challenges Lockean associationism by viewing knowledge and all mental processes as based on physical sensations, rather than viewing the ‘mind’ as an ‘empty cabinet,’ a *tabula rasa*, and thus entirely dependent on education and experience.¹⁴ Pater’s aesthetic theory can be partly understood by reference to the terms that the proto-psychologist Alexander Bain deployed in *Mind and Body: The Theories of their Relation* (1859; 1873), a study which interrogates the interdependent qualities of the relationship—or to use his own phrase ‘the terms of the alliance’¹⁵—between ‘our physical framework’¹⁶ and ‘thought.’¹⁷ Having worked on the assumption that ‘consciousness or mind’¹⁸ and ‘matter and material arrangements’¹⁹ are ‘united in the most intimate alliance,’²⁰ he concludes his study by re-describing the mind and soul as material entities

¹³ There is an important distinction between the terms ‘mind’ and ‘brain’ used here: the physiologists move away from thinking about the ‘mind’ in a metaphysical sense in an attempt to interrogate whether mental processes can be understood in terms of the physiology of the brain.

¹⁴ Ian Small notes how Pater derives this idea from Alexander Bain: ‘Cognition...was made possible by the patterns formed by “associated impression”... Pater’s famous language, his careful reiteration of the central vocabulary of recent psychology, especially *impression* and *discrimination*, seems to me to point to a considerable familiarity with works like Bain’s.’ (Small, ‘The Vocabulary of Pater’s Criticism,’ p. 86).

¹⁵ Alexander Bain, *Mind and Body: The Theories of their Relation* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873), p. 80.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

which together constitute ‘one substance, with two sets of properties, two sides, the physical and the mental—a *double-faced unity*.’²¹ In so doing he disrupts Descartes’ dualistic model that conceives mental activities as distinct from physical sensation. It also reminds us of Paterian disinterestedness in which the body’s corporeal, sensory susceptibility to new influences are part of the same process of discriminatory realization of incoming impressions. That is, discrimination, which allows the mind to personalise impressions, is a corporeal process. In 1883, the year of the third edition of *Mind and Body*, Pater incorporates Bain’s psychological concepts into his essay on ‘Dante Gabriel Rossetti’ when arguing that:

Spirit and matter, indeed, have been for the most part opposed, with a false contrast or antagonism by schoolmen, whose artificial creation those abstractions really are. In our actual concrete experience, the two trains of phenomena which the words *matter* and *spirit* do but roughly distinguish, play inextricably into each other.²²

²¹ Ibid., p. 196. Bain continues, claiming that ‘The organ of the mind is not the brain by itself; it is the brain, nerves, muscles and organs of sense...It is, therefore, in the present state of our knowledge, an entire misconception to talk of a *sensorium* within the brain, a *sanctum sanctorum*, or inner chamber, where impressions are poured in and stored up to be reproduced in a future day. There is no such chamber, no such mode of reception of outward influence.’ (Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect* ((London: John W. Parker, 1855)), p.61). Mind, Bain argues in ‘Common Errors on the Mind,’ is not a different fact from the body: ‘not a feeling can arise, not a thought can pass,’ he insists, ‘without a set of concurring bodily processes.’ (Alexander Bain, ‘Common Errors on the Mind,’ *Fortnightly Review*, 4 (1868): 160). G.H Lewes shared this view, arguing that: ‘The brain is simply one element in a complex mechanism, each element of which is a component of the Sensorium, or Sentient Ego. We may consider the several elements as forming a plexus of sensibilities...no one of them can be active without involving the activity of all the others’ (G. H Lewes, *Problems in Life and Mind: Mind as a Function of the Organism* ((London: Trubner, 1879)), p. 77).

²²Pater, ‘Dante Gabriel Rossetti,’ pp. 235-36.

Here, like Bain in his concluding chapter ‘History of the Theories of the Soul,’ Pater self-consciously challenges those philosophical and religious traditions which, as Rick Rylance explains, view the mind and body as ‘ontologically distinct, and...their relationship, even their natures, [as]...beyond enquiry.’²³ Pater challenges the idea that humans can transcend the everyday by linking the mind to the body, and in doing so re-situates the spirit in the same realm of enquiry that is usually reserved for matter; in his 1868 essay on William Morris, Pater describes ‘spirit’ as being composed of material elements, ‘phosphorus and lime and delicate fibres.’²⁴ To a substantial degree, Pater portrays the spirit as determined by and subject to the same environmental forces and external influences that ‘rust...iron and ripen...corn.’²⁵

As I examined in the previous chapter, the process of being receptive to external influences forms a crucial element of Paterian disinterestedness and aligns Pater with associationist psychologists such as Herbert Spencer who asserted: ‘the broadest and most complete definition of life will be—the continuous adjustment of internal relations to external relations.’²⁶ This adjustment, which enables the organism to adapt to its environment, is an instinctive and reflexive response to different kinds of stimuli. Spencer terms his mechanism of self-reflexivity a ‘compound reflex action.’²⁷ The notion that we are determined by our responses to our environments appeals to Paterian self-culture; it is experience (not dogmatic doctrine) which shapes the course of

²³ Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, p. 23.

²⁴ Pater, ‘Conclusion,’ p. 207. (This passage from Pater’s essay on Morris reappears in ‘The Conclusion’ to *The Renaissance* which is the text from which I am quoting).

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Biology*, Volume 1 (New York: Appleton, 1897), p. 80.

²⁷ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1 (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1855), p. 548.

development. This ‘compound reflex action’ underscores Pater’s conception of the individual as ‘a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream.’ Moreover, Spencerian associationism returns us to the heuristic components of Paterian disinterestedness, particularly its bold claim that the process of experience is ‘itself...the end,’²⁸ in which our sense-perceptions inform a state of high consciousness.

In his imaginary portrait, ‘The Child in the House’ (1879), Pater dramatises the concept of environmental determinism by portraying the childhood experiences of the main protagonist, Florian Deleal, as fundamental to the growth of his mental faculties and aesthetic consciousness. In this story, a middle-aged Florian revisits his childhood home in a dream. His somatic state affords an opportunity to reflect upon his experiences during that period of early development: ‘In the house and garden of his dream he saw a child moving’²⁹ and this allows him to ‘study...the first stage in that mental development.’³⁰ At this stage of his development, Florian is highly susceptible to new impressions to the point at which the child’s sensory and perceptual stimulations furnish his ‘house of thought’³¹ and construct ‘the texture of his mind.’³² The narrator generalizes this course of development, objectifying it as that which is representative of ‘that process of brain-building by which we are, each one of us, what we are.’³³ Pater uses the ‘house beautiful’ as a metaphor for the Spencerian notion that ‘individual experiences furnish the concrete

²⁸ Pater, ‘Conclusion,’ p. 210.

²⁹ Walter Pater, ‘The Child in the House,’ 1879, in *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1895), p. 173.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 184 and 186.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 176.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

materials for all thought.’³⁴ Over the course of the narrative, those seemingly ‘insignificant...influences of the sensible things which are tossed and fall and lie about us, so, or so, in the environment of early childhood’³⁵ are integrated into ‘a system of visible symbolism’³⁶: ‘irresistibly, little shapes, voices, accidents—the angle at which the sun in the morning fell on the pillow—become parts of the great chain wherewith we are bound.’³⁷ That is, these percepts accrue singular, individual significance in the mind of the perceiver; associations are, in this sense, a personal reconfiguration of his experiences. The associationist theory, then, accounts for a process of compilation, in which the individual is required to be predisposed to new experiences, *and* assimilation, in which the individual makes connections between his impressions so that ‘early experiences of feeling and thought’ might be ‘assigned house-room in our memory’ and ‘abide with us ever afterwards, thus, and not otherwise.’³⁸ This process of making connections between impressions reminds us that environmental determinism only represents one side of what Pater means by that ‘process of brain building.’ The idea that we are passively responsive to external stimuli is at odds with Pater’s emphasis on the individuality of the critic, and his engagement with physiological psychology goes beyond the notion that humans are the biological counterparts of ‘iron and...corn.’

³⁴ Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 582. (In this particular passage which I will refer to in more detail later, Spencer argues that the mind does not derive knowledge completely from experience but also from the transmission of inherited characteristics).

³⁵ Pater, ‘The Child in the House,’ p. 176.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 177-78.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

For Pater, we are, instead, ‘the most complex of the products of nature.’³⁹ In that previously (albeit partially) cited passage of *The Renaissance* in which human life is described as ‘but the concurrence renewed from moment to moment of forces parting sooner or later on their ways,’⁴⁰ Pater returns to his appropriation of ‘discrimination’ as a crucial component of critical disinterestedness. It ensures that the individual can self-manage that ‘sharp and importune reality,’ which threatens to determine us.⁴¹ He writes:

But when reflection begins to act upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force is suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions,—colour, odour, texture—in the mind of the observer.⁴²

It is this process which allows us to acquire ownership of our experiences (or associations) and manage their organization, so that ‘the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind.’⁴³ Discrimination is, in short, a process of assimilation which requires the individual to make personal and private selections. Pater would describe this as a selection process in which the individual ‘with absolutely truthful

³⁹ Pater, ‘Coleridge,’ p. 66.

⁴⁰ Pater, ‘Conclusion,’ p. 208.

⁴¹ As Douglas Mao has astutely observed: ‘Pater finds in the aesthetic an arena where the stealthy determination of our souls by outside forces might all be for the best...but also...locates in the same field of the aesthetic a way of getting some purchase on, perhaps even faintly evading, determination in general.’ (Douglas Mao, *Fateful Beauty: Aesthetic Environments, Juvenile Development, and Literature, 1860-1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010)), p. 80).

⁴² Pater, ‘Conclusion,’ pp. 208-9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

intention, amid the multitude of facts presented to him must needs select, and in selecting assert something of his own humour, something that comes not of the world without but of a vision within.⁴⁴

In 'The Child in the House,' this process of making nuanced, personal selections is paralleled to the arrangement of furnishings in a home, of 'the closely-drawn white curtain and the shaded lamp.'⁴⁵ In a contemporary review, one critic writes that in the portrait, 'The career of his soul was followed no further than the period of early youth' and describes his impression as 'received in a child-like, and so unconscious way.'⁴⁶ However, Pater builds an element of self-consciousness into the narrative by incorporating the practice of discrimination into its frame. Florian's childhood experiences are mediated through a dream; a year earlier the contemporary psychologist, James Sully, had described dreams as offering an opportunity for individuals to prove 'themselves to be possessed not only of their ordinary, but of their extraordinary power of reflection.'⁴⁷ The narrator of 'The Child in the House' describes the status of his dream in similar terms: it 'did for him [Florian] the office of the finer sort of memory, bringing its object to mind with a clearness, yet, as something happens in dreams, raised a little above itself, and above ordinary retrospect.'⁴⁸ This framing device provides an opportunity for Pater to depict the adult Florian re-experiencing childhood memories whilst in a state parallel to that of

⁴⁴ Pater, 'Style,' p. 5.

⁴⁵ Pater, 'The Child in the House,' pp. 178-9.

⁴⁶ John Miller Gray, 'Review of Marius,' 1885, in *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage*, ed. R.M Seiler (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 121.

⁴⁷ James Sully, 'Dreams,' in *Aesthetics, Dreams and Association of Ideas*, eds. James Sully and George Croom Robertson (Humboldt Publishing, 1888), p. 27.

⁴⁸ Pater, 'The Child in the House,' p. 171.

infant susceptibility. This allows Florian to reflect upon ‘how his thoughts had grown up to him’⁴⁹ and as such, ‘this accident of his dream was just the thing needed for the beginning of a certain design he then had in view, the noting, namely, of some things in the story of his spirit.’⁵⁰ It enables Florian to judge these experiences from a disinterested, detached critical perspective in a story which allows him to reflect upon the very ‘process of brain-building’ that has equipped him with these skills.

Furthermore, Pater incorporates into the structure of the narrative his definition of disinterestedness as a practice which involves two types of attention working synergistically together, thus demonstrating the complex critical practice which Florian is learning to undertake:

So he yielded himself to these things, to be played upon by them like a musical instrument, and began to note with deepening watchfulness, but always with some puzzled, unutterable longing in his enjoyment, the phases of the seasons and of the growing or waning day.⁵¹

The narrative techniques used in ‘The Child in the House’ replicate this complex model of perception. Pater creates distance by employing an uninvolved observer who adopts a third-person stance, which ensures that events are narrated in purportedly more objective (‘scientific’) terms. This

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 172.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 188.

guarantees that the narrative offers an analytical account of its description of mental processes rather than simply relaying Florian's introspective stance using the natural language of his experience. Rick Rylance notes that this stance poses 'the possibility (some would say likelihood) that the "third-person" perspective arrogates a vocabulary and address so chilly and alien to the person whose experiences are being described that he or she can barely recognize what occurred as his or her own.'⁵² By contrast, the language used in this particular context recalls the concept of Paterian impersonality. These objective or 'scientific' terms represent the vocabulary of the 'ideal' Paterian individual who should aim to give (as Max Saunders puts it) 'objective reality to...subjective experiences.'⁵³ This process involves discriminatory analysis of experiences, the sensations of which are the critic's main concern.

For Pater, this method of awareness stimulates the individual's understanding of his relationship with the world around him. Pater derives this concept of discrimination from Spencerian associationism, which builds an element of self-reflection into its theory that we are reflexive organisms, determined by our experiences (despite the fact Spencer views the 'will' as a developed reflex). In *Principles of Psychology*, Spencer explains:

Manifestly, every sensation, to be known as such, must be perceived—must become an object of perception; and hence, as thus considered, all

⁵² Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, p. 41.

⁵³ Max Saunders, *Self-Impression*, p. 60.

sensations are perceptions...Moreover, not only in sensation proper, do I contemplate the organic affection of myself—as a state of consciousness standing in certain relations to other states; but I also contemplate it as existing in a certain part of the body—as standing in certain relations of position.⁵⁴

Spencer's description of this process as one that allows him to 'contemplate' not only the 'organic affection of' himself but also to understand how his 'state of consciousness [is] standing in certain relations to other states' and 'of positions' maps onto the way Paterian discrimination folds into Paterian relativity by prompting us to recognise our complex 'relation to the world.' Spencer's ideas again underlie Pater's sensory modes of perception in which knowledge is derived from physical sensation: that which is sensually perceived constructs the individual's intellectual life.

Paterian discrimination as a process which prefigures Paterian relativity also draws on the work of Bain which centres on the principle that 'Relativity ...coincides with Discrimination—the sense of Feeling of Difference.'⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Bain terms this ability to identify 'the seemingly innumerable shades of our consciousness in correspondence of sensible appearances'⁵⁶ 'our discriminative sensibility,'⁵⁷ and describes it as 'an

⁵⁴ Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 279.

⁵⁵ Bain, *Mind and Body*, p. 81.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

apparatus of great range and complication.’⁵⁸ He awards discrimination the highest place in his hierarchy of mental functions, arguing that this faculty distinguishes ‘civilized’ minds from their ‘primitive’ counterparts: ‘Discrimination is the very beginning of our intellectual life... Whenever a man is more knowing than his fellows he sees distinctions where they see none.’⁵⁹ Spencer too positions discrimination as a mechanism practiced by those organisms best equipped to survive, noting that whilst this mechanism ‘is manifest ...throughout all life, brute and human, more or less of this discrimination is exercised by higher creatures than by lower.’⁶⁰ Spencer is thus most focused on how discrimination functions as a crucial mechanism for survival, which, when refined, allows the organism to ‘know what is eatable and what is not; which creatures to pursue and which to fly; what materials are fit for these purposes and what for those.’⁶¹ We can see how useful Spencer is for Pater’s project to make aesthetic experience the highest and most valued by tracing Spencerian evolutionary logic in the opening paragraph of ‘Style’ in which Pater registers the notion that discrimination plays a central role in our mental development and suggests that aesthetic form offers a sophisticated tool to enhance our ability to discriminate:

Since all progress of mind consists for the most part in differentiation, in the resolution of an obscure and complex object into its component aspects, it is surely the stupidest of losses to

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 83-4.

⁶⁰ Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 339.

⁶¹ Ibid.

confuse things which right reason has put asunder, to lose the sense of achieved distinctions, the distinction between poetry and prose, for instance, or, to speak more exactly, between the laws and characteristic excellences of verse and prose composition.⁶²

Pater applies an evolutionary concept of progress to the cultivation of aesthetic taste; at one point, he even associates ‘well-bred person[s]’ with ‘good taste.’⁶³ In the above extract, Pater implies that aesthetic discrimination is essential for intellectual development, describing the loss of a ‘sense of achieved distinctions...between poetry and prose’ to be ‘the stupidest of losses.’ The operative word here is, of course, ‘stupidest’ in a sentence which implies that we will regress to a state of being slow-witted, obtuse and lacking in sensibility if we lose the ability to make aesthetic distinctions. The paragraph as a whole also suggestively proposes that aesthetic difficulty should be valued in instrumental terms: the task of identifying the ‘component aspects’ of ‘an obscure and complex object’ that aesthetic prose invites promises to contribute towards that ‘process of brain-building’ or ‘progress of mind.’ This proposition anticipates James’ privileging of the opacity of the impression as a cipher for evoking the complexity of experience, which, as Martha Nussbaum has argued, makes

⁶² Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 1.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 11. (Pedantry being only the scholarship of *le cuistre* (we have no English equivalent) he is no pedant, and does but show his intelligence of the rules of language in his freedoms with it, addition or expansion, which like the spontaneities of manner in a well-bred person will still further illustrate good taste.—The right vocabulary!’ ((Pater, ‘Style,’ pp.10-11))).

the Jamesian novel ‘a paradigm of moral activity.’⁶⁴ Novel-reading, she argues, is a morally edifying activity when the novelist ‘create[s], in imagination’ the ‘actualization’ of the ‘fine possibilities of the actual.’⁶⁵ This is part of Nussbaum’s wider argument that reading Henry James makes us become ‘a sensitive and empathic interpreter’⁶⁶ of others.

Pater elaborates on aesthetic discrimination and its instrumentality in the process of ‘brain-building.’ Unlike Spencer, Pater does not account for discrimination (or, to use the sibling term, ‘differentiation’ that is deployed in ‘Style’) as a survival tool in a primitive context because he is assuming an elite readership—that ‘select few,’ those ‘men of a finer thread.’ The ethical corollary of discrimination for Pater does not concern primitive matters of selective ingestion, but focuses rather on civilized matters: this practice enables the individual to orientate himself within a complex ‘world of fine gradations’ and to use this newly acquired self-knowledge to become more sympathetic towards others. For Florian Deleal, the ‘process of brain-building’ involves the formation of his ethical consciousness, a process which is also referred to as ‘the gradual expansion of the soul which had come to be there.’⁶⁷ At the start of the narrative, Florian commits an ethical, sympathetic act to help ‘a poor aged man...with the burden which he carried, a certain distance.’⁶⁸ This indicates that Florian’s ethical

⁶⁴ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 148.

⁶⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, “‘Finely Aware and Richly Responsible’: Moral Attention and the Moral Task of Literature,” in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 82, No. 10, Oct., 1985 p. 529.

⁶⁶ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 63.

⁶⁷ Pater, ‘The Child in the House,’ p.172.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

consciousness (the development of which is the subject of this portrait) is fully formed. The process of discriminating his impressions results in Florian's developing sense of an obligation to respond sympathetically towards others:

There were times when he could think of the necessity he was under of associating all thoughts to touch and sight, as a sympathetic link between himself and actual, feeling, living objects.⁶⁹

His responsiveness to sensory stimulation preconditions Florian to feel affinities between himself and others. In particular, the suffering of others induces a condition of pain within him: his mother's 'cry on the stair'⁷⁰ at news of his father's death 'struck into his soul forever'⁷¹ whilst he intuits his dying cat's 'hundred different expressions of voice'⁷² and 'one wild morning of pain.'⁷³ These instances reveal Florian's capacity to demonstrate consideration for others, but it is the moment at which he acts on these induced feelings which constitutes a significant stage of development in the formation of his ethical consciousness. When he hears a caged bird emit 'a responsive cry'⁷⁴ towards 'its young ones,'⁷⁵ he releases the 'mother-bird'⁷⁶: 'at last, with the first light, though not till after some debate with himself, he went down and

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.187.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 183.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 184.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

opened the cage, and saw a sharp bound of the prisoner up to her nestlings.’⁷⁷

On committing this ethical act, he finds an ‘architectural place,’ as Pater terms it in ‘Style,’ within ‘the great structure of human life’.⁷⁸

and therewith came the sense of remorse,—he too was become an accomplice in moving, to the limit of his small power, the springs and handles of that great machine in things, constructed so ingeniously to play pain-fugues on the delicate nerve-work of living creatures.⁷⁹

It becomes clear that sympathy is representative of the individual’s revised realization of his relationship with the world, and that this process involves the suspension of self-interest so that ‘pain-fugues’ can ‘play...on...[our] delicate nerve-work’ and the re-entry of these self-interests so that the individual can discriminate his impressions and re-orientate himself within a complex world.

Florian describes the maturation of his ethical sympathies as ‘the growth of an almost diseased sensibility to the spectacle of suffering,’⁸⁰ which develops whilst his appreciation for ‘choice form’⁸¹ deepens. Here, Pater’s use of the word ‘diseased’ registers the problem of altruism for Darwinian evolutionary psychology. By aiding the survival of the unfit, altruism poses as a contradiction to the competitive model of individualism

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 36.

⁷⁹ Pater, ‘The Child in the House,’ p. 184.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 181.

⁸¹ Ibid.

on which evolutionary psychology is based. Spencer defined altruism as an action ‘unconscious or conscious’ that ‘involves expenditure of individual life to the end of increasing life in other individuals’⁸² and argued that altruistic acts were necessary for social evolution because those communal groups populated with selfish individuals were least likely to survive.⁸³ Spencer anticipated ‘the disappearance from future generations of the nature that is not altruistic enough’⁸⁴ and ‘a gradual decrease in the egoistic satisfaction of its members.’⁸⁵ As we have seen, the fact that sympathy is central to Paterian ethics can be explained by reference to Spencerian discrimination, which involves a reflection on our affective states that enables us to relate sympathetically and, consequently, behave altruistically towards others. However, Spencer—and, in turn, Pater—noted that becoming more altruistic would compromise the pleasure which individualistic, selfish acts afforded. In *The Man Versus the State* (1884), whilst Spencer noted that ‘selfishness...tramples on the freedom of citizens,’ he forewarned that the ‘state of transition’ to a more altruistic society would ‘of course be an unhappy state.’⁸⁶ He writes:

⁸² Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, Volume 1, 1893 (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1978), p. 231.

⁸³ This view is based on Charles Darwin’s often overlooked endorsement of altruism as a behaviour that is not incompatible with competitive individualism: ‘With strictly social animals, natural selection sometimes acts indirectly on the individual, through the preservation of variations which are beneficial only to the community. A community including a large number of well-endowed individuals increases in number and is victorious over other and less well-endowed communities; although each separate member may gain no advantage over the other members of the same community. With associated insects many remarkable structures, which are of little or no service to the individual or its own offspring, such as the pollen-collecting apparatus, or the sting of the worker-bee, or the great jaws of soldier-ants, have been acquired.’ (Charles Darwin quoted in St. George Mivart, *The Genesis of Species* (New York: D. Appleton, 1871), pp. 207-8).

⁸⁴ Spencer, *Principles of Ethics*, p. 234.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁸⁶ Herbert Spencer, *The Man Versus the State*, 1884 (London: Williams and Norgate, 1902), pp. 41-42.

Humanity is being pressed against the inexorable necessities of its new position—is being moulded into harmony with them, and has to bear the resulting unhappiness as best it can. The process must be undergone, and the sufferings must be endured.⁸⁷

Pater's 'The Child in the House' dramatizes how individualistic Aesthetic discrimination can be ethical while at the same time pointing to the tension in that model. For Pater, the more the aesthete uses his enlarged sympathy to *act in altruistic ways*, the more the discriminatory individualism which promotes that sympathy in the first place is compromised. Pater's use of the word 'diseased' registers the paradox, alluded to earlier, in Aestheticism's individualistic model of ethical activity. Florian's altruism may actually be socially injurious because it requires a type of self-sacrifice that hinders the individualistic and private acts of aesthetic contemplation that are required to develop that ethical consciousness which makes us altruistic in the first instance. The term 'diseased' also accounts for the way altruism is a behaviour which evolves from discrimination as a corporeal process that is reflexive and instinctive; Florian is unable to go beyond his physiological limits in order to evade this 'disease.' We are reminded of the distinguishing feature of Paterian ethics, which, as I argued in chapter two, is that they contain no injunction to act. The aesthete cannot act in altruistic ways without being self-contradictory.

⁸⁷ Spencer, *Man Versus the State*, p. 68.

In 'Style,' Pater situates Spencer's envisioning of the social utility of discriminating one's impressions in the very specific context of aesthetic discrimination.⁸⁸ When explaining that the practice is crucial to mental development, he reveals that those who undertake this practice must exercise sympathy: 'Into the mind sensitive to "form,"' he writes, 'a flood of random sounds, colours, incidents, is ever penetrating from the world without, to become, by sympathetic selection, a part of its very structure.'⁸⁹ This returns us to aesthetic appreciation as a process that preconditions its practitioners for social interaction and to the coda of 'Style' in which, as I have previously noted, Pater defines 'great art' as that which is 'devoted ...to the enlargement of our sympathies with each other.'⁹⁰ By heightening our ability to differentiate and make distinctions between the various 'component' elements of a complex work of art, we are preconditioned to exercise the same skills that we practice when acquiring knowledge of ourselves and our relationship with each other.

Pater's incorporation of the psychological concept of associationism into the stylistic dynamics of his writings inculcates readers in the type of aesthetic experience which 'enlarges our sympathies.'⁹¹ As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Pater describes his writings as 'compact, of

⁸⁸ It is important to note that Spencer's theorisation of discrimination applies to non-aesthetic context. For Spencer, aesthetic activities are a result of the play instinct. He writes: 'this activity of the intellectual faculties in which they are not used for purposes of guidance in the business of life, is carried on partly for the sake of the pleasure of the activity itself, and partly for the accompanying satisfaction of certain egoistic feelings which find for the moment no other sphere.' (Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 2 ((London: Williams and Norgate, 1872)) p. 631).

⁸⁹ Pater, 'Style,' p. 28.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁹¹ Pater, 'Style,' p. 36.

obscure and minute association.’ Those percepts which accrue personal, referential significance within the mind of the writer are synthesised into the aesthetic dynamics of the work, and thus contribute towards a style that requires a highly attentive reader who will be ‘a minute and constant observer’ of the ‘physiognomy’⁹² of words; Pater asserts that aesthetic prose requires a reader who is ‘full of eyes.’ It is the difficulty of these works which activates self-conscious modes of attentive engagement within the reader. This attentive self-consciousness preconditions the reader for sympathetic interactions with others by equipping him with the skills to be ‘Alive to the value of an atmosphere in which every term finds its utmost degree of expression.’⁹³ Of course, those readers best equipped to acquire an ‘intimate grasp of the author’s sense’ will be those who have been exposed to the same experiences of the writer, or those with the ability to decode the complexity of their formal composition.⁹⁴ This anticipates Henry James’ emphasis in ‘The Art of Fiction’ on an exposure to capacious experience as necessary for making discriminatory judgments. Pater’s emphasis on the reader’s experience as that which is equivalent to the writer’s underpins his specification of a ‘scholar writing for the scholarly’ and explains why he requires readers with a ‘scholarly conscience’ who exercise ‘that scholarly attentiveness of mind’ he declares to be ‘recommending.’ For Pater, the ideal reader is one who will ‘have undergone exact trial’⁹⁵ and have a proven ability to attend rigorously to ‘that frugal closeness of style which makes the

⁹² Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 17.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 9.

⁹⁴ This is resonant of Herbert Spencer’s concept that ‘the aesthetic pleasure derived from form though not great in the uncultured, becomes relatively voluminous in the cultured, by wealth of associations.’ (Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 2., p. 641).

⁹⁵ Pater, ‘Style,’ p.15.

most of every word.’⁹⁶ This is of course the elitist aspect of Pater’s incorporation of associationism into the stylistic dimensions of his writings, and somewhat undermines the ethical self-consciousness that it activates.

Nonetheless, it is this elitist requirement of high self-consciousness and attention to the synergy between formal and referential precision in works of art which prefigures the high point of aesthetic experience by ‘yield[ing]’ what Pater in ‘The Conclusion’ describes as ‘a quickened, multiplied consciousness.’⁹⁷ For Pater, aesthetic discrimination ‘variegat[e]s’⁹⁸ and ‘multiplie[s]’⁹⁹ our emotional range by prompting us to categorize our emotions into an extensive range of groups. This idea which is central to the ethical agenda of Paterian aesthetic experience is infused with concepts drawn from late-Victorian psychological discourse. For example, as Ian Small noted in the late 1970s, James Sully, a psychologist who we can align most closely to Pater due to the way he situates the theories of Bain and Spencer within the context of aesthetic experience and aesthetic consciousness, asserts that: ‘the multiplication of distinct emotional elements by means of discriminative and assimilative activities...supplies the materials for more extended groups of revived ideal feelings.’¹⁰⁰ For

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁹⁷ Pater, ‘Conclusion,’ p. 213.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 210.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 213.

¹⁰⁰ James Sully, *Sensation and Intuition: Studies in Psychology and Aesthetics* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1874), p. 360. (Ian Small noted that ‘Sully added to Spencer’s arguments what seem to be to be two crucial points. The first of these was that pleasure was vouchsafed to the spectator of art in terms of an impression...Sully’s second point followed immediately from this. As the means by which art generated pleasure in the mind of the spectator was the sensual impression, so, Sully maintained, responses to works of art had *necessarily* to be individual. This theoretical postulate of an ‘impression’ confirmed the proposition that responses to art were relative and so made anything but a relative aesthetic impossible to countenance.’ ((Small, ‘The Vocabulary of Pater’s Criticism,’ p. 84))).

Sully, discrimination increases our capacity to be receptive and is a process which generates new categories of emotions because it enables us to recognize the various components of our intricate impressions. This is particularly resonant of Pater's argument that discrimination is generative of sensuous, corporeal experience, particularly that of 'pleasure.'¹⁰¹ In 'Style,' Pater asserts that self-conscious, critical engagement—the 'critical tracing out of that conscious artistic structure'¹⁰²—is 'one of the greatest pleasures of really good prose literature.'¹⁰³ He reiterates this link between readerly exertion, aesthetic difficulty and a work's affective dimensions when he asserts that: 'To really strenuous minds there is a pleasurable stimulus in the challenge for a continuous effort on their part.'¹⁰⁴ This reminds us of the way Paterian discrimination strengthens that Bainian 'alliance' between 'our physical framework' and 'thought,' and prompts us to think about how Pater envisions 'pleasure' as central to that alliance. Pater derives the concept of 'pleasure' from psychological theories which conceive the term as constituting a state in which the intellect and the body are attuned to one another in an interdependent way.

In *The Renaissance*, Pater situates the critical concept of 'pleasure' at the centre of his model of critical evaluation, which reflects how he conceives sensual gratification as constituting an evaluative state of

¹⁰¹ Pater's model of criticism works on the principle that 'Education grows in proportion as one's susceptibility to these impressions increases in depth and variety' (Pater, 'Preface,' p. ix).

¹⁰² Pater, 'Style,' p. 21.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p.14.

consciousness within his theory of aesthetic criticism.¹⁰⁵ We can better understand how ‘pleasure’ acquires its central and evaluative status within Paterian Aestheticism by considering how it originates from psychological discourse. Bain connects ‘pleasure with increase of vital power’¹⁰⁶ and reports that pleasurable emotions cause ‘an accession of active power’¹⁰⁷ in ‘organic functions,’ particularly in ‘the extensor muscles, which are... strongly stimulated.’¹⁰⁸ When read in these terms, Paterian discrimination (as an activity that produces pleasure) is valued for its revitalizing properties; this reinforces the way evolutionary discourse underlies its instrumental value. For Bain, whilst discrimination stimulates the muscles, the activity also requires a practitioner with muscular strength and poise to undertake it because, as he puts it, ‘The so-called mental influences...cannot operate, except on a frame physically prepared to respond to stimulation.’¹⁰⁹ Pater incorporates Bain’s theory of discrimination as a muscular, physically strenuous activity into his model of ‘ideal’ aesthetic response. As cited, Pater requires readers with ‘really strenuous minds’ to undertake the task of aesthetic discrimination.

¹⁰⁵ The critic must interrogate whether a work of art gives ‘pleasure ...and if so, what sort of degree of pleasure?’ and to estimate how it ‘produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced.’ (Pater, ‘Preface,’ pp. viii and ix). Also, deciphering the complexity of works of art requires us to reflect upon how they serve as ‘powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations’ and to interrogate how they construct their affective dimensions: it is the critic’s task to ‘indicate what source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced.’ (Ibid., p. ix). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde portrays the term in a similar way when he presents it as antonymic of ‘happiness,’ a state of consciousness which he consequently as valueless, purely psychological and non-evaluative: ‘I have never searched for happiness. Who wants happiness? I have searched for pleasure.’ (Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, p.166).

¹⁰⁶ Bain, *Mind and Body*, p. 62.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p.134.

It is important, at this stage, to remember that Pater conceives the act of appreciation as constituting a process of creation no different from that which the artist undertakes. As such, we can trace Pater's envisioning of a muscular Aestheticism by considering how the practice of discrimination applies to artistic composition as well as readerly deconstruction. The literary artist, as I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, must handle his material in a highly self-conscious, meticulous and selective way so that 'every part [of the work] is conscious of all the rest, till the last sentence does but, with undiminished vigour, unfold and justify the first.'¹¹⁰ Moreover, Pater's model of the writer as a sculptor in 'Style'—where he notes that 'the material in which he [the writer] works is no more a creation of his own than the sculptor's marble'¹¹¹—emphasises his creative handling of his material as a physical activity of hewing away rock. As the previous chapter examined, the Paterian writer can expect a reader who will return his efforts. Pater compares this highly disciplined activity—otherwise known as 'asceticism'—to that which an athlete undertakes: 'Surplusage! he will dread that, as the runner on his muscles.'¹¹² The muscularity of Paterian discrimination returns us to the concept of asceticism, which, according to Pater's definition of the term, means 'self-restraint.'¹¹³ Therefore, we return to the corporeality of aesthetic experience as a crucial component of the

¹¹⁰ Pater, 'Style,' p. 18.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ Pater, 'Style,' p. 10.

selflessness of Paterian aesthetic criticism.¹¹⁴ More broadly, the muscularity of Paterian Aestheticism embodies his broader re-conception of the body as both indispensable and inextricably linked to the intellect. Pater's emphasis on a muscular Aestheticism has drawn critical attention to his celebration of the male body. As I noted in the introduction to this thesis, my account of Pater's muscular Aestheticism challenges Richard Dellamora's identification of an element of homoeroticism in Pater's emphasis on the male body. By contrast, I argue that Pater's emphasis on the male body is anchored to his desire for a proficient aesthetic practitioner.

The view that the corporeality of aesthetic experience is a crucial component of the receptive capacities of the Paterian critic is extended in a chapter of *Greek Studies* entitled, 'The Age of Athletic Prizemen: A Chapter in Greek Art' (1894), in which Pater notes how the athletic physique—'With all the suppleness, [and] the delicate muscularity'¹¹⁵—provides ideal conditions to prepare the individual for sensuous, compassionate thought: 'Assuredly they have no maladies of soul any more than of the body...But if they are not yet thinking, there is the capacity of thought, of painful thought, in them, as they seem to be aware wistfully.'¹¹⁶ The athletic physical condition of Pater's ideal aesthetic critic is a determining factor of his capacity to be receptive, and in turn, of his capacity to think intellectually,

¹¹⁴ George Levine provides a detailed account on asceticism in the context of Paterian Aestheticism, explaining that it refers to 'an austere, rigorous restraint of the self that,' necessitates a 'selflessness [which is] a central aspect not only of the tradition of scientific epistemology, but of ethics and aesthetics (not to speak of religion).' (George Levine, 'Two Ways Not To Be a Solipsist: Art and Science, Pater and Pearson,' in *Victorian Studies*, 43 ((Autumn, 2000)): 20).

¹¹⁵ Walter Pater, 'The Age of Athletic Prizemen: A Chapter in Greek Art,' 1894, in *Greek Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1910), p. 272.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

sympathetically and thus ethically. In his essay on Coleridge, Pater had offered a more polemic version of this argument, going as far as to claim that our physical disposition affects our ‘moral world.’ This is significant because it perceives the construction of the individual’s moral judgments as relative to his singular intuitive, sensory experiences, ‘so that every hour in his life is unique, changed altogether by a stray word, or glance or touch.’¹¹⁷ Moreover, it returns us to how the process of ‘brain-building,’ which involves physiological development, constructs those ‘sympathetic link[s].’ Pater envisions this process of development as that which is crucial to the construction of the individual’s ethical consciousness. Pater, however, admits that it is difficult to know the precise relations between the mind and body. Here, as elsewhere in his *oeuvre*, Pater foregrounds his awareness of the ‘complexity’ of humanity, and advocates attempts of ‘the inductive sciences’¹¹⁸ to re-understand their exchanges in ‘a more exact estimate of the subtlety and complexity of our life.’¹¹⁹ We learn that Victorian psychology formulates—or at least complements—the concept of Paterian relativity in the way that it disrupts those Arnoldian ‘abstract moralities’ by interrogating the way our intellectual, ‘moral’ judgments might be relative to individual, sensory experience. In this way, the formation of the individual’s ethical consciousness does not prescribe or commit the individual to moral judgment.

Nevertheless, Pater, alongside psychological theorists, had made some conclusions on their interrelations. It soon becomes clear that the

¹¹⁷ Pater, ‘Coleridge,’ p. 67.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

interactions between the body and the mind are, for Pater, interdependent to the extent that one cannot pre-exist without the other. Pater registers his endorsement of Lamarckian theories of evolutionary biology when writing:

Character merges into temperament; the nervous system refines itself into intellect. His physical organism is played upon not only by the physical conditions about it, but by remote laws of inheritance, the vibrations of long past acts reaching him in the midst of the new order of things in which he lives.¹²⁰

The idea that the ‘physical organism [is] played upon...by remote laws of inheritance’ is problematic from the perspective of Paterian Aestheticism considered as a taught activity. It transpires that Pater’s theories concerning the development of aesthetic consciousness are reserved for those recipients of the inherited mechanisms that are deemed necessary for ‘ideal’ modes of aesthetic response. Here, Pater derives the word ‘vibrations’ from the writings of Spencer who uses the term to denote ‘a mechanical force’ which throws the body ‘into a vibratory state.’¹²¹ Pater’s use of this Spencerian word reinforces his idea that our material fate is held to depend upon the ‘long past acts’ of our ancestors; we are subjected to—and determined by—the ‘mechanical force’ of the ‘laws of inheritance’ to which Pater refers. At the same time, Pater’s use of the term ‘vibrations’ also refers to the way the

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1, p. 192.

transmission of acquired characteristics is stimulated by the conditions of our own experiences and interactions with the environment, which may or may not stimulate physiological, nervous reactions that will bring those 'remote,' 'long past acts' into the present. The individual's interaction with external stimuli, which rewires or refines our reconfiguration of nerves and the complex arrangement of associations, contributes to a process of evolution in which 'the next generation will appear, renewed, modified by the ideas of this.'¹²² Spencer confirms this in *Principles of Psychology* when he writes that we are determined by both our environment and that which we acquire by the 'remote laws of inheritance': '[W]e have but to expand this doctrine [that all intelligence is acquired through experience] so as to make it include, with the experience of each individual, the experiences of all ancestral individuals.'¹²³ This, for Spencer, explains how certain interactions with our environment are determined by evolution. He observes instances where 'that adjustment between the organism and the environment which evolution has established' is evident; for example:

an infant's hand, constructed so as to grasp by bending the fingers inwards, implies ancestral hands which have thus grasped, and implies objects in the environment to be thus grasped by this infantine hand when it is developed; so the various structures fitting the infant for apprehensions of space-relations, imply such

¹²² Pater, 'Diaphaneité,' 1864, in *Miscellaneous Studies*, p. 221.

¹²³ Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 2, p. 195.

apprehensions in the past by its ancestors and in the future by itself.¹²⁴

Here the notion of inherited characteristics does not appear to compromise the educative, taught element of associationist psychology. Pater's emphasis on those 'remote characteristics,' then, does not entirely undermine his commitment to the developmental direction of aesthetic experience.

Nonetheless, the developmental direction of aesthetic contemplation and, in turn, the construction of an ethical consciousness is a process reserved for Pater's 'select few' because of the way inherited characteristics, whilst held to depend upon environmental factors, undermine associationist ideas. The notion of transmitted biological characteristics had modified Spencer's otherwise staunch commitment to the view that 'individual experiences furnish the concrete materials of all thought.'¹²⁵ In *Principles of Psychology*, Spencer writes of the way it is fallacious to assume that the mind, at birth, is a *tabula rasa*:

Doubtless, the individual experiences furnish the concrete materials for all thought; doubtless, the organized and semi-organized arrangements existing among the cerebral nerves, can give no knowledge until there has been a presentation of the external relations to the effect of facilitating

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 194.

¹²⁵ Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1, p. 582.

and strengthening those involved nervous connections that are in the process of spontaneous evolution: just as its daily gambols aid the growth of its limbs. But this is quite a different thing from saying that its intelligence is wholly produced by its experiences. That is an utterly inadmissible doctrine—a doctrine which makes the presence of a brain meaningless—a doctrine which makes [? it] unaccountable [sic].¹²⁶

Distinguishing his associationism from that of Locke, Spencer notes that ‘long past acts’ (to use Pater’s phrase) can be transmitted from generation to generation; as Rick Rylance explains, Spencer subscribes to the Lamarckian theory which views habits—whether beneficial or detrimental to the individual—‘acquired in a lifetime could become “organic” (to use Spencer’s word) and therefore were transmissible from generation to generation, each incrementally increasing the former’s moral capital or debts (as it were).’¹²⁷ The same is the case for Pater’s ‘select few’ who, we learn in Pater’s short essay ‘Diaphaneité’ (1864), are the recipients of ‘That truthfulness of temper, that receptivity, which professors often strive in vain to form’¹²⁸ by the ‘remote laws of inheritance’ to which he refers in ‘Coleridge’: this ‘character,’ Pater writes, ‘is like a relic from the classical age, laid open by accident to our alien modern atmosphere.’¹²⁹ This notion of

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, p. 223.

¹²⁸ Pater, ‘Diaphaneité,’ in *Miscellaneous Studies*, p. 219.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

traits as ‘relics’ reveals how, for Pater, the receptive capacities of the individual are inherited characteristics that only re-appear in generations when conditions require them.

In ‘Diaphaneité,’ we find Pater utilizing the Spencerian justification for inherited characteristics. For Spencer, the idea that we are determined by our ‘ancestral traits’ provides an explanation for non-conformist individualistic habits of thought and feeling.¹³⁰ Likewise, Pater argues that those who display a ‘clear crystal nature,’ ‘must be...discontented with society as it is.’¹³¹ We see this notion come into play in ‘Denys L’Auxerrois’ where, as the first chapter noted, the individualistic artist, Denys—who is ‘connected always with the assertion of individual freedom’—arrives in Auxerre at a time in medieval French history when cities are ‘turning their narrow, feudal institutions into a free communistic life.’ Denys represents the re-appearance of the individual from the normative constraints of institutional life and figureheads a ‘revolution in the temper and manner of individuals.’¹³² It is significant that this ‘revolution’ is made possible by ‘the relic itself,’ which as Angela Leighton has observed, ‘brings back a character from the past, but also reflects art’s deep-mired engrossment in the past’¹³³ in this short story. ‘Denys L’Auxerrois’ thus dramatises the way ‘the temper and manner of individuals’ depend upon inherited characteristics that only resurface when conditions—such as oppressive communal life—necessitate them. The ‘crystal clear nature’ to which Pater refers in

¹³⁰ See Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, p. 223.

¹³¹ Pater, ‘Diaphaneité,’ p. 222.

¹³² Pater, ‘Denys L’Auxerrois,’ p. 68.

¹³³ Angela Leighton, *On Form*, p. 94.

‘Diaphaneité’ symbolises an ideal quality of the highly individualistic temperament which is able to go against the grain of ‘collective life.’ Pater conceives the notion of taste as a construct of our ‘collective life’¹³⁴; by contrast, the individual, unique temperament values that which is of personal significance to it and has the receptive capacity to appreciate that which comes to him in a variety of ways, whether ‘accident, or usage, or convention.’¹³⁵ Pater’s elitism is not as hermetic as it may, at first, appear: he suggests that there might be ‘flushes of’ this trait ‘in all of us,’¹³⁶ and its re-emergence is dependent upon a highly individualistic attitude, which needs to go against the grain of collective thought. This ‘clear crystal nature’ facilitates individual and private modes of response by conditioning the individual for a type of receptivity which is open to a range of influences, and is, in short, disinterested.

Elsewhere in his oeuvre, however, we are reminded of the hermetic nature of Paterian elitism and the notion that our receptive capacities are dependent on physiological features, which are subject to the hierarchical principles of Lamarckian evolution. In ‘The Child in the House,’ Pater implies that the development of one’s aesthetic consciousness is reserved for those with the required innate traits. Pater implies that it is only those who are born equipped with this faculty to be receptive that can embark on that process of ‘brain-building’ that will, ultimately, lead to a developed consciousness. The story suggests that Florian Deleal is an eligible member

¹³⁴ According to Pater, our ‘collective life press[es] equally on every part of every one of us, reduces nearly all of us to the level of a colourless uninteresting existence’ (Pater, ‘Diaphaneité,’ p. 220).

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 219.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 222.

of this elite group when it suggests that he possesses innate faculties or ‘powers’ (to use a Paterian term) that make it possible for him to be open and susceptible of an array of new sensory impressions. For example, when he is learning to read he wonders ‘at the ease with which he learned, and at the quickness of his memory.’¹³⁷ These innate faculties re-emerge due to Florian’s interactions with ‘beautiful physical things,’ which operate ‘a kind of tyranny of the senses over him,’ which returns us to the way in which Pater’s theory of aesthetic contemplation, which develops our ethical consciousness, is informed by the view that our interactions with the environment are held to depend upon our inherited characteristics. And so whilst developmental in its direction, in that experiences are crucial for the activation of the mechanisms required for ideal modes of response, for Pater, that connection between ‘brain-building’ and ‘sympathy’ is, ultimately, only one that can be forged by his ‘select few.’ This reveals that for Pater, our capacity for receptivity—that ‘free play of the mind’—can only be acquired by those with an innate mechanism for ideal modes of response who have activated its emergence via educative means, notably that of lived experience.

We can see then how it is Pater’s emphasis on the corporeality of aesthetic experience that underpins the homosocial nature of his elitism which in turn structures the tension between elitism and ethics within his Aestheticism. This corporeality secures the selflessness of the critic by

¹³⁷ Pater, ‘The Child in the House,’ p. 176. (Another such instance occurs in ‘The Poetry of Michelangelo’ where Pater uses the term ‘inherited sentiment’ to describe why ((and how)) the ‘Florentines of the fifteenth century’ could be so ‘preoccupied with the thought of death.’ ((Walter Pater, ‘The Poetry of Michelangelo,’ 1871, in *The Renaissance*, p. 84.))).

making the individual more receptive to new experiences. Pater's muscular Aestheticism preconditions the individual for social interaction by making him sensitive to the world's 'fine gradations.' However, it is this same corporeality which is responsible for Paterian elitism: aesthetic contemplation is an activity reserved for those with inherited receptive faculties. Therefore, the inherited capacity that equips an individual with the sympathy that is a prerequisite of ethical action is simultaneously compromised when he acts—that is, when he becomes a part of, rather than separate from, the world. We can understand the ways Henry James and Vernon Lee both aim to find ways to reconcile this tension by turning to their own engagements with contemporary psychological discourse.

3.2 'I seemed to float into clearness, but into a darker obscure': Jamesian Psychological Realism, Attention and Idiosyncratic Relations

The ethics of Jamesian impressionism are centred on the opacity of the impression as a cipher for evoking the complexity of experience. As noted above, Martha Nussbaum has made a prominent case for the way James' portrayal of the 'fine possibilities of the actual' makes readers of his fiction more 'sensitive and empathic interpreter[s]'¹³⁸ of others. James inherits from Pater an aesthetic which depicts the fine grain subtleties and nuances of experience, in the process the psychological concepts that underlie Paterian Aestheticism are imported into Jamesian Aestheticism. However, James also incorporates his own psychological terms and concepts and these distinguish

¹³⁸ Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, p. 63.

his view of the relationship between human consciousness, aesthetic form and ethics from that of Pater. As we have seen, James places far greater emphasis than Pater on the idiosyncratic nature of human experience in a bid to disable prescriptive moral judgments to a point which renders any commitment to ethical action irrelevant. This section firstly examines how James' idiosyncratic impressionism is formulated by reference to the psychological writings of his brother, William James, which revise the principles of Spencerian associationism in a way that promotes the agency and 'selective interests' of the experiencing individual. The section then turns to think about the way William James' writings provide Henry James with a psychological framework to extend modes of 'ideal' response to a broader public and thus extend Aestheticism's fields of reception without relinquishing his emphasis on the proficiencies of the individual. Henry James' attempted democratization of Aestheticism plays a central role in the ethics of his impressionism because it guarantees a more representative 'house of fiction.'

William James was self-conscious about his status as an 'onlooking psychologist'¹³⁹ due to a certain tendency of those placed in this position 'to strip the human element out' of accounts that describe the mental states of the experiencing individual. In order to overcome the problems that this position tended to bring with it, he promoted an introspective mode of psychological analysis which aimed to recuperate the idiosyncratic character of human experience. He describes this approach to psychology as 'the looking into our

¹³⁹ William James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890), p. 238.

own minds and reporting what we there discover.’¹⁴⁰ William’s commitment to introspective psychology reinforces his investment in the notion that reality is relative to the perceptions of the individual mind: objects ‘belong...exclusively to that individual mind’¹⁴¹ and have ‘no status anywhere else.’¹⁴² He would go on to note that ‘The deeper features of reality are found only in perceptual experience.’¹⁴³ His confidence in moral relativism extends to a broader suspicion of theories that tended to give ‘objective authority to’ subjective values. Like Lee, William James joined the retaliation against Max Nordau, who linked artists of the late-Victorian avant-garde to social degeneracy: ‘The trouble is that such writers as Nordau,’ he asserts, ‘use the descriptive names of symptoms merely as an artifice for giving objective authority to their personal dislikes.’¹⁴⁴ In order to challenge such normative modes of analysis, James promotes introspective psychology with a view of returning analysis to the experiencing individual by removing the ‘third person’ perspective. William James had noted what Rylance describes as ‘a crucial difference between observing an experience in something else and having that experience oneself’¹⁴⁵; the ‘third-person’ perspective becomes a problem when:

the observer and transcriber of the experience
happens to be, say, a neuroscientist deploying the
rhetoric, postures, techniques, and conceptual
equipment of his or her science in a way that

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁴¹ William James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 2 (London: Macmillan, 1891), p. 288.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ William James, *Some Problems of Philosophy: A Beginning of an Introduction to Philosophy* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 97.

¹⁴⁴ William James, ‘Degeneration and Genius,’ 1895, in *Collected Essays and Reviews* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920), p. 402.

¹⁴⁵ Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, p. 41.

might take the experience some distance from the experiencing individual's personal sense of what occurred.¹⁴⁶

In order to report or analyse psychological events, William James adopts 'the primarily introspective stance of the experiencing individual,' which as I noted above, Rylance describes as 'using the natural language of that person's experience ("I felt...").' By transferring authority to the individual subject, James had hoped to ensure that psychologists could have on record the individual's experiences in their most minute, fine-grained and idiosyncratic details. And so, as is evident here, whilst Jamesian disinterestedness can be re-explained by reference to psychological terms, it is important to note that those psychological terms originate from William James' own plea for disinterested modes of analysis.

As the previous chapter examined, this model of analysis complements Henry James' aim for the novel as a literary form:

to range through all the differences of the individual relation to its general subject-matter, all the varieties of outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same from man to man (or, so far as that goes, from man to woman).¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. pp. 41-2.

¹⁴⁷ James, *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 45-6.

Redefining the terms of human experience in their most idiosyncratic form lends elasticity to the novel, charging it with an ‘immense array of terms, perceptual and expressional’ that are singular and ‘look...over the heads of the standing terms—or perhaps rather, like alert winged creatures, perch... on those diminished summits and aspire...to a clearer air.’¹⁴⁸ In order to preserve such perceptual terminology for his fiction, James aims to convey the ‘varieties of outlook on life’ by refusing to give that sense of ‘objective reality to...subjective experiences.’ He does this by promoting the ‘first-person’ perspective across his fiction, which contrasts with the ‘third-person’ perspective which we find in Pater’s fiction. As examined in the above section, the narrative techniques in ‘The Child in the House’ use an omniscient narrator to retell the story of the adult Florian Deleal who re-experiences his childhood memories. The narrative frame uses a vocabulary that would be unfamiliar to the child, Florian. By contrast, James’ fiction of the 1880s and 1890s does not appear to lend an objective hand to subjective experience: even when James deploys an omniscient narrator in *The Tragic Muse* the subjective asides of this anonymous figure suggest that this narrative frame merely contributes to the wider collective gaze; the narrator is another member of the auditorium producing the refracted gaze through which we must try to gain access to the novel’s centre, Miriam.

It is, however, his most significant intervention into the ghost story, ‘The Turn of the Screw’ where Henry James tests out his brother’s framework

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 339.

of introspective psychology by incorporating key elements into the formal dynamics of the novella. The central narrative offers a first-person account of the governess' personal experiences of being charged with the care of two children in a grand country house which she believes to be haunted by two deceased figures, Peter Quint and Miss Jessel. James complicates the 'authenticity' of what is ostensibly a first-hand account by alerting our attention to the fact that the governess' narrative is mediated: the unnamed narrator recounts a story told by Douglas which he has remembered from a transcribed version of the governess' manuscript that he does not have to hand, but of which he has an 'impression.' Nonetheless, Douglas does not arrogate the first-hand nature of the governess' account by using a third-person narrative mode and by alluding to the novella's untranslatability beyond the deictic world of her account when he tells his auditors, 'the story *won't* tell.'¹⁴⁹

The frame narrative then appears to refuse to lend an objective reality to subjective experience. When reflecting upon the evolution of the ghost-story, James argues that the modes of psychological analysis which his brother disavowed are not appropriate for producing 'the really effective and heart-shaking'¹⁵⁰ contributions to this genre. He asserts 'the mere modern "psychical" case, washed clean of all queerness as by exposure to a flowing laboratory tap...clearly promised little [for the genre], for the more it was respectably certified the less it seemed of a nature to rouse the dear old sacred

¹⁴⁹ James, 'The Turn of the Screw,' p. 118.

¹⁵⁰ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 160.

terror.¹⁵¹ He argues that conveying experience in first-hand terms is the most effective way of exploiting the phenomenological potential of this genre. In this way, the ghost-story, as he reconceived it, offered a suitable genre to incorporate introspective analysis into the form of his fiction in order to convey the ‘varieties of outlook on life.’

The governess’ narrative reflects how she is continually calling on her impressions to make analytical judgments of a situation that she regards as dominated by unknown entities. The narrative shifts between an account that includes what the governess claims to be ‘absolutely traceable’¹⁵² (and thus which she can account for with ‘absolute certainty’) and an account that has to depend upon the terms of her perceptual impressions because that which she perceives appears to hold no reality beyond her first-hand experiences. At one point in the narrative, she writes:

the strange dizzy life or swim (I try for terms!)
 into a stillness, a pause of all life, that had
 nothing to do with the more or less noise we at
 the moment might be engaged in making and that
 I could hear through any intensified mirth or
 quickened recitation or louder strum of the
 piano.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² James, ‘The Turn of the Screw,’ p. 184.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 187.

It is only the governess who experiences the ‘prodigious palpable hushes’¹⁵⁴ (of which she can ‘call...nothing else’¹⁵⁵) which signal the reappearance of ‘the outsiders’¹⁵⁶ and her inability to find common terms to describe the phenomenon she is witness to re-emphasises the extent to which James situates her as ‘the sole subject of such experience’¹⁵⁷ throughout the narrative.

This idea returns us to William James’ notion that perceptions ‘belong...exclusively to that individual mind’ and have ‘no status anywhere else.’ The untranslatability of her experiences recurs throughout the novella at moments such as ‘The particular impression I had received proved in the morning light, I repeat, not quite successfully presentable to Mrs Grose’ and ‘I scarce know how to put my story into words that shall be a credible picture of my state of mind.’¹⁵⁸ The wider accessibility of the governess’ experiences is not at issue here. Henry James charts the governess’ attempts to acquire knowledge, but the narrative maintains an ambiguity which, to use the frame narrator, Douglas’ phrase, ‘*won’t* tell.’ That is, whilst the narrative charts the process of attempts to acquire knowledge, it refuses to register the known co-ordinates of the unknown and thus maintains the ‘exquisite, mystification’¹⁵⁹ that James aims to construct. Even when the governess’ perceptual capacities are at their sharpest and she ‘float[s] into clearness,’ she claims to enter ‘a darker obscure.’¹⁶⁰ That is, her modes of perception—even when in hyper-drive—do not lead to knowable or accessible truths. For William James, the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p.149.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 152.

¹⁵⁹ James, *The Art of the Novel*, pp. 172-3.

¹⁶⁰ James, ‘The Turn of the Screw,’ p. 234.

object of any thought is ‘fringed’ and ‘bathed’ in a ‘halo of obscure relations’ which are unique to the individual.¹⁶¹

Henry James’ refusal to create a necessary link between modes of perception and epistemological certainties is, of course, part of his attempt to inculcate readers in rules of engagement which prioritise individualised modes of response and, in turn, cultivate an individuated audience. This forms part of James’ wider attack on overarching theories that aim to define us, and his promotion of a model of empiricism in which individuals see their identity as subject to experience, so (like the Paterian individual) ‘constantly reforming itself on the stream.’¹⁶² The narrative of ‘The Turn of the Screw’ dramatises the way introspective analysis can generate epistemological uncertainty. The governess’ futile self-examination leads to a metaphysical crisis: ‘within a minute there had come to me out of my very pity the appalling alarm of his [Miles] being perhaps innocent. It was for the instant confounding, and bottomless, for if he *were* innocent, what then on earth was I?’¹⁶³ The governess’ deployment of terms used to convey her hesitancy invalidates the existential question ‘what then on earth was I?’ because she is not certain of Miles’ innocence which serves as the condition for its validity. She does not have the facts necessary to locate answers to existential questions. James intensifies the ‘final insecurity’¹⁶⁴ of Pater’s view that knowledge is ‘never-

¹⁶¹ James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1., p. 276.

¹⁶² Pater, ‘Conclusion,’ pp. 209-210.

¹⁶³ James, ‘The Turn of the Screw,’ p. 234.

¹⁶⁴ Pater, *Plato and Platonism*, p. 168. (Angela Leighton has argued that Pater’s ‘essay finally leads, not to a point proved but an ‘insecurity’ achieved. It is the critical genre which can, on the one hand, admit uncertainty, subjectivity, conditionalness, while also, on the other, putting its own shaped form into play as part of its matter.’ ((Leighton, *On Form*, pp. 28-29.))).

limited' and 'never complete' by refusing to prescribe the ethical consequences of the reader's aesthetic experience.

This concern for idiosyncratic modes of aesthetic perception emerges from James' engagement with William James' psychological discourse, which aims to rewrite elements of associationist psychological thought by retaining interest in the brain's physiological features, but unfastening what was, for Herbert Spencer, a necessary link between the individual and the environment. In this way, Jamesian psychological discourse aims to attend to the idiopathic dimensions of human experience. At the beginning of his career, William James was, according to Michael W. Taylor:

an enthusiastic advocate of Spencer's naturalistic approach to psychology. In his own *Principles of Psychology*, James advocates a physiological view of the mind, arguing that in order to survive we should make 'our nervous system our ally instead of our enemy.'¹⁶⁵

This echoes Spencer's emphasis on those best equipped to survive as having an 'organic affection of' themselves, which provides 'a state of consciousness standing in certain relations to other states.' At times, it seems James is simply paraphrasing Spencer when he writes, '[e]xperience is remoulding us every

¹⁶⁵ James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1., p. 122.

moment'¹⁶⁶ and that 'our mental reaction on every given thing is really a resultant of our experience of the whole world up to that date.'¹⁶⁷ Yet, he soon becomes dissatisfied with Spencer's theory 'to the extent of setting an examination question for his students [at Harvard] that required them to "mention all the inconsistencies you have noticed in this book."¹⁶⁸ William James argued that Spencer places too much emphasis on the environment's influence on shaping the individual mind, arguing that 'Such an empiricist writer as Mr. Spencer, for example, regards the creature as absolutely passive clay, upon which "experience" rains down. The clay will be impressed most deeply where the drops fall thickest, and so the final shape of the mind is moulded.'¹⁶⁹ This critical account appears to somewhat over-state the environmental determinism in Spencer by overlooking his emphasis, mentioned earlier, on self-reflection; nonetheless, James aims to place greater emphasis on individual agency, volition and the self-interest of the subject. He reemphasises this position by arguing that Spencer views humans as the 'mere offshoots and creatures of our environment by viewing the mind as merely a mirror or nature that acquired its information passively.'¹⁷⁰ Challenging this notion that the mind 'is merely a mirror,' he asserts:

the knower is not simply a mirror floating with no
 foothold anywhere and passively reflecting an
 order that he comes upon and finds existing. The
 knower is an actor and co-efficient of the truth on

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Michael W. Taylor, *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 5.

¹⁶⁹ James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1, p. 403.

¹⁷⁰ James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 2, p. 632.

one side, whilst on the other he registers the truth
which he helps to create.¹⁷¹

Here, William James places greater emphasis on the relationship between the individual's 'active powers' and his interactions with the environment. He is an 'actor' and rather than a being capable only of gaining an 'organic affectation of' himself and a heightened awareness of his relationship with the environment, he is an agent that participates in creating 'the truth' which he registers. James—despite giving credit to its 'power as a conception'—contests the notion that 'ideas are themselves the actors, the stage, the spectators, and the play,'¹⁷² and argues that the individual perceives ideas that he himself has conceived. This distinguishes Jamesian psychological discourse from that of Spencer by moving away from the idea that the individual merely analyses the affect that his engagement with the environment has on him; he envisions an individual who engages with his environment in a much more interactive way. He influences his environment as much as his environment influences him.

It is this process of one's agential management of his experience that, for William James, culminates in the formation of 'consciousness.' In 'The Stream of Consciousness' (1892), James presents consciousness as that which consists of faculties, each with functional roles to organize that which the

¹⁷¹ James, 'Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence,' in *Collected Essays and Reviews*, p. 66. This description of the individual is part of James' aim to place emphasis on the special cognitive qualities of the human mind in order to distinguish their response to the environment as unique; if an environmental deterministic model 'were true,' he writes, 'a race of dogs bred for generations, say in the Vatican, with characters of visual shape, sculptured in marble, presented to their eyes, in every variety of form and combination, ought to discriminate before long the finest shades of these peculiar characters' (James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1, p. 403).

¹⁷² William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: & to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1899), p. 177.

‘ordinary laws of association “bring before the footlights” of consciousness.’¹⁷³

He asserts that:

the mind is at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities. Consciousness consists in the comparison of these with each other, the selection of some, and the suppression of the rest by reinforcing and inhibiting agency of attention.¹⁷⁴

James explains his preference for the term ‘personal consciousness’ in order to highlight the fact that each individual mind carries out these processes in a unique, idiosyncratic way. The preliminary faculty of perception involved in cultivating an individualised, ‘personal consciousness’ is that of attention. It is this faculty which ensures it is the individual, and not the environment, which ultimately defines the nature of human experience.

In *Principles of Psychology*, James defines ‘attention’ as the individual’s personalised selection of random associations: it is, he writes, ‘the taking possession of the mind, in clear and vivid form of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought.’¹⁷⁵ This definition does, of course, closely resemble Henry James’ instruction to the writer ‘to take possession of it [experience], explore it to its utmost extent, reveal it,

¹⁷³ James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1, p. 450.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

rejoice in it,¹⁷⁶ which suggests that this psychological mode of attention underpins the principles of Jamesian aesthetic perception. This process of ‘taking possession’ is driven by the individual’s self-interest, or what William James terms, ‘selective interest.’ William James goes on to explain that the selection of personal interests creates attentive conditions for ‘focalization’ and ‘concentration,’ conditions that prefigure an ‘intelligible perspective’ to the point at which ‘what is called our “experience” is almost entirely determined by our habits of attention.’¹⁷⁷ In this way, self-interest creates conditions for experience to be defined on the individual’s own terms. William asserts: ‘*My experience is what I agree to attend to*’¹⁷⁸; ‘Millions of items of the outward order are present to my senses which never properly enter into my experience. Why? Because they have no *interest* for me.’¹⁷⁹ This resembles Henry James’ proposal that ‘it may be said that impressions *are* experience.’ Moreover, this mode of attention is a crucial underpinning of James’ emphasis on artistic selection as a demonstration of his creative integrity. He tells the aspiring novelist: ‘All life belongs to you, and don’t listen either to those who would shut you up into corners of it and tell you that it is only here and there that art inhabits.’¹⁸⁰ Throughout his fiction, James makes artistic decisions based on the principle of personal selection. In the preface to ‘The Turn of the Screw,’ James recalls the comments of one reader who felt that he ‘hadn’t sufficiently “characterized” my young woman engaged in her labyrinth; hadn’t endowed

¹⁷⁶ James, ‘The Art of Fiction,’ p. 407.

¹⁷⁷ William James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, 1892 (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc), p. 39.

¹⁷⁸ William James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1., p. 402.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

her with signs and marks, features and humours'¹⁸¹ and defends this decision on the basis that 'one has to choose ever so delicately among one's difficulties, attaching one's self to the greatest, bearing hard on those and intelligently neglecting the others.'¹⁸² He goes on to note that 'If one attempts to tackle them all one is certain to deal completely with none; whereas the effectual dealing with a few casts a blest golden haze under cover, the others find prudent to retire.'¹⁸³ Whilst James registers the difficulties of artistic selection, his aesthetic aims to convey human experience as driven by 'selective interests.'

This notion of 'selective interests' recalls the detachment of Henry James' impressionism, which Lee would find problematic due to the way such modes of perception require an element of self-absorption. Without personal interests driving attention, William James tells us, 'experience is an utter chaos' and whilst interest 'varies in every creature...without it the consciousness of every creature would be a gray chaotic indiscriminateness, impossible for us even to conceive.'¹⁸⁴ For James, as the last chapter illustrated, detachment is a necessary precondition for individual perception. The Jamesian impressionist requires a 'field-glass' to produce 'an impression distinct from every other.' This type of detachment is different from the one we find in Pater whereby the individual remains 'in his isolation' to ensure he 'know[s]' his 'own impressions.' For Henry James, detachment facilitates a means by which to actively manage which sensations he will analyse. This

¹⁸¹ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 173.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1., p. 403.

contrasts with Pater's description of the child Florian for whom sensory and perceptual stimulations furnish his 'house of thought' and construct 'the texture of his mind'; this type of susceptibility to impressions in James is a process meditated by the selective interests of the individual.

Henry James' aesthetic also incorporates concepts of impartiality and open-mindedness from his brother's psychological discourse. William James argues that the individual can only select interests from a wide choice of 'simultaneous possibilities' in order to preserve a pluralism that guarantees there is no necessary link between the individual and the environment. In order to attain such a broad spectrum of associations, Henry James calls on the 'imagination unassisted' or 'working freely, working (call it) with extravagance,' but ultimately, this imagination must be 'controlled' by the laws of artistic selection. That the individual selects from a plurality of sources implies that not all which stimulates or interests the mind receives attention and subsequent analysis, as it appears to do in Spencerian associationism (and, in turn, Paterian Aestheticism). The individual's selection of his associations, then, is not predictable because of a counterproductive synergetic combination of impartiality (that 'free play of the mind on all subjects') and his 'selective interests' (that are controlled by means of attention). Impartiality preserves the plurality of experience—that 'huge spider's web of the finest silken threads'—whilst attention, which is driven by self-interests, ensures that the selection made is relative to the experiencing individual.

We can distinguish Jamesian from Paterian impressionism also because it does not view the corporeality of experience as that which constitutes a crucial component of the selflessness of Aestheticism. In fact, James perceives self-interest as operating at the physiological level. William James argues that associations are ‘consequences of the succession of currents in our nervous system.’¹⁸⁵ More specifically, James envisions that selective interests are based on ‘the excitement of the sense-organs to which the object appeals.’¹⁸⁶ The faculty of attention, for James, operates at the physiological level and is thus subject to evolutionary principles. Henry James explores the relationship between attentive perception, corporeality and the ability to make discriminative judgments in ‘The Turn of the Screw.’ Throughout, the governess’ perceptions lead to an awareness of how they affect her corporeally. On first seeing Quint, ‘this figure, in the twilight’ she notes that this ‘produced in’ her ‘two distinct gasps of emotion, which were, sharply, the shock of my first and that of my second surprise.’¹⁸⁷ She informs us that this shock ‘must have sharpened all my senses’ and she develops a heightened attentiveness to these episodes, which enables her to make ‘sharp’ discriminations on future encounters with Quint. At the point of the third encounter, she finds herself ‘aware of three things’ which ‘were practically simultaneous, yet they had flashes of succession.’¹⁸⁸ This attentive perception enables her to ‘meet and measure’ Quint with a heightened ‘intensity’; that is, the sharpness of her faculty of attention provides conditions to make discriminations, which are essential to the formation of ‘personal consciousness.’

¹⁸⁵ James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, p. 190.

¹⁸⁶ James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1., p. 434.

¹⁸⁷ James, ‘The Turn of the Screw,’ p. 136.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.170.

As her encounters with Quint show, that which engages the attention of the governess—that which excites her sense-organs—receives her concentration and focus; it is her own interests which shape her experience. Indeed, during her early days as a governess she perceives her time at Bly as ‘a trap—not designed, but deep—to my imagination, to my delicacy, perhaps to my vanity; to whatever, in me, was most excitable.’¹⁸⁹ She is the ‘sole subject of such experience’ and she must accept that whilst her eyes are ‘unsealed,’ the eyes of others are ‘hopelessly sealed.’¹⁹⁰ The self-interested nature of her experience results in the ethical problems that Lee would aim to resolve in her own aesthetic theory. Whilst Lee emphasises the importance of our perceptive faculties merging into the form that we perceive, James’ governess cannot overcome the otherness of the ghosts. When describing her encounters with the ghosts she claims to behold an ‘alien object in view’¹⁹¹ and a ‘hideous apparition.’¹⁹² In Lee’s supernatural fiction, she punishes those who cannot overcome their own self-interest in order to establish an interactive, mutual understanding of the object. Even when the governess claims to ‘meet and measure’¹⁹³ Quint with a reciprocated ‘common intensity’ in which, she claims, ‘He knew me as well as I knew him,’ she cannot discount her perception of him as ‘a living, detestable, dangerous presence,’ which she accepts is a ‘distinction for quite another circumstance.’¹⁹⁴ James’ emphasis on self-interest as central to experience could result in a type of selfish individualism, and it is this sort of individual that Lee tries to redefine.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 187.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

However, there are moments within ‘The Turn of the Screw’ when James tests the limits of the governess’ faculty of attention. Towards the end of the novella, the governess is desperate to formulate conclusions and she tells us: ‘Of what first happened when I was left alone I had no subsequent memory...I must have lain there long and cried and wailed, for when I raised my head the day was almost done.’¹⁹⁵ The governess’ loss of consciousness compromises her ability to make judgments about events that have happened within that interval, but nonetheless, when she realises events have changed to her ‘surprise’ she decides she has ‘a fresh reflexion to make on Flora’s extraordinary command of the situation.’¹⁹⁶ As we have seen, the term ‘reflexion’ within late 19th-century psychological discourse is used to denote the process of discriminating one’s own experience and privately managing their organization so that, to use Pater’s phrase, ‘the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind.’ The fact that the governess has not observed the scene shows how her own reflexion is based on speculation, as opposed to that which she has realised for herself. James reveals other weaknesses too that make the reader question the validity of the governess’ judgments. The reliability of the governess’ narration comes into question when we learn that she is ‘untraveled’¹⁹⁷ and inexperienced. Indeed, her experience appears, at times, to remain limited to her reading of literary works. For example, she uses her knowledge of fiction to construct her judgment of events at Bly: ‘Was there a “secret” at Bly—a mystery of Udolpho or an insane, an unmentionable relative kept in unsuspected confinement?’¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 215-6.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 208.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 138.

This implies that her interests are confined to a limited perspective. Moreover, we learn it is possible that the children have manipulated her narrow experience: they are ‘in possession of everything that had ever happened to’ her and she soon suspects that ‘they pulled with an art of their own the strings of my invention and memory.’¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless, within the deigetic world of the novella, James ensures that the experience portrayed reveals the idiosyncratic features of the governess’ mind. It appears that James is aiming to cultivate a mode of psychological realism in which experience remains relative to the strength of the individual’s perceptive faculties and thus offers a mode in which our understanding of events is confined to this focalized perspective. Introspective analysis is, for Henry James, a mode that reveals also the ‘quality of the [individual] mind.’²⁰⁰

Yet whilst Henry James may portray the relationship between physiology, attention and experience as one which is relative to the quality of the individual mind within the parameters of his fiction, he shares his brother’s concern for ‘proper’ modes of attention when he reflects upon the practitioner required in the production and consumption of literary art. The physiological implications of attention mean that evolution determines the quality of this faculty within each individual, and both William and Henry James recognised that not everyone is equipped with the endowments to demonstrate ‘proper’ attentive habits. William James asserts: ‘Some of us are naturally scatter-brained, and others follow easily a train of connected thoughts without

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

²⁰⁰ James, *The Art of Fiction*, p. 406.

temptation to swerve aside to other subjects.²⁰¹ To those to whom it comes naturally, attention ‘is highly focalized and concentrated, and the focal ideas predominate in determining association.’²⁰² For these individuals, high levels of attention can be achieved involuntarily; he notes that the figure of the genius is often associated with passive attentiveness: ‘Geniuses are commonly believed to excel other men in their power of sustained attention. In most of them, it is to be feared, the so-called ‘power’ is of the passive sort.’²⁰³ One of the reasons why such figures can achieve high levels of attention in a passive way is because ‘The minds of geniuses are full of copious and original associations.’²⁰⁴ Such minds, for James, have plenty of interests from which to select, and these will sustain their attention because the attentive faculty is a physiological function and is thus subject to evolutionary principles. He notes:

the possible stock of ideas which a man's free spirit would have to choose from might depend exclusively on the native and acquired powers of his brain and as such suspects that no one who is without it naturally can by any amount of drill or discipline attain it in a very high degree. Its amount is probably a fixed characteristic of the individual.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, p. 112

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1., p. 423 (He is careful to note also that it is ‘*their genius making them attentive, not their attention making geniuses of them.*’ ((Ibid.)))

²⁰⁴ James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, p. 102.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 112-13.

In tracing the evolutionary logic of this notion that the genius' mind is filled with various associations, we are reminded of both William and Henry James' commitment to philosophical disinterestedness whereby exposure to a wide variety of experience is necessary for a 'free play of the mind on all subjects.' William James' suggestion that it is only men of 'geniuses' with the cognitive endowments to attain a broad range of associations implies that the philosophical concept of a 'free play of the mind on all subjects' is reserved for a select few.

Elitism, then, preserves the aims of William James' introspective approach to psychology. He recognises that introspective analysis is a difficult process—it is, he writes, 'like seizing a spinning top to catch its motion, or trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks'²⁰⁶—and thus requires a figure with the cognitive faculties to undertake it. As soon becomes clear in William James' writings, whilst his theorization of introspective analysis aims to be democratic in its attempt to embrace 'difference' and the idiosyncrasies of individual experience, introspective psychology does not operate on the basis that *anyone* could qualify as a practitioner of it. This resembles Henry James' envisioning of a more representative 'house of fiction' and of his attempt to inculcate readers in certain rules of engagement whilst refusing to make concessions for those incapable of realising the work's value for themselves. Henry James, like Pater, is interested in a qualitative type of aesthetic experience and his implied elitism in statements such as 'In proportion as that the mind is rich and noble will the

²⁰⁶ James, *Principles of Psychology*, p. 244.

novel...partake of the substance of beauty'²⁰⁷ shares the view that the capacity of the impression to serve as a cipher for conveying the complexity of experience is dependent upon the quality of the mind of the experiencing individual. Jamesian psychological discourse develops out of William James' engagement with associationist psychological discourse and its emphasis on a competitive model of individualism in which only the fittest survive. The ideal practitioner, for William James, is a figure with 'Superb cognitive endowments from whose piercing perceptions no fact was too minute or too remote to escape whose all-embracing foresight to contingency could find unprepared.'²⁰⁸ There is thus a tension between introspective analysis as a method which foregrounds the idiosyncrasies of the mind, and as a specialist practice which requires those with the attentive faculty which is a 'fixed characteristic.' This tension does not, however, entirely undermine the idiosyncratic elements of Jamesian psychological discourse. James does not subscribe to Spencer's 'conception of the universe as a mechanical system governed by invariable laws' which 'left no room for chance.' Instead, he subscribes to Darwinian evolutionary principles which account for 'accidental and spontaneous variations.'²⁰⁹

In addition, this tension is somewhat eased by the fact that William James' emphases on attention as an innate faculty does not rule out the possibility that those with so-called 'commonplace minds' can work to attain

²⁰⁷ James, *The Art of Fiction*, p. 406.

²⁰⁸ William James, 'Remarks on Spencer's Definition of Mind as Correspondence' (1878), in *William James: The Essential Writings* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1984), p.14.

²⁰⁹ James demonstrates his endorsement of this theory in his essay 'Great Men and Their Environment,' in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York, London and Bombay: Longmans Green and Co., 1897), pp. 216-254.

focus of presented stimuli, and it is this element of Jamesian psychological discourse which proves to be instrumental to Henry James' aim to cultivate a readership for his fiction. To those to whom attention does not come naturally, he asserts, 'the margin...[is] filled with something like meteoric showers of images, which strike into it at random, displacing the focal ideas, and carrying association in their own direction.'²¹⁰ These individuals, to sustain attention, and achieve the same level of 'focalization' and 'concentration' must depend upon modes of voluntary attention. William conceives the concept of the 'will' as a mode of active attention that would need to be activated when focalization does not come naturally to the individual. It serves as a secondary function that comes into play when the individual's passive physiological response is inattentive. So whilst Spencer had conceived the 'will' as a reflexive, 'passive' response, James argues that 'acts of will are such acts only as cannot be inattentively performed.'²¹¹ For James, voluntary attention is reserved for those without intellectual endowments to achieve attention naturally and he suspects 'that genius tends to prevent a man from acquiring habits of voluntary attention.'²¹² In fact, he asserts that attention can be achieved in one of two ways: either 'by grace of genius or by dint of will.'²¹³ Despite his assertion that attention is a 'fixed character in the individual,' he notes that it does not matter how one attains attention, 'the longer one...attend[s] to a topic the more mastery of it one has.'²¹⁴ He goes on to imply that those who acquire 'habits of voluntary attention' are virtuous: the 'faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention over and over again is the very root of judgment,

²¹⁰ James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, pp. 112-3.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

²¹² James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, p. 95.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, p. 113.

character, and will.²¹⁵ After all, ‘acts of voluntary attention’ ensure that the individual regains the self-determination to self-manage his experiences, and such acts are thus ‘momentous and critical, determining us, as they do, to higher or lower destinies.’²¹⁶ As a result, William James informs educators that ‘An education which should improve this faculty would be *the* education par excellence.’²¹⁷ He suggests that the:

exercise of voluntary attention in the schoolroom must therefore be counted one of the most important points of training that take place there; and the first-rate teacher, by the keenness of the remoter interests which he is able to awaken, will provide abundant opportunities for its occurrence.²¹⁸

These proposals return us to the notion of authorial responsibility and Henry James’ democratization of Aestheticism: it is due to ‘individual vision and by the pressure of the individual will’ that the ‘house of fiction has in short not one window, but a million.’²¹⁹ The cultivation of the individual ‘will,’ therefore, is critical for aesthetic pluralism; that is, it ensures that literature is not preserved for a select few.

²¹⁵ James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, p. 95.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

²¹⁷ James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, p. 95.

²¹⁸ James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, p. 189.

²¹⁹ James, *The Art of the Novel*, p. 46.

As the first chapter examined, Henry James often aims to ‘awaken’ the ‘remoter interests’ of readers by cultivating individualised modes of response that require high levels of readerly attention; James recognised that the literary object must arouse the attention of its readers in order to stimulate the ‘remoter interests.’ William James noticed that objects must be of ‘interest’ to the experiencing individual because selective interests are based on the ‘excitement of the sense-organs to which the object appeals.’²²⁰ Whilst interests are variable from person to person, objects must have the potential to be interesting and sustain attention: ‘the active powers, left alone with no proper object on which to vent their energy must either atrophy...or else [unleash] pent up convulsions.’²²¹ This notion of a ‘proper object’ implies that some forms of experience vouchsafe higher psychological affects than others, and anticipates his brother’s Paterian emphasis on aesthetic experience. We see this type of view in Henry James’ ‘The Art of Fiction’ where, as I mentioned earlier, he asserts that ‘The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting.’ He echoes this view in ‘The Future of the Novel’ where he asserts: ‘[The prose picture] must, of course, hold our attention and reward it, it must not appeal on false pretences.’²²² We thus move towards a model in which both perceiver and object of perception participate in a mutually transactional relationship: there is potential for the percept to stimulate interest in the perceiver, and there is potential for the perceiver to relate to the percept on the basis of that which appeals to their ‘sense-organs.’ For Henry James, it is the responsibility of the author to produce art which stimulates the interests of its

²²⁰ James, *Principles of Psychology*, Volume 1, p. 434.

²²¹ William James, ‘Reflex Action and Theism,’ 1881, in *The Will to Believe*, pp. 126-7.

²²² James, ‘The Future of the Novel,’ p. 1.

readers whilst the reader must, if necessary, use modes of voluntary attention to remain focused and attentive to it. This idea anticipates Lee's complex three-way relationship between writer, object and reader, the dynamics of which are, as I noted in chapter two, dependent on the co-operation of each.

The cultivation of voluntary attention is central to both Henry and William James' concern for the idiosyncratic nature of perceptual relations, which—whilst maintaining the Spencerian associationist view that ideas are in part ideas of relations, including ideas of my relation with the world around me—is more concerned with how the uniqueness of perception prefigures the individual's formation (and realization) of 'a halo of obscure relations.' Henry James' incorporation of the concept of the individual will into his aesthetics offers a means by which to ensure art is representative of a broad spectrum of 'obscure relations.' This is similar to Pater's aim to cultivate an individualised aesthetic that is charged with relative values, but whilst Pater could afford to reserve this for a 'select few' and so assume a readership with the attentive skills to produce the aesthetic it consumed, James placed greater emphasis on the 'awakening' of the particular type of attention which Pater takes for granted, in order to ensure that he can extend his Aestheticism to a broader public. As the first chapter considered, James demands readerly attention in an age which compromised it. Following the poor reception of *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), James despondently apprehended that

The *faculty of attention* has utterly vanished from
the general Anglosaxon mind, extinguished at its

source by the big blatant *Bavadère* of journalism, of the newspaper & the picture (above all) magazine: who keeps screaming “Look at *me*, I am the thing, & I only, the thing that will keep you in relation with me *all the time* without your having to attend one *minute* of the time.”²²³

When we consider that James could not afford to ignore such cultural conditions, voluntary and ‘active’ modes of attention are much more ‘momentous and critical’ for him than they are for Pater. Not only does James place emphasis on ‘the pressure of the individual will’ to formulate idiosyncratic impressions, but the concept of individual agency is central to the very process of perception. For example, the active verb ‘making use of’ in James’ description of the artist as a ‘person making use of’ his ‘unique [observatory] instrument’ that creates ‘an impression distinct from every other’ reveals the way ‘active’ attention is central to his impressionism. This distinguishes his impressionism from that of Pater who places more emphasis on ‘an intuitive condition of mind’ and ‘a sort of immediate sense.’²²⁴

Of course, the individual ‘will’ does have a place in Pater when he accounts for the important role that active attention plays in his complex model of reception. In ‘Style,’ for example, the verb ‘will’ is used to describe the actions of his ideal writer and reader: as I have noted, he envisions ‘that sort of reader who *will* go (full of eyes) warily, considerately’ and ‘the

²²³ Henry James, ‘Letter to W. D. Howells,’ (11 December 1902), in *The Letters of Henry James*, p. 408.

²²⁴ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 31.

scholar...who...*will* show no favour to short-cuts, or hackneyed illustration, or an affectation of learning designed for the unlearned' (emphasis is mine). Yet, this notion of the individual will is inextricably linked to his notion of an intuitive and an instinctive relationship with one's environment. Paterian 'will' is not so much concerned with the notion of voluntary attention; rather, it is conceived as a predisposition which is a feature of the ideal aesthete's temperament. Temperament, or 'quality of mind,' is central to both Jamesian and Paterian Aestheticism, but James pays special attention to how this temperament might be cultivated.

Owing to William James' influence, Henry James makes a greater distinction (when compared to Pater) between passive (involuntary) and active (voluntary) modes of attention in order to cultivate an aesthetic form which portrays the idiosyncratic features of human experience. As we will see in the following section, James' concern for attention anticipates Lee's distinction between active and passive modes. However, whilst James regards 'voluntary' attention as a substitute for the individual who cannot achieve the appropriate type of attentiveness via involuntary means, Lee appears to work on the assumption that active modes of attention are essential regardless of the individual's innate abilities in order to ensure that we are 'engrossed by something outside ourselves.'²²⁵

²²⁵ Lee, *The Beautiful*, p. 62.

3.3 '[A]bsorbed into the form we perceive': Vernon Lee, Active Attention and Empathy

Prior to her feminist-led recovery, Lee was known above all else, for her importation of the term 'empathy' (*Einfühlung*) from the German school of psychological aesthetics into the study of British aesthetics. She devotes attention to this concept in works such as 'Beauty and Ugliness' (1897, 1912) and *The Beautiful: An Introduction to Psychological Aesthetics* (1913), which promote her view that we should partake in a process of self-realization, looking outwards when we engage with art. That Lee devotes significant portions of her oeuvre to late 19th- and early 20th-century psychological discourse suggests that she is self-consciously aiming to use such works to elevate a model of criticism designed for the appreciation of her fiction. Indeed, Shafquat Towheed has argued that such studies are 'symptomatic of her desire to identify, and even to instruct, a fit and receptive literary readership for her work.'²²⁶ However her endeavour to use critical works in this strategic way is not without its paradoxes. Lee's aesthetic empathy promotes a special type of engagement in which the critic devotes his attention exclusively to the percept in question. Yet, by using her critical works to cultivate empathetic modes of readerly engagement, Lee shifts our attention to a secondary, non-aesthetic mode of discourse. This undermines the vicarious and spontaneous nature of aesthetic empathy and reminds us of Lee's didactic tendencies. Nonetheless, Lee's works which commit to the concept of empathy are, indeed, anchored to her envisioning of an 'ideal' reader; that is, one who is

²²⁶Shafquat Towheed, 'Determining "Fluctuating Opinions": Vernon Lee, Popular Fiction, and Theories of Reading,' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 60 (2005): 214.

capable of appreciating and producing the elusive aesthetic which characterizes her supernatural fiction.

This section re-examines the concept of aesthetic empathy in Lee's writings by exploring how this concept is formulated via her engagements with both the German school of psychological aesthetics and the British school of physiological psychology. I argue that Lee's incorporation of the German concept *Einfühlung* is central to her rewriting of Paterian sympathy, but that her engagements with British physiological psychology means that her socially-engaged notion of 'empathy' remains anchored to Pater's prioritization of individual modes of response and an elite readership.

As the previous chapter illustrated, Vernon Lee's aesthetic empathy is, in fact, a version of Paterian sympathy. Throughout her writings, Lee often uses the terms 'sympathy' and 'empathy' interchangeably. This suggests that Lee endorses one of the sub-definitions of 'sympathy'—noted above—that most closely resembles her concept of 'empathy.' Secondly, it reveals that the German psychologists that theorize empathy regarded the term to be synonymous with 'sympathy.' As Gustav Jahoda has argued, Theodor Lipps had conceived 'empathy' and 'sympathy' as synonymous terms, but subsequent translations of his notion of empathy have misinterpreted it as 'being a concept quite distinct from that of the old "sympathy."'”²²⁷ Jahoda

²²⁷ Jahoda, Gustav. "Theodor Lipps and the shift from "sympathy" to "empathy."” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*. 41, 2 (2005): 162.

claims that Lipps ‘leave[s] no doubt that he regarded these concepts as more or less synonymous’²²⁸ in statements such as:

Positive *Einfühlung* is the experience of that harmony, negative the experience of discord. We can also describe that harmony as sympathy. Indeed, sympathy is nothing else than a psychic, an ego-experience; it is tied within my consciousness to an object different from myself that penetrates me and is freely accepted by me. It is the harmony between a life that is foreign to me and my own drive, need, or desire for life. Hence, we may also call positive *Einfühlung* sympathetic *Einfühlung*.²²⁹

The idea that empathy facilitates ‘harmony between a life that is foreign to me and my own drive, need, or desire for life’ closely resembles Lee’s emphasis on empathetic engagement as a process that facilitates a reciprocal and interactive relationship between critic and art-object. The key difference is, of course, that Lee does not describe empathy or sympathy as ‘a psychic,’ ‘ego-experience.’ In contrast to the egotism that underpins Paterian sympathy, Lee’s aesthetic empathy entails ‘an absorption in the non-ego.’²³⁰ This, Lee informs us in *The Beautiful*, is one of ‘several mischievous

²²⁸ Ibid., p. 158.

²²⁹ Lipps. *T. Die ästhetische Betrachtung und die bildende Kunst* ((Hamburg & Leipzig: Voss, 1906)); quoted in Gustav Jahoda, ‘Theodor Lipps and the shift from “sympathy” to “empathy,”’ pp. 158-9.

²³⁰ Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, p. 62.

misinterpretations'²³¹ that underlie her definition of the German concept of empathy. She openly contests Theodor Lipps' use of the 'reflexive form of the German verb "sich einfülen" (to feel oneself into)' which 'defines...Empathy as a metaphysical and quasi-mythological projection of the ego into the object under observation.'²³² For Lee, this is 'a notion incompatible with the fact that Empathy...depends upon a comparative or momentary abeyance of all thought of an ego.'²³³ Rather than amount to an act of self-projection, she conceives aesthetic empathy as an act of 'feeling into' which involves 'the merging of the perceptive activities of the subject in the qualities of the object of perception.'²³⁴ Lee uses the verb 'merging' to evoke a critical practice that does not require modes of social detachment to facilitate it. As the previous chapter illustrated, for Lee empathetic engagement with art prompts the immediate establishment of an interactive relationship between the perceived object and the practitioner's perceptive states. It is an activity that, by removing egotism, anticipates an intensely charged aesthetic experience of absorption and self-loss, in which our attention is devoted entirely to the object in question. Lee describes empathy as a type of contemplation that 'reinstat[e]s' the object 'in the centre of our consciousness.'²³⁵ She makes it clear that the object should 'no longer be thought of with reference to ourselves (since we aren't thinking about ourselves)' but rather 'in reference to' the object itself, 'to what we are thinking about.'²³⁶ During this process, 'we are,'

²³¹ Lee, *The Beautiful*, p. 66.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

according to Lee, ‘engrossed by something outside ourselves.’²³⁷ Lee’s aesthetic empathy is central to her emphasis on modes of disinterested critical enquiry, which as the previous chapter illustrated, which involves two distinct types of critical attention working synergistically together.

Lee’s move away from the metaphysical implications of empathy is a consequence of her appropriation of the German concept in terms that belong to the British school of physiological psychology. In her essay ‘Art and Usefulness,’ Lee explains that when we engage empathetically with art we become more receptive to the affective dimensions of the work’s formal dimensions; we are, so to speak, susceptible to its influence. She redefines ‘the *word* sympathy’ as ‘this subduing yet liberating, this enlivening and pacifying power of beautiful form over our feeling.’²³⁸ This recalls the associationist view that our intellectual life is located within the physiology of the brain; as for Pater, for Lee, the corporeality and sensuousness of aesthetic experience plays a crucial role in preserving the disinterestedness of this process. Furthermore, her model of aesthetic appreciation, like that of Pater’s, builds in an element of self-reflexivity of one’s affective response to art. In *Music and its Lovers* she re-conceives sympathy as a process which requires us to ‘recognise the feelings suggested by’²³⁹ the object. Like Pater, she promotes an activity that ensures that art’s affective dimensions are held to depend upon the quality of our perceptive faculties. This is similar to the model of critical engagement that Pater promotes in *The Renaissance* where he instructs the critic to ask: ‘How is my nature modified by its [the art object’s] presence and

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 62.

²³⁸ Lee, *Laurus Nobilis*, p. 239.

²³⁹ Lee, *Music and its Lovers*, p. 206.

under its influence?'; while, in turn, emphasizing the imperative 'to know one's own impression as it really is.' As for Paterian Aestheticism, this two-tiered model of critical enquiry means that the selflessness of Lee's aesthetic empathy does not, as it may at first seem, require the mind's analytical functions to recede into the background or prefigure a loss of agency. The key difference, of course, is that Lee removes the element of detachment from this two-tiered process in order to theorize a different type of self-reflexivity. For Pater and James, aesthetic perception allows the artist or critic to remain detached from the object with which they come into contact in order to facilitate a mode of reflexivity that allows the critic to 'turn that Other into a reordered reflection of his own image.' By contrast, Lee argues that such self-reflexivity can only take place when the critic establishes immediate interaction with the art object. She argues that the critic can only experience art's affect 'when our feelings enter, and are absorbed into the form we perceive'²⁴⁰ because it is this interaction which ensures the critic can 'reproduce the object and trust...its reproducing impressions.' This, for Lee, eliminates the 'tendency' of the Paterian critic 'to note...the emotion caused by an object in himself'²⁴¹ and fail to appreciate the object on its own terms. She makes a subtle but crucial distinction: Lee's critic must know one's own impressions of the 'reproducing impressions' of the object. This mode of self-reflexivity preserves the selflessness that underlines the social utility of Lee's notion of aesthetic empathy by ensuring that our attention is 'directed entirely to the feeling which one attributes to the other.'²⁴²

²⁴⁰ Lee, *Laurus Nobilis*, pp. 239-240.

²⁴¹ Lee, 'On Style,' p. 39.

²⁴² Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, p. 46.

As for James, for Lee, corporeal receptivity must be an active process. Yet, whilst Jamesian attention—which can be achieved actively or passively—preserves an element of self-interest and individual agency, for Lee, attention, as I noted, must be achieved *actively* in order to ensure that aesthetic engagement enables the critic to ‘think rather in terms of “it is” than in those of “I am.”’ Whilst for Pater, the critic must become ‘one complex medium of reception’ in which it is difficult to distinguish between passive and active modes of attention, there is a greater degree of separation between the two types of attention for Lee. This is perhaps best exemplified in a section of *Music and its Lovers*, appropriately entitled ‘Active and Passive Attention,’ in which she interrogates the differences between ‘listening’ as ‘eminently active’ and ‘hearing’ as ‘comparatively passive.’²⁴³ She then adds the proviso that ‘It is no easy matter thus to describe the difference between such passive and active kinds of attention (or perception—Wundt’s “apperception”); because real experience does not tally with such distinctions,’²⁴⁴ before going on to assert that the two types of attention constitute separate activities with ‘essential difference[s]’²⁴⁵:

even as I am convinced that there is usually some degree of “listening” in all “hearing” of music and a necessary substratum of mere “hearing” in all listening ... it seems to me we must recognise an essential difference between [these] two sorts

²⁴³ Lee, *Music and its Lovers*, p. 107.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

of attention, in order to appreciate their different results.²⁴⁶

In this assessment of the ‘essential difference between two sorts of attention,’²⁴⁷ she does, of course, echo Pater’s distinction between the two modes of attention for whilst ‘hearing’ finds us susceptible to influence ‘it is attention which has [been] laid hold of from without and something [has been] done to it and to us.’²⁴⁸ She asserts that ‘in the case of “listening,” our attention is not merely being acted upon, it is acting. We are doing something: discriminating and correlating those various relations of the musical notes among themselves.’²⁴⁹ Lee inherits from Paterian Aestheticism the basic principles that underpin this distinction. Yet whilst passive and active modes of attention combine to constitute the Paterian aesthetic critic’s ‘whole nature,’ these two types of attention are not brought into the same synergetic relationship in Lee’s aesthetic theory.

In Paterian Aestheticism, passive modes of attention are left to secure this selflessness and achieve corporeal receptivity, whilst active modes of attention—whilst still achieved via physiological faculties—ensure that an element of self-interest can re-enter the frame of critical engagement. Lee argues that modes of active attention are crucial to securing the outward-looking direction and selflessness of her aesthetic empathy because they ensure that the critic retains attention on the art object under observation, rather than

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

himself. This extra measure of corporeal receptivity means that Lee places greater emphasis than Pater on intellectual activities such as discrimination as being physically strenuous; she promotes, that is, a much more muscular Aestheticism. We have seen this already in ‘A Wicked Voice’ where Lee dramatises the physical demands of aesthetic appreciation; Zaffirino’s haunting cadences drain the composer of energy. After one of the many episodes that leave him ‘breathless,’ Magnus is exhausted:

my hair was clammy, my knees sank beneath me,
 an enervating heat spread through my body; I
 tried to breathe more largely, to suck in the
 sounds with the incense-laden air. I was
 supremely happy, and yet as if I were dying; then
 suddenly a chill ran through me, and with it a
 vague panic.²⁵⁰

This physically draining mode of appreciation makes Magnus more receptive to Zaffirino’s voice to the point at which he is conditioned for spontaneous interaction, which involves ‘becom[ing] the...quiddity’ of the music. He feels his ‘body melt even as wax in the sunshine’ and notes that he ‘too was turning fluid and vaporous, in order to mingle with these sounds as the moonbeams mingle with the dew.’²⁵¹ Lee uses the figure of the castrato to theatrically dramatise art’s corporeal demands. In *Laurus Nobilis* she celebrates music as

²⁵⁰ Lee, ‘A Wicked Voice,’ p. 174.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

that which penetrates ‘the soul’s vague viscera.’²⁵² It is such ‘various muscular strains, changes of respiratory and circulatory changes’ which, Lee surmises, ‘might be considered as constituting the special aesthetic emotion.’²⁵³ The fact that discrimination as a muscular activity is central to her aesthetics of empathy means that this critical practice is reserved for those with the physical stamina to ‘keep...it up.’ This recalls the way Lee categorises together incompetence and fatigue on her spectrum of readerly proficiency: ‘the stupid or tired Reader’ is antithetical to ‘the right kind of Reader.’ Statements such as these reveal the way Lee incorporates more deeply into her Aestheticism the notion from British psychology that the body is both indispensable and inextricably linked to the intellect. Lee’s subscription to this school of psychological theory is significant because it runs parallel with her move away from the metaphysical implications of Lipps’ notion of empathy. Moreover, this is significant for Lee’s conception of empathy as a process which requires the ‘momentary abeyance of all thought of an ego’ because it means that our sense of self no longer exists in an autonomous realm ‘beyond enquiry’ but is instead in a realm which is determined by external influences. The corporeality or materiality of our intellectual life is a highly prized component of the selflessness of Lee’s aesthetics of empathy, which is maintained at both passive and active stages of aesthetic engagement because it ensures that ‘momentary abeyance of all thought of an ego’ is possible to achieve. It is in this way that Lee seeks to remove the individual’s self-interests from the process of aesthetic engagement. This does not mean, however, that Lee disregards the individuality of the critic and the private nature of his response to art.

²⁵² Lee, *Laurus Nobilis*, p. 141.

²⁵³ Vernon Lee, ‘Recent Aesthetics’, *Quarterly Review*, 199 (April 1904): 438.

To a slightly greater extent than Pater, Lee reserves aesthetic empathy for a highly trained, ‘ideal’ practitioner. She registers the difficulty of engaging empathically with art, asserting that:

the muscular adjustments and the measuring,
 comparing and coordinating activities by which
 Empathy is started being indeed occasionally
 difficult and distressing, but giving in themselves
 little more than a negative satisfaction, at the
 most that of difficulty overcome and suspense
 relieved.²⁵⁴

One might read this as a paraphrasing of Pater’s theorization of the three-tiered relationship between aesthetic difficulty, the reader and the formation of literary value in his essay ‘Style’ when he states: ‘for the reader supposed there will be an æsthetic satisfaction in...the delightful sense of difficulty overcome.’²⁵⁵ In works such as *Music and its Lovers*, Lee qualifies such claims, explaining that empathy, as a process of ‘feeling into,’ demands our ‘active attention’²⁵⁶ and subheadings of this mode of attention include activities such as ‘discrimination and correlation,’²⁵⁷ which, as I have mentioned, Victorian psychologists such as Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer had theorized as attributes of intellectual and cognitively ‘superb’ minds. Lee

²⁵⁴ Lee, *The Beautiful*, p. 68.

²⁵⁵ Pater, ‘Style,’ p. 14.

²⁵⁶ Lee, *Music and its Lovers*, p. 112.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

echoes Spencer's assertion that 'more or less of this discrimination is exercised by higher creatures than by lower.' And so whilst discrimination may be central to a process which requires the critic to 'become the character, the quiddity of the particular' work of art, this spontaneous, 'liberating' and 'enlivening' process, which ensures Lee's aesthetic empathy is a socially-engaged process, is held to depend upon the perceptive capacities of the observing individual. It becomes clear, then, that her theorization of a mode of perception that ensures we partake in a process of self-realization 'looking outwards' is a specialist practice not opened to an untrained practitioner, and is reserved for an elite readership with the skills and proficiencies to 'keep...it up.'

Lee's stress on the perceptive qualities of the critic means that, like Pater and James, she ensures that the aesthetic practitioner formulates his response via a first-hand engagement with the art object. The individuality of the critic comes more sharply into focus in Lee's aesthetic theory when she endorses the associationist view that our associations play an important role in the act of aesthetic contemplation. Somewhat understandably, Lee had articulated her hesitancy towards associationism because of the way it threatens to compromise disinterested critical engagement. It promotes a critical practice that allows us to impose our own memory and experiences on an object, enhancing our appreciation of that object's singularity. As Ian Small has argued, 'What Associationism as an aesthetic theory did was to deny the possibility of perceiving the "reality" of the artifact: that "reality" tended to become submerged by the plethora of associations awakened in the mind of the

spectator.’²⁵⁸ In her essay ‘Juvenilia’ (1887), Lee notes that ‘Association means the investing of one object, having characteristics of its own, with the characteristics of some other object: the pushing aside, in short, of reality to make room for the fictions of imagination or memory.’²⁵⁹ And Lee was thus apprehensive about a mechanism that appeared to compromise a mode of criticism which pleads for the subordination of our self-interests.

In *Beauty and Ugliness*, Lee had described empathy as involving ‘the revival of subjective states in what we call our memory’²⁶⁰ and in ‘Juvenilia’ she wrote that ‘without association there would be no relations to art; nay no art at all.’²⁶¹ For Lee, associations play a central role in helping the aesthetic practitioner to establish an empathetic relationship with art, which, as cited above, involves the ‘the merging of the perceptive activities of the subject in the qualities of the object of perception.’²⁶² That is, associations are crucial to a process based on the fundamental notion that the ‘essential character of beauty is its being a relation between ourselves and certain objects.’²⁶³ Lee’s associationism, therefore, moderates her commitment to a mode of criticism which is divested of self-interest. For her, ‘utter unfamiliarity baffles aesthetic responsiveness,’ since the ‘very worst attitude towards art is that of the holiday-maker who comes into its presence with no ulterior interest or

²⁵⁸ Ian Small, ‘Vernon Lee, Association and “Impressionist Criticism,”’ *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 17: 2 (Spring 1977): 179.

²⁵⁹ Lee, *Juvenilia*, p. 45. As Ernest in Wilde’s ‘The Critic as Artist’ quips: ‘the primary aim of the critic is to see the object as in itself it really is not.’ (Wilde, ‘The Critic as Artist,’ Part I, p. 119).

²⁶⁰ Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, p. 47.

²⁶¹ Lee, *Juvenilia*, p. 54.

²⁶² Lee, *The Beautiful*, p. 57.

²⁶³ Lee, *Beauty and Ugliness*, p. 53.

business.²⁶⁴ She argues that we should distinguish associationism from an attitudinal type of engagement with art (such as self-interestedness); instead, as Ian Small notes, she describes associationism as a ‘fundamental mechanism, of all mental activity.’²⁶⁵ In ‘Juvenilia,’ she responds to her rhetorical question: ‘Now are we not balking the very end and aim of association when, in order to enjoy its action in ourselves, we neglect its works?’ with the assertion that ‘it is not association which is pestilent; it is our own conceit, our own stupidity, our own want of self-command.’²⁶⁶ She therefore becomes concerned with the way we self-manage our associations to ensure that we establish an appropriate relationship with art. Lee not only accepts that associations are a fundamental part of critical engagement, she argues that to deny our associations is to deny the individuality of the critic: without associations, she writes, ‘no individuality of ourselves would have existed at all.’²⁶⁷ She thus returns to Paterian impressionism and its emphasis on the critic’s apprehension of his associations (his impressions) in a way that is personal to him; the personal configuration of our impressions, for Pater, constitutes ‘that process of brain-building by which we are, each one of us, what we are.’²⁶⁸ In *The Renaissance Fancies and Studies*, she writes, ‘The things in our mind, due to the mind’s constitution and its relation with the universe, are, after all, realities; and realities to count with, as much as the tables and chairs and hats and coats.’²⁶⁹ Associations—those ‘things in our mind’—are central to Lee’s subscription to a mode of

²⁶⁴ Lee, *The Beautiful*, pp. 135 and 138.

²⁶⁵ Ian Small, ‘Vernon Lee, Association and “Impressionist Criticism,”’ p. 182.

²⁶⁶ Lee, *Juvenilia*, pp. 72 and 73.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁶⁸ Pater, *The Child in the House*, p. 173.

²⁶⁹ Vernon Lee, *The Renaissance Fancies and Studies* (New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons; London, Smith, Elder, & Co., 1896), pp. 238-9.

impressionistic criticism that prioritises the perceptive qualities of the individual practitioner.

Moreover, Lee's commitment to the individuality of the critic is further called to our attention in her emphasis on his physiological responsiveness, which anchors her notion of aesthetic empathy to Lamarckian evolutionary discourse. By subscribing to the view that our intellectual life is located within the physiology of the brain and the body generally, Lee, like Pater and James, identifies the mechanisms required for aesthetic appreciation as subject to the same evolutionary process as other organisms. She writes: 'The capacity for...aesthetic satisfaction...would be fostered by virtue of a mass of evolutionary advantages which are as complex and difficult to analyse, but also as deep-seated and undeniable, as itself.'²⁷⁰ It is possible to go as far to argue that to a much greater extent than is at stake in Henry James' envisioning of an ideal reader Lee's Aestheticism is reserved for those recipients of the inherited mechanisms that are deemed necessary for 'ideal' modes of aesthetic response. James reserves active attention for those individuals without the 'superb cognitive endowments' to engage attentively with art in a passive way as part of his aim to cultivate a readership for his fiction. By theorizing 'active' attention as a process which requires superb cognitive endowments, Lee reserves no room for the 'stupid or tired Reader' in the terms of her ideal reader.

²⁷⁰ *The Beautiful*, p. 155.

However, there is scope reserved for the cultivation of the reader without the proficiencies to engage with art: but this cultivation does not demand the reader's 'active' attention. Unlike Pater and James, Lee's reader is part of a complex three-way reader-response framework in which the writer must not abandon the unqualified reader. As I argued in the first chapter, Lee's own refusal to transfer her authorial responsibilities to the reader is part of her mistrust of the reader's proficiencies and attempt to engineer his response. Lee holds a cynical view of the reader or, more specifically, the individual responsible for co-operating with the pre-conditions required for a certain mode of aesthetic response. In *The Beautiful*, for example, she asserts that 'blank despondency [is] characteristic of so many gallery goers'²⁷¹ and in 'On Style' she assumes that 'the Reader is perpetually on the point of stopping, of turning round, or going off at a wrong turning, let alone his yawning from side to side.'²⁷² As referred to in chapter one, Lee stipulates that the writer must devise means to sustain the reader's attention. Therefore, she situates the reader within a supportive, co-operative relationship, which requires the writer to partake in 'the craft of manipulating the contents of the Reader's mind' which stimulates the reader's emotive responsiveness and it is for this reason that she describes the writer's craft as 'in a very special sense, an emotional art.'²⁷³ As we have seen, in her supernatural fiction where she promotes an elusive, obscure aesthetic which requires the suspension of the reader's expectations, Lee's ideal mode of appreciation is elevated or enforced via coercive and authoritative means, which goes against the grain of Aestheticism's emphasis on the individuality of the critic's response. Her didacticism is, nonetheless,

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Lee, 'On Style,' p.41.

²⁷³ Lee, 'On Style,' p. 35.

part of her aim to cultivate a readership for her fiction and offers a solution to the fact that the majority of readers consuming fiction in the late-19th century lacked the qualifications to engage with the type of aesthetic that characterizes her fiction.

As we have seen the social agenda of Vernon Lee's Aestheticism is held to depend upon its elitism, and this elitism aligns her with, rather than against, Pater and James. Lee's notion of empathy is actually a version of Paterian sympathy. Rather than reject Paterian sympathy, she rewrites certain elements of the concept: her modification of Pater is apparent in the way both draw on contemporary associationist psychology. She also extends Henry James' distinction between active and passive modes of attention, but for entirely different reasons: she extrapolates active from passive types of attention in order to remove the element of detachment which we find in James and Pater, and so to sharpen the social conscience of Paterian sympathy. Whilst James ensures that the cultivation of the reader requires the stimulation of 'active' attention, Lee attributes this responsibility to the craft of the writer, which is a form of responsibility that often mutates into didacticism. Lee's emphasis on the individuality of her ideal critic undermines scholarship which has tended to assume that her commitment to the concept of empathy means that she aims 'to create a community of appreciation through the medium of art, even to the point of rendering the art object obsolete' and that her work prefigures 'the view among many contemporary artists that art should be a

shared experience'²⁷⁴ by uniting 'its viewers in communal appreciation'²⁷⁵ as Paula Marantz Cohen has argued. Whilst it is true that Lee sought to articulate the terms of her aesthetic theory in a way which emphasised a sharper social conscience than that found in the works of writers such as Pater, this does not mean that she 'redirected her view toward the audience.' We can better align Lee's writings to the elitism of British Aestheticism in light of the fact that her socially-engaged notion of 'empathy'—of 'moving outside us'—is anchored to her prioritization of individual and private modes of response which require an 'ideal,' elite readership.

Conclusion: Negotiating Physiological Limits

Walter Pater, Henry James and Vernon Lee each engage with physiological psychology in a way that reveals how the ethical engagements of British Aestheticism are held to depend upon an elitist demand for aesthetic practitioners who possess the intellectual mechanisms required for 'ideal' modes of response. Pater's muscular Aestheticism is crucial to his emphasis on a selfless, sensory Aestheticism, which is ethical by making the individual more receptive to new impressions that he can then discriminate in order to re-orientate himself in a complex world and establish his relationship towards others. It is this same emphasis on the corporeality of aesthetic experience which reserves his Aestheticism for those with the innate receptive faculties that aesthetic contemplation activates. By reserving his Aestheticism for a

²⁷⁴ Marantz Cohen, Paula. 'The Elusive Aesthetics of Vernon Lee.' *The Yale Review*. 95, 1. (2007): 29.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

select few, Pater undermines the ethical consequences of aesthetic engagement because it exacerbates the problem that comes with the detachment of Paterian aesthetic criticism: this select few do not need to depart from their ivory towers or commit to ethical action, and when they do so, their engagement with the world seems to compromise the very individualism which is a precondition of the sympathy that underwrites that capacity for ethical action.

Henry James continues to preserve Pater's engagements with physiological psychology, but views the corporeality of aesthetic experience as that which promotes the individual's agency and interests. James endorses a mode of attention which ensures that it is the individual, and not the environment, which ultimately defines the nature of human experience. James' Aestheticism is reserved for both the naturally proficient and the untrained practitioner. Those individuals who are not equipped with the superb cognitive endowments necessary to attend to form in a passive, effortless way are reserved the mechanism of 'voluntary attention' which brings 'back a wandering attention over and over again.' Whilst for Pater, it is the writer's responsibility to activate an innate receptivity, for Henry James, the author's task is to produce art which stimulates the interests of all its readers, including those who are less proficient, and who must, if necessary, use modes of voluntary attention to remain focused and attentive.

Vernon Lee departs from both Pater and James by theorizing an interactive mode of aesthetic engagement with art so as to prioritise the object under observation rather than focus on the benefits that the process brings to

the individual. Lee extends Pater's emphasis on the corporeality of the aesthetic critic, regarding it as crucial to the selflessness of aesthetic experience; but she removes the element of detachment from active modes of attention—those processes of discrimination and correlation—in order to ensure that the critic remains focused on the uniqueness and otherness of the work of art itself, rather than on himself. Lee theorizes another level of corporeal receptivity, which makes her muscular Aestheticism a more physically demanding activity than that of Pater's. Yet, Lee accounts for the less proficient reader by ensuring that the dynamics between reader, writer and art-object depend upon the co-operation of each.

In this chapter, we have thus seen how James and Lee extend Paterian Aestheticism into a new age of literary reception by trying to deal with the tensions between elitism and ethics that underscore Pater's model of aesthetic criticism. Both James and Lee rework the ethical implications of aesthetic experience in response to their engagements with contemporary psychological discourses. Detachment, for James, is ethical by heightening the individual's awareness of the idiosyncratic nature of his experience. This view evolves from his interest in William James' psychology and its concern for the idiosyncratic features of physiological cerebral processes. Owing to the fact that there is no necessary relationship between the individual and his environment, unlike Pater, James does not anticipate the precise social consequences to result from this activity. His aestheticism is ethically engaged by virtue of the fact that it seeks to cultivate a readership capable of conducting introspective analysis, which, in turn anticipates a culture of aesthetic pluralism. For Lee, the ethics of

Paterian and Jamesian elitism are undermined by modes of detachment because they do not commit the individual critic to action. Unlike James, Lee retains emphasis on the social consequences of aesthetic engagement and it is due to her commitment to the ethical implications of aestheticism that she removes the element of detachment. Her commitment to aesthetic empathy marks the way she rewrites Paterian sympathy into the early 20th-century in which Pater's 'ivory tower' model of ethics comes under pressure. Lee's aesthetic empathy still requires, however, a proficient reader to undertake this practice. She only overcomes the elitism of empathetic aesthetic experience by ensuring that the writer does not completely abandon the reader to construct meaning unassisted.

—CONCLUSION—

As this thesis has shown, the social implications of Aestheticism are undermined by but also held to depend upon an elitist set of requirements that precondition the reader's responsiveness to literary works. Extending Paterian Aestheticism into a new age of literary reception, the writings of James and Lee complicate the assumption that an elite reader is *inevitably* required to engage with works of art that may yield an ethical response. Yet, both James and Lee continue to assume that art's social engagements are secured by 'ideal' consumption practices. Therefore, as we have seen, their attempts to account for a less proficient reader are, at times, paradoxical and do not resolve the tension between elitism and ethics that renders Aestheticism's social engagements problematic. Nonetheless, we have arrived at a much more complicated and nuanced understanding of the ethical, social and cultural implications of Aestheticism's readerships by examining how James and Lee rewrite Pater's ideas on reception in accordance with their own respective engagements with literary and intellectual culture.

Moreover, by arriving at an expanded account of Aestheticism, we can now understand why certain writers in the early 20th century, many of whom are associated with Modernism, continue to debate the reception conditions required for engaging with works of literary art in an ethical way. For example, we can turn to Virginia Woolf's account, which takes a rather unthinking form of elitism when asserting that the type of pleasurable reading that Pater had

theorized would be reserved for the ‘common reader’ rather than the critic or the scholar.¹ In *The Common Reader* (1925), she asserts:

The common reader differs from the critic and scholar...He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others. Above all, he is guided by an instinct to create for himself, out of whatever odds and ends he can come by, some kind of whole—a portrait of a man, a sketch of an age, a theory of the art of writing.²

Here, like Pater, James and Lee, Woolf theorizes the act of reading as a process of creation no different from that which the artist undertakes. She appears, however, to assume that anyone can undergo this type of aesthetic experience. Woolf separated the type of reading she theorized from scholarship because she felt excluded from its gendered parameters. She refers to scholarship within the reading room as ‘a thought in the huge bald forehead,’³ thus depicting the dome as Ruth Hoberman describes—as ‘a recurring image for the conflation of knowledge and masculinity.’⁴ Woolf’s view that anyone can undertake artistic practice as she conceived it is somewhat undermined by her conceptualization

¹ Angela Leighton, for example, has shown how ‘Pater’s “gemlike flame” goes on flickering in Woolf’s work, in objects which, like Pater’s, enjoy that transparency to the outer world which keeps them fragile, open-ended, both self-sufficient and conditional.’ (Angela Leighton, ‘Aesthetic Conditions,’ in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, p. 22).

² Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 1984), p. 1.

³ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1929), p. 26.

⁴ Ruth Hoberman, ‘Women in the British Museum Reading Room During the Late-Nineteenth and Early-Twentieth Centuries: From Quasi-to Counterpublic’, *Feminist Studies*, 28 (2002): 507.

of the woman writer as requiring a 'room of one's own.' Woolf's model of readerly engagement turns out also to depend upon modes of detachment which recalls the Paterian and Jamesian models of critical engagement that requires a scholar as part of its reservation of aesthetic experience as an activity that is reserved for a specialist reader capable of undertaking the activity of critical engagement in a specifically theorized way.

Furthermore, we can see how the legacies of Aestheticism's concern for an ethical mode of aesthetic consumption are latent in Woolf's account when she reiterates the importance of an active reader to secure an ethical form of aesthetic consumption, one which appreciates the affective dimensions of art; she writes:

For we are apt to forget...how great a power the body of literature possesses to impose itself: how it will not suffer itself to be read passively, but takes us and reads us; flouts our preconceptions; questions principles which we had got into the habit of taking for granted.⁵

This activity resembles Pater, James and Lee's theorization of aesthetic experience as a process which expands and redefines the individual's self-knowledge, and recalls their frameworks of disinterested criticism as an activity which enables the critic to suspend his egocentric interests to

⁵ Woolf, *The Common Reader*, p. 48.

‘question...principles which we had got into the habit of taking for granted.’ Moreover, here, like the aesthetes of this study, Woolf turns to the issue of readerly attentiveness to secure a readership that can engage with works characterized by aesthetic difficulty. Here we can see how Aestheticism’s theorization of a mode of reading which preserves that Paterian ‘specialness’ for the writer becomes a working model and sensibility or literary figures associated with Modernism. As we know, Henry James’ works regularly disrupt readerly absorption in order to activate the reader’s ‘voluntary attention’ and ‘remoter interests’; it is this disruption of the reader’s absorption which accounts for the difficulty of his works.

Overall, the writings examined in this thesis represent a specific response to a continued debate concerning the relationship between literature’s social utility, artistic responsibility and modes of readerly consumption. A further examination of the various ways Pater, James and Lee’s theorized reading practices extend beyond literary and intellectual culture at the turn-of-the-century can only shed more light on the complexity of the movement’s ethical models of aesthetic consumption. Aestheticism’s theorized specialist reading practices have been shown to both guarantee and problematise the movement’s social engagements. Therefore, when tracing the legacies of Aestheticism, we must examine how specific writers deal with the tensions that exist between certain kinds of elitism and certain kinds of ethics, and also interrogate the extent to which departures from—and appropriations of—Aestheticism’s theories of reception are caused by each writer’s engagements with the concerns of a new era.

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