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Pateresque: The Person, the Prose Style.

> So personal and so definite is the quality of Mr Pater's work, for those whom it repels as for those whom it attracts, that if he wrote a new book on Chinese pagodas, or on the Habits of the Water-rat, those people who have read him would devoutly read him still. [i]

Talk of Walter Pater was almost always personal, and it would begin with his person. He was 'an ugly pig', as his great admirer Lionel Johnson put it.[ii] To George Moore, he appeared 'almost as one of those ugly uncouth figures one meets with at the end of terraces, in lead rather than in stone, with large over-arching skulls'.[iii] 'He had an overhanging forehead, brown hair, deep-set mild eyes near together, a nose very low at the bridge, a heavy jaw, a square chin, and a curious malformation of the mouth'.[iv] His friends, it was said, convened meetings in order to discuss the problem, deciding that Pater should grow a large concealing moustache. The result was that he came to look like 'a vicar who has got somehow mixed up with a cavalry man'.[v] 'God help the British Army, and Britain, too, if its military men have Pater's physique and presence,' warned Thomas Wright, his biographer.[vi] Pater thought the 1894 sketch of him by William Rothenstein made him look like 'a Barbary ape'.[vii] He walked 'with a peculiar though slight stoop' and, when tired, with 'a halting step that suggested partial lameness'.[viii] According to Wright the malformed back was a family trait, shared with Pater's Aunt Bessie, of which the family was proud. They called it '"the Pater poke"'.[ix] Other acquaintances named him the '"shivery-shaky man," and talked of him as if he were a blanc mange or a jelly'.[x] G.C. Monk recalled Pater's habit in Oxford of 'slouching past under the wall and never looking anyone fairly in the face', for which he acquired the nickname among undergraduates of 'Judas'.[xi] The fact of his ugliness seemed significant in some way, particularly for those young literary men who were most under his spell, or who were trying hardest to resist his influence. Pater was 'far from being as beautiful as his own prose', Henry James made a point of noting.[xii] It presented itself as an enigma. Or rather, it compounded the enigma that was already there: that of his prose-style.

Besotted with his writings and about to adopt their style as his own, Arthur Symons was naturally curious to see what sort of man Pater was 'in the flesh'. For Symons it was difficult to conceive of him as a man in the flesh at all; instead he imagined 'an influence, an emanation, a personality, quite volatilised and ethereal'.[xiii] The reality of Pater's actual person seemed unlikely enough for its discovery to be a significant event for the young men of the 1890s. For them Pater was the High Priest of Aestheticism, the Prophet of Beauty: 'le prosateur ouvrage par excellence de ces temps', in Mallarmé's phrase.[xiv] His personal ugliness was a shock for those who took the perfection of art to consist in a happy concordance between form and content, that 'complex faculty for which every thought and feeling is twin-born with its sensible analogue or symbol'.[xv] Pater seemed unlucky enough to have been twin-born with his sensible anti-symbol. But this irony could also be taken as a metaphor: it stood for the raw material of a life which had been transfigured by Art. It was a key element of his achievement, the transformation of the 'stereotyped world'.[xvi] The problem was resolved, if one compared his grotesque appearance with that perfect prose, and then reflected upon the super-subtle meanings embodied in this paradox.

The apparent contradiction between the person and the prose also fed into a suspicion many had that there was something essentially deceptive about him; that the true self was being held in reserve, hidden behind a mask. Edmund Gosse would note that Pater was a gracious host, always perfectly attentive, 'but who could tell what was passing behind those half-shut, dark-grey eyes, that courteous and gentle mask?'.[xvii] George Moore went further: 'A mask, I cried, to myself', wondering what reasons Pater could possibly have had 'for the assumption of so hideous a disguise'.[xviii] John Rainier McQueen, the school friend who had known Pater longer than almost anyone else, described him as 'an admirable (because unconscious) *actor*; and I think an instance of Jekyll and Hyde dualism'.[xix] If this was so it was nevertheless hard to identify which face belonged to Hyde and which to Jekyll. Those who knew him intimately disagreed as to whether the writings could be taken as an index to his true character, or whether they were rather a 'sort of disguise', another mask imposed upon the physical one.[xx] 'Behind the mask… that he did not lift, that he could not lift, was a shy, sentimental man, all powerful in written word, impotent in life', wrote Moore.[xxi] This particular dichotomy was a

tempting conclusion to reach given the legendary uneventfulness of Pater's life, but it is too simple a resolution of the paradox. Henry James attempted to see through it altogether when he described Pater as 'the mask without the face' in a letter to Edmund Gosse, although this, too, was unjust to Pater.[xxii] Symons subtilized the distinction even further, dissolving it completely:

> Everything in Pater was in harmony, when you got used to its particular forms of expression: the heavy form, so slow and deliberate in movement, so settled in repose; the timid yet scrutinising eyes; the mannered, yet so personal voice; the exact, pausing speech, with its urbanity, its almost painful conscientiousness of utterance; the whole outer mask, worn for protection and out of courtesy, yet moulded upon the features which it covers. And the books themselves are the man, literally the man in many accents, turns of phrase; and, far more than that, the man himself, whom one felt through his few, friendly, intimate, serious words: the inner life of his soul coming close to us, in a slow and gradual revelation.[xxiii].

It is remarkable how frequently the fact of the body hovers somewhere behind descriptions of Pater's prose style – sometimes as a baffling contradiction, often as a symbol of what was overcome, sometimes as an index of precisely what was wrong with his writing: the slow, overburdened, broken-backed, halting and languorous sentences, unnatural and deformed, for those who were not his admirers. Perfectly formed, for those who were. The notion of Pater's physical person being entirely at one with the shape and manner of the prose style could be taken in opposite ways.[xxiv] In fact, the contradictory nature of reactions to Pater's writing marks out a major fault-line in an age-old aesthetic debate which acquired a particular urgency during the *fin-de-siècle* and the early years of the twentieth century, and then re-emerged in twentieth-century literary-theoretical arguments (as I shall show). Central to all of this is the question of the style – 'the style, unlike all other styles', as Moore put it.[xxv]

'Le style c'est l'homme même'. Style is the man himself; it is the essential signature of the individual (Buffon's aphorism first appeared in his inaugural discourse at the Académie Française in 1753). Baudelaire would ask whether 'le choix des sujets, c'est l'homme?'[xxvi] Wittgenstein would take Buffon's words to mean something slightly but significantly different: 'a man's style is a *picture*

of him', which softens the notion of an exactly congruent truth between inner and outer, and leaves open the possibility of style as mask or persona.[xxvii] The relation of style to body, and of body to identity, is an ancient philosophical question; the relation of style to thought – to *content*, equally so. Admirers and detractors alike are agreed that Pater's prose style in some way mirrors or performs the conceptual content of the writings, so that his aesthetic philosophy is enacted in the peculiar syntactical forms and rhythms of his prose, and in its narrow or self-echoing lexicon. In this case, 'le style est la pensée même'.[xxviii] Those who consider the conceptual content of Pater's writing to be valueless ('etiolated' was T.S. Eliot's judgement), read the prose as mimetic of this lack of motive or impulse.[xxix] Those who value Pater's aesthetic vision, see it somehow announced and adumbrated in the very structure of his sentences. This is true, no doubt, of every serious writer, but it seems particularly true of Pater, to the point where it has become the crux of his reception. And the curiously self-performative dimension to his prose seems to explain the numerous passages which may be taken out of their context and produced as descriptions of his own work.

To take one example, from the 1889 essay 'Aesthetic Poetry', adapted from the early review of the poems of William Morris, in the passage descriptive of Provençal poetry of the late middle ages:

> Here, under this strange complex of conditions, as in some medicated air, exotic flowers of sentiment expand, among a people of a remote and unaccustomed beauty, somnambulistic, frail, androgynous, the light almost shining through them, as the flame of a little taper shows through the Host. Such loves were too fragile and adventurous to last more than for a moment.[xxx]

It is not merely the case that each phrase in this passage belongs to the Pater lexicon (his touchstone words would include 'strange', 'remote', 'frail', 'unaccustomed', 'fragile'; he is fascinated by metaphors of 'exotic flowers', by the wafer of the Eucharist, for things or feelings that last no more than a 'moment', for anything 'androgynous'; his use of 'complex' as a noun is also typical, and Angela Leighton has drawn our attention to the centrality of the word 'conditions' in his writing); but the structure of the sentence itself, with its ambiguous deictic 'here', with the delays and side-issues, its sequence of three adjectives in suspension, the uncertainty of whether the light shining through

'them' passes through the flowers of sentiment or through the people – all this produces a rhythm and movement of sense which is itself 'somnambulistic', both languorous and strangely focussed at once, as if in 'some medicated air'.[xxxi] Moreover, the light 'almost shining through' the flower-people is an example of the translucence celebrated in 'Diaphaneitè', the essay that constitutes Pater's first serious aesthetic statement, and which is frequently cited as being the most 'coded' of all his works.[xxxii]

That there is something very peculiarly personal, then, about all of Pater's writing, that it seems oddly self-performing, might superficially seem to prove some tendency of solipsism, or projection – that he discovers reduplications of himself in everything he encounters. But looked at more carefully, it may also suggest a complexity to the notion of the 'personal' that has been overlooked in critical studies of Pater, but which, I shall argue, is fundamental to his own understanding of style. In his essay on 'Style', Pater translated Buffon's aphorism as 'The style is the man', but offered the following qualification:

> A relegation, you may say perhaps – a relegation of style to the subjectivity of the individual, which must soon transform it into mannerism. Not so! since there is, under the conditions supposed, for those elements of the man, for every lineament of the vision within, the one word, the one acceptable word, recognisable by the sensitive, by others "who have intelligence" in the matter, as absolutely as ever anything can be in the evanescent and delicate region of human language. 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. … / If the style be the man, in all the colour and intensity of a veritable apprehension, it will be in a real sense "impersonal."[xxxiii]

In other words, at its highest order, style may attain an authenticity higher than the accidents of individual subjectivity, a truly personal style which is 'recognisable' to others, and which therefore becomes impersonal in the sense of being communicable, shared. It emerges from a unique set of 'conditions', 'elements', 'lineament', (in other words, from the physical body), but it is based upon a rigorous economy, a kind of *ascêsis*: 'the one word, the one acceptable word'; it is a true manner rather than a mannerism, a 'veritable apprehension' in which what is apprehended is so by the self and

by others simultaneously ('veritable' here plays upon the sense of emphatic, and truthful, or 'most real'; 'apprehension' is another key word from Pater's lexicon).

The question of style tends to return at intervals in the history of philosophy, and has recently received renewed attention. The rediscovery of its perennial complexity may well send us back to the peculiar case of Walter Pater with fresh interest, for Pater the stylist is exemplary in his focussing or intensifying of the central questions.[xxxiv] These have overlapped with the development over the past three decades of interest in the idea of embodiment in literary studies, often taking its cue from new research in cognitive science.[xxxv] In particular, the emphasis on what Mark Johnson called 'the body in the mind' – of the mind's embodied, material condition – has enabled us to think in ways Pater himself anticipated about the dualisms of form against substance, or of style versus content.[xxxvi]

Whether it is entirely reliable or not, Edmund Gosse's *Critical Kit-Kats* (1896) was the first work to give an extended account of Pater's methods of composition, the strange and elaborate process which Gosse compared to working at an 'artesian well, to reach the contents of which, strata of impermeable clay must be laboriously bored'.[xxxvii] According to Gosse, Pater composed on lined paper, leaving alternate lines blank, working out the sentences in their basic outline or formula before using the blank space in order to correct, adorn and beautify them. He would 'at leisure insert fresh descriptive or parenthetical clauses, other adjectives, more exquisitely related adverbs, until the space was filled'.[xxxviii] Then there would be a further phase of revision and beautification as Pater copied out the whole once more, again on alternate lines of the page, until the end result was reached, a prose that was 'heavy with ornament, supple with artifice... full of gorgeous conceits, jewelled phrases … all calculated, wrought up, stippled'.[xxxix] Some disliked it intensely. John Addington Symonds described the effect reading Pater had upon his nerves as 'like the presence of a civet cat'.[xl] Edward Thomas also objected:

> On almost every page of his writing words are to be seen sticking out, like raisins that will get burnt on an ill-made cake. It is clear that they have been carefully chosen as the right and effective words, but they stick out because the labour of composition has become so self-conscious and mechanical that cohesion and perfect consistency are impossible. The words

> have only an isolated value; they are labels; they are shorthand; they are anything but living and social words.[xli]

Like jewels, like raisins. An aesthetic of gem-stones pervades the *fin de siècle*, often served up with sugary stuff. The 'yellow book' by which Wilde's Dorian Gray is spellbound, is said to have been written in 'that curious jewelled style', borrowed half from Pater, half from Joris-Karl Huysmans, whose hero des Esseintes owns a tortoise studded with jewels.[xlii] At the end of the century, Mallarmé's 'Crise de vers' (1897) would speak of words that 'illuminate each other with reciprocal reflections like a virtual trail of fire on precious stones (*pierreries*)'.[xliii] The removal of what Pater called 'surplusage', or verbiage, would, according to the essay on 'Style', be like the 'gem-engraver blowing away the last particle of invisible dust'.[xliv] Pater's early imaginary portrait, 'An English Poet', published posthumously, praised its fictional poet for work of 'a certain hardness like that of a gem or a cameo', perhaps remembering Gautier's *Émaux et Camées* (1852), in which writing poetry and stonecutting are analogous activities.[xlv] The 'hard, gem-like flame' of the 'Conclusion' emerges from this particular notion of *techne*.

Stone-cutting would be an organising metaphor for Pound and the *Imagistes* too, but in quite a different way, since it lends itself both to advanced ornamentation and to its opposite. Margaret Oliphant's hostile review of *The Renaissance* in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1873 had applied the word '*rococo*' to the book, describing it as a 'curious mingling ... of bad taste … with much that is really graceful and attractive'.[xlvi] The word belongs to a set of overlapping terms mapping a spectrum of taste or value that would be much debated in the final decades of the century: *rococo*, Aesthetic, Euphuism, Decadence. Translating Paul Bourget's definition of Decadent writing, Havelock Ellis famously wrote of a process in which the 'unity of the book' is first broken down to allow the 'independence of the page'; the page then gives way to the 'independence of the phrase', only for the phrase to 'give place to the independence of the word'.[xlvii] Words 'sticking out' from their sentences, as if appealing to a gourmandising appetite, the raisin-jewel, were symptoms of Silver Age language. Pater's was a style that suggested the 'hot, moist conservatory'; it was a prose of 'mazes, precise gardens, and topiary work', in which, as Symonds put it, one might get lost as 'in a sugar-cane

plantation'.[xlviii] Though in a sense it is an honour to add an adjective to the English language, 'Pateresque' is a dubious and anaemic one ('very dainty, very picturesque, very Pateresque, and very precious'), although this seems better than Ezra Pound's 'Paterine', the style of the 'empurpled descant'.[xlix] 'Paterine' has not survived in usage, whereas 'Pateresque' has. Even so, the OED gives it only the broadest and most neutral of definitions, as if to signal a fundamental indecision about its value: 'Of, relating to, or characteristic of the English writer Walter Pater, or his writings or aesthetics' (a synonym is offered in the slightly more genteel 'Paterian'). It begs the question.

The basic disagreement – and a significantly irreconcilable one – concerned whether the Pateresque denoted a quality of ascetic refinement, or the exact opposite. Edward Thomas wrote:

> It was obviously a style which aimed consciously at accuracy and a kind of perfection; unconsciously, perhaps, at a hard purity and dignity. It abhorred paraphrase, anything like padding even for the purpose of connection, all looseness, repetition, emphasis and personal accent… It was obscure and almost without grace. It was wonderful particularly in its detachment. For it retained no sign of an original impulse in it. If there had been a strong impulse the after elaboration had worn it completely away. This detachment made language seem to be as hard and inhuman a material as marble, and like marble to have had no original connection with the artist's idea. It was shy but decided, as well as stiff. It suggested the desire of a narrow, intense perfection both in language and in life. [l]

If Symons heard the 'mannered, yet so personal voice', Thomas detected only abhorrence of the 'personal accent'.[li] For him, the effect suggested something cold and detached rather than warmly personal. Pater's own essay on 'Style', first published in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1888 and then placed at the beginning of *Appreciations* (1889), spoke of 'self-restraint, a skilful economy of means, ascêsis, that too has a beauty of its own'. All good prose, he argued, was constituted by the 'removal of surplusage'. Flaubert's prose (sometimes cited as the model for Pater's own) is given as the outstanding example of this, displaying an austerity that is not the pedantic correctness of the scholar, but rather 'a security against the otiose', which would mean the exclusion of anything that does not really tell towards 'the pursuit of relief, of life and vigour in the portraiture of one's sense'.[lii]

For many, however, it seemed as if Pater's own writing flatly contradicted these same tenets. It was self-evidently the case that the prose was over-freighted with 'surplusage' – the word itself seems to be on conspicuous display in a sentence commending the removal of decoration. (Does 'otiose' not also stick out a little bit?) Wright noted that Pater would talk excitedly about 'delightful words, especially if they were not in common use, as an epicure does of lickerish morsels'.[liii] Chancing upon such morsels – often perusing the dictionary for just this purpose – Pater would insert them into his prose. This process of studded amplification produced what Yeats would later call 'that extravagant style', under the influence of which he and his friends had wilfully fallen.[liv] The fact that some saw an exemplary asceticism where others detected extravagance suggests the profound uncertainty around value underpinning much of the literary terminology of the *fin-de-siècle*. Is Pater's style chaste or voluptuous? Is it celibate, ascetic, or sybaritic? Which is the positive term, which is the negative? Is it a good or a bad thing to be Aesthetic, to be Decadent? They are all, in fact, 'question-begging terms', as Pater observed of the related word 'hedonism', which he resented being applied to his own work. [lv] But it was only one of several unstable epithets his writing attracted. Perhaps the most interesting of these is the one most directly concerned with prose technique: Euphuism, in which late nineteenth-century writers showed a renewed interest, and which Pater himself theorized in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). In the chapter titled 'Euphuism' the young writer Flavian, under whose influence Marius has fallen, is described as having cultivated that 'foppery of words, of choice diction', which had been common among the literary elite of the second century. Together the two young men devour the work of Apuleius ('"Like jeweller's work! Like a myrrhine vase!"'),[lvi] and thus inspired rehearse the terms of the argument about Pater's own style. Flavian's Euphuism is presented essentially as a discipline. It sought to weigh 'the precise power of every phrase and word, as though it were precious metal'. Such a 'care for style' would mean 'restoring to full significance' all the 'latent figurative expression' in a language dying of 'routine and languor'; it would be a return to the 'primitive power' of language, 'a kind of sacred service to the mother-tongue'. Through this Marius finds an analogy with the 'old ritual interest', with the household gods of the old Roman religion.[lvii] And this was a theory that was 'manifested in every age in which the literary conscience has been awakened to forgotten duties towards language'.[lviii]

In other words, Euphuism was both a symptom of and cure for a perceived linguistic crisis, one most obviously paralleled by the late nineteenth century.[lix] As such it was a rationale for Pater's own theory of style, and, implicitly, a coming to terms with the old ritual interest of Latin Christianity, towards which his language had become increasingly dutiful since 1873. But Pater goes further than this by daring to historicise the notion of Euphuism itself in strongly relativist terms, positing the remarkable thought that even Homer's poetry (direct, sensuous, 'simple and broad'), may have appeared 'unreal and affected … to some of the people of his own age'.[lx] What this implies is that since literary language is exposed both to historically-shifting perspectives over time *and* to an inherent ambiguity of value in its original context, then the Euphuism of the contemporary moment was not only bound to acquire a quite different aspect in the future, through the 'enchanted-distance fallacy', but was *already* available for a set of competing evaluations.[lxi] Pater's own prose struck contemporary readers in just such contradictory ways. 'Had there been really', he is able to ask seriously, 'bad ages in art or literature?'[lxii]

Certainly his style would receive an *imprimatur* of sorts from the *Symboliste* poetics that appeared in England very late in the century, its principles translated by Arthur Symons, who spoke of using words 'as the ingredients of an evocation', and who insisted that 'perfect explicitness is not a necessary virtue'.[lxiii] What we are seeing here is, in fact, a perpetually renewed conflict in aesthetics that runs very deep throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and which has an afterlife in the post-structuralist and postmodernist poetics of the 1980s and '90s.[lxiv] It is a conflict at the heart of Pater's own aesthetic preferences. Marius, we are told, pursues a literary style based upon 'a certain firmness of outline, that touch of the worker in metal'; he instinctively distrusts 'all that had not passed a long and liberal process of erasure.'[lxv] This sounds like the removal of surplusage recommended by the essay on 'Style'. But the virtue or reality of 'outline' thus produced is also often explicitly questioned in the novel. Indeed, the notion that 'firmly outlined objects' may have something illusory or deceptive about them is traced in its philosophical origins to Heraclitus, whose influence is everywhere in Pater's work. To seek to produce outline is, in effect, to name or to affix, which may be to 'regard as a thing stark and dead what is in reality full of animation'.[lxvi] To suggest

rather than to name would be a touchstone of Mallarmé's poetic manifesto, but Pater's work is deeply divided on that principle. And it is always a moral question. A Symbolist poetics is inherently vulnerable to the accusation that it confuses an 'inexplicitness' in its objects of attention, with imprecision or vagueness in its language or mode of attention, and will simply fail to do justice to its subject matter – or worse, will perpetrate an injustice. In this sense Symbolism is an inheritor of an earlier nineteenth-century Pre-Raphaelitism, often criticised along just these lines. Ford Madox Ford accused D. G. Rossetti of 'the idea, amounting to an obsession, that Poetry is a matter of mists hiding, of glamours confusing the outlines of things'. Ezra Pound's poem 'Revolt Against the Crepuscular Spirit in Modern Poetry' (1909) berated the contemporary taste for a poetry of 'mists and tempered lights'. [lxvii] This was a criticism of both language and content, and it carried with it an explicit moral rebuke. Mists and glamours, confused outlines and inexplicitness, meant not looking things fairly in the face (like Judas).

The essay on Pater by Christopher Ricks, published in *The Force of Poetry* (1984), was the most aggressively destructive account of his work along these lines since Margaret Oliphant's review had spoken of worshipping 'attenuated and refined adumbrations of Art' in 1873.[lxviii] Ricks' principal objection was to Pater's misquotations, which seemed to him to demonstrate a lack of respect for other persons. But this general moral failing was also discernible in the mannerisms of the prose, particularly in its acts of evasion and imprecision. Ricks detected a kind of cowardice in Pater's refinements, especially in his over-use of the word 'finer', and in his over-fine scruples:

> But then it is a ubiquitous feature of Pater's style that he uses "almost" in conjunction with strong, extreme, or absolute terms, in order to create an emotional tremor, a simulation of a forthcoming delicate discrimination which proves not to come forth… His *almosts* are those of a man who winces into verbalism: almost painful, almost insane, almost diseased; almost animal, almost coarse; almost natural, almost supernatural, almost clairvoyant; almost endless, almost nameless, almost expressionless; almost impassive, almost disembodied, almost dead… Moreover, "almost" has direct filaments to his other reiterated rhetorical turn,

> "a kind of x y", a verbal device for combining a maximum air of uncomplacent discrimination with a minimum effort to achieve it. The corrugated brow is on a mask.[lxix]

Ricks concluded (in a way typical of Pater himself) that the fault ultimately lay in matters of personality or temperament: '"a sort of divided imperfect life"; "a sort of delicate intellectual epicureanism"; "a kind of unimpassioned passion"; "a kind of passionate coldness"': all Pater's own phrases turned against him.

Reading Pater is to encounter a 'relative spirit' at work in language and in thought: *almost, sort of, kind of*; a fluctuation in the base units of nomination. In this sense Ricks was right to recognise that the most 'important cluster' among the general habit was that which presented 'flirtations with religion'.[lxx] (Ricks was echoing Eliot's description of the content of *Marius* as a 'prolonged flirtation with the liturgy'.)[lxxi] When the relative spirit meets the strong or 'absolute' terms of a religious vocabulary, we have one of the most interesting dimensions to Pater's writing, long recognised as the point at which his philosophy either stands or falls. Each of the examples Ricks listed of the 'almost' formulation in these cases (and he cites sixteen) could therefore be subjected to worthwhile scrutiny. Do we understand what is meant by something that is 'almost mystical', or that is a 'sort of religious duty', or a 'kind of sacred transaction'? Are we prepared to accredit such in-between phenomena? The broader question is about the ways in which the language of nineteenth-century aesthetics absorbs and appropriates (perhaps traduces) the language of religion, how it is bound up with processes of substitution, or perhaps accommodation, between Art and Christianity, processes in which Pater was deeply implicated.[lxxii] To a large extent this complex development is a battle over terminology, with the evacuation and the reoccupation of various language domains. Ricks was presenting the idea (later developed by Linda Dowling) of Pater as a decadent writer who has lost faith in the English language, and who therefore repeatedly loses his nerve in the weak specifications that characterise his prose. But those formulations could also be read as descriptions of very real conditions and types of experience, which are not, however, precisely nameable. One such would be aesthetic experience, as Pater understood the term: almost mystical, a kind of sacred transaction. In other words, Pater's world also contains indefinite phenomena that escape or defer the hard outline of names. This is one reason why

criticism has been able to apply the vocabulary and interpretive strategies of post-structuralism so happily to Pater – the theoretical framework of what Ricks, writing in 1984, irritably called 'those present-day exponential exponents of self-regarded criticism who are Pater's heirs'.[lxxiii]

One man's jewels may be another man's raisins – but there may also be periods or particular authors in literary history where the consensus of value has distinctly broken down, and for interesting reasons. Pater is one such example. Denis Donoghue's *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (1994) answered Ricks by presenting the positive philosophical case for a prose style characterised by its postponements, delays and deferrals. For Donoghue, Pater's significance lay precisely in the fact that he invented the 'Pateresque', 'a certain tone, a style' – the invention of a style being a far more significant achievement than the invention of 'an idea'.[lxxiv] The long sentences of meandering parataxis, refinement upon refinement, not only mimed the patterns of desire, but constituted heroic acts of yearning and aspiration. 'It was as if', Donoghue argued, 'he had internalized the otherwise empty promise of redemption and set every noun, every adjective, moving toward an end never to be reached'. And this movement itself marked Pater's 'quiet refusal to live by the rhythms of public life'.[lxxv] This, then, was an essentially antinomian stance, rebellious and tough-minded. It broke the closed forms and hard outlines of commerce and technology to insist upon the life of second thoughts, of revisions and reformations. And this placed Pater not only at the fountainhead of modernism – its 'onlie begetter', according to Donoghue – but as a forerunner of postmodernism. He was a 'textual subject', one for whom 'everything exists to end up as a style'.[lxxvi] Echoing in its own way the idea of the mask without the face, this, too, was a critical vocabulary composed of oddly impersonal or spectral terms, as if Pater's writing bore only half-lights or second-order traces of other voices and texts.[lxxvii]

What Edward Thomas had observed of the prose displaying no sign of 'an original impulse' was being recapitulated, but here as a prototype of a postmodern condition, an idea that rescued Pater from the suspicion that individual self-culture could only be politically reactionary, or that aestheticism was a form of the politics of Me. ('What is this song or picture, this engaging personality in life or in a book, to *me*?', had always seemed a worrying question. [lxxviii] Margaret Oliphant had connected it with

that ‘class of people’ calling themselves Evangelicals, determined ‘to save the souls of their Me at all hazards’.[lxxix]) If the crisis of legitimation – the unravelling of forms of cultural authority and authenticity, including that of the language of religion, is the key to understanding later nineteenth-century Aestheticism, Pater would fill the role of the aesthetic-postmodernist whose prose style, like his thought, is most remarkable for its tendency to dissolve structures, to atomize or to break down fixed forms. This emphasis emerged, as I say, in the 1980s and ’90s in the wake of post-structuralism, and has remained the predominant view of Pater ever since, but it needs to be adjusted. Part of its durability is explained by the continuity between it and the crepuscular spirit Pater was said to represent by those who were repelled by *fin-de-siècle* aesthetics. But that ‘strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves’, of which the ‘Conclusion’ speaks, is a twofold movement, and is as much about making as it is about unmaking.[lxxx] Despite the note of deep melancholy in his work, almost everything Pater wrote was an essay in appreciation (the word he shared with Ricks); moreover, most of his work after 1873 seemed in some ways to be a revision of the ‘Conclusion’ and its vision of inconstancy. What is missing, then, from purely aesthetic or ‘textual’ accounts of Pater – the ‘shivery-shaky man’, the blancmange or jelly – is the ‘personal’ in the sense in which Pater understood this important word. The perceived reality or actuality – the apprehension – of persons and personality is the dimension of his work most often underestimated, and yet it is fundamental. Artworks emerged from what he called in the essay on Leonardo ‘the secret places of a unique temperament’; they were expressive of such secrets, without fully disclosing them.[lxxxi] The shadowy or the ‘textual’, the fluxional, the principle of what Pater calls ‘undulancy’, the disembodied force, the ‘in-between’, are all states existing in relation to something of quite the opposite nature.[lxxxii] This is what Pater called in the essay on ‘Style’ ‘the soul-fact’.[lxxxiii] It is a kind of lodestar in the gravitational field of which all shadow and movement, all flickering and vanishing outline, are oriented – those ‘two opposing tendencies’ Pater would identify in Greek culture as ‘the centrifugal and the centripetal’.[lxxxiv] It is connected to the fact of the body – the ‘conditions’ or ‘lineaments’ of art’s production. It is always shadowed by the question of the body’s secret desire – its preferences. Another word for it would be ‘style’.

What is striking is how often and in how many various ways he insists upon the reality of this principle. Literary art, 'like all art', was 'the representation of such fact as connected with soul, of a specific personality, in its preferences, its volition and power'.[lxxxv] '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.' Flavian's Euphuism is saved from 'lapsing into mere artifice' by 'bringing to the surface, sincerely and in their strong personal intuitions, a certain vision or apprehension of things'.[lxxxvi] Like 'preference', the word 'apprehension' sits between the fact of the body and the choice of the will. But it only really acquires a reality inter-subjectively. For Marius's own literary aspirations, the selected word or phrase would be valuable 'in exact proportion to the transparency with which it conveyed to others the apprehension, the emotion, the mood, so vividly real within himself.'[lxxxvii] In the chapter on Luca della Robbia from *The Renaissance* Pater writes of the artist's sculptures:

> They bear the impress of a personal quality, a profound expressiveness, what the French call *intimité*, by which is meant some subtler sense of originality – the seal on a man's work of what is most inward and peculiar in his moods, and manner of apprehension: it is what we call *expression*, carried to its highest intensity of degree.[lxxxviii]

Again, Pater might be describing his own work here – the inner life Symons would recognise, the 'man himself' in the intimacy of his books, his style and his body, all in harmony. In the essay on 'Style', Pater gave a summary of these ideas, which are central to all his work:

> There are some to whom nothing has any real interest, or real meaning, except as operative in a given person; and it is they who best appreciate the quality of soul in literary art. They seem to know a *person*, in a book, and make way by intuition: yet, although they thus enjoy the completeness of a personal information, it is still characteristic of soul, in this sense of the word, that it does but suggest what can never be uttered, not as being different from, or more obscure than, what actually gets said, but as containing that plenary substance of which there is only one phase or facet in what is there expressed.[lxxxix]

The 'essence of all artistic beauty is expression', Pater wrote in *Plato and Platonism*, 'the line, the colour, the word, following obediently, and with minute scruple, the conscious motions of a convinced intelligible soul'. Art, therefore, would always constitute a 'veritable psychology'.[xc] This principle was a foundation-stone not merely of aesthetics, of literature and of art in equal measure, but of philosophy in general. For Pater as much as for Plato, all real knowledge 'was like knowing a *person*'; it comes to us in this way.[xci] In its most intensely experienced manifestation, that notion of 'expression' or 'apprehension' (of style as *l'homme même*) finally provided a theological analogy. For Marius, the reality of a 'companionable spirit at work in all things' could be understood through a process of logical induction 'even as one builds up from act and word and expression of the friend actually visible at one's side, an ideal of the spirit within him'.[xcii]

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[i] Edmund Gosse, review of *Plato and Platonism* in *New Review* (April 1893), viii: 419-29, in Seiler, R.M. (ed.), *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1980), p.251. [Hereafter, *CH*.]

[ii] Lionel Johnson, *The Collected Poems of Lionel Johnson*, ed. Ian Fletcher (New York: Garland, 1982), p.xxxii.

[iii] George Moore, *Avowals* (London: Heinemann, 1924), p.180.

[iv] Thomas Wright, *The Life of Walter Pater* 2 vols. (London: Everett & Co., 1907), I, p.86.

[v] Moore, *Avowals*, p.180.

[vi] Wright, II, p.134.

[vii] Quoted in Denis Donoghue, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), p.102.

[viii] Wright, II, p.59.

[ix] Wright, I, p.12.

[x] Wright, II, p.134.

[xi] Wright, II, p.135.

[xii] *Henry James: Letters*, ed. Leon Edel (London: Macmillan, 1981), II, p.212.

[xiii] Quoted in Donoghue, p.70.

[xiv] Quoted in Arthur Symons, *A Study of Walter Pater* (London: Charles J. Sawyer, 1932), p.89.

[xv] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry; the 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p.109. All quotations from *The Renaissance* are taken from the 1893 edition. (Hereafter, *The Renaissance*.) Quotations from Pater's other works are taken from the Cambridge Library Collection of 2011, 9 vols., a reprint of the Macmillan edition of 1900, abbreviated as *WWP*.

[xvi] *The Renaissance*, p.189.

[xvii] Edmund Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats* (London: Heinemann, 1896), p.264.

[xviii] Moore, *Avowals*, pp.180-181.

[xix] Quoted in Wright, I, p.201.

[xx] Arthur Christopher Benson, *Walter Pater* (London: Macmillan, 1906), p.189.

[xxi] Moore, *Avowals*, p.203.

[xxii] James, *Letters*, III, p.492

[xxiii] Symons, *A Study of Walter Pater*, pp.4-5.

[xxiv] Behind this evocation of the body and its conditions, behind this primary 'mask', lies the possibility of another secret – the body's secret: that is, of a homosexuality that may not or cannot be named. Style, in other words, is connected to the body's *desire*. In this there is a paradox, however, because this is a secret that is nevertheless out in the open; it is a 'code' that is at once both disguise and explicit confession, and therefore, paradoxically, both personal and impersonal at once. Linda Dowling's study of Pater's 'radicalization of Victorian liberal assumptions', suggests that he relied upon 'devising a "coded" version of liberalism in which its more radical implications became visible

to anyone who knew how to read'. *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p.92. See also Michael F. Davis, Walter Pater's "Latent Intelligence" and the Conception of Queer Theory', Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, Carolyn Williams (eds), *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire* (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2002), pp.261-285. My argument here will not trace the specifically homoerotic dimension to Pater's style.

[xxv] Moore, *Avowals*, p.91.

[xxvi] Charles Baudelaire, 'La Double Vie par Charles Asselineau' (1859), *Oeuvres*, Ed. de la Pléiade, II, p.456.

[xxvii] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), p.78.

[xxviii] Rémy De Gourmont, *Le Problème du style* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1902), p.154.

[xxix] Quoted in René Wellek, 'Walter Pater's Literary Theory and Criticism', *Victorian Studies* 1:1 (Sep., 1957), pp.29-46. (p.29.)

[xxx] Walter Pater, *Appreciations, With an Essay on Style* (1889), *WWP*, V, p.217.

[xxxi] 'conditions, meaning context, cause, or foundation, but also manner, quality, or character … governs many of Pater's crucial statements'. Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), p.85.

[xxxii] '"Diaphaneitè", which articulates this ideal [of desire between men] at an early stage in its development, is directly coded to "miss" some of Pater's listeners while reaching men sympathetic to expressions of desire between men.' Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), p.58.

[xxxiii] *Appreciations, WWP*, V, p.36.

[xxxiv] 'Style… marks a faultline in the history of Western thought and culture that can be traced back to Plato and beyond. That faultline – and it is precisely one of *style* – is, putatively, between philosophy and poetry, or literature. On one side is philosophy's relative disregard for style in its overriding

pursuit of truth, and on the other is poetry's – literature's – all-consuming interest in style, even – perhaps especially – at the expense of truth. … [Theory is] the discourse that emerged *out of the faultline of style, between literature and philosophy*.' 'Introduction' to Ivan Callus, James Corby and Gloria Lauri-Lucente, *Style In Theory: Between Literature and Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p.9.

[xxxv] See, for example, David Hillman and Ulrika Maude (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to The Body in Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Guillemette Bolens, *The Style of Gestures: Embodiment and Cognition in Literary Narrative* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012);

[xxxvi] Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). See also, Mark Turner, *Reading Minds: The Study of English in the Age of Cognitive Science* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), and *The Literary Mind* (New York: Oxford University press, 1996). Ellen Spolsky, *Satisfying Skepticism: Embodied Knowledge in the Early Modern World* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2001), and *Gaps in Nature: Literary Interpretation and the Modular Mind* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), and *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[xxxvii] Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats*, p.262.

[xxxviii] Gosse, *Critical Kit-Kats*, p.264.

[xxxix] Benson, *Walter Pater*, p.215.

[xl] Quoted in Wright, II, p.115.

[xli] Edward Thomas, *Walter Pater: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1913), p.213.

[xlii] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p.121.

[xliii] Stéphane Mallarmé, *Mallarmé*, ed. A. Hartley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p.171.

[xliv] *Appreciations*, p.19.

[xlv] *Walter Pater: Imaginary Portraits*, ed. Lene Østermark-Joahnsen (London: Modern Humanities Research Assocaition, 2014), p.111.

[xlvi] *CH*, p.91. The portrait of Apuleius in *Marius the Epicurean*, suggests that there was a 'piquancy in his *rococo*, very African, and as it were perfumed personality'. (*WWP*, III, p.87.)

[xlvii] Cited in Donoghue, p.293. Bourget was paraphrasing an idea that originated in Désiré Nisard's *Etudes de moeurs et de critique sur les poètes latins de la decadence* (1834).

[xlviii] Wright II. 113; 153.

[xlix] Wright, II. 6. Pound's phrase is from 'A Shake Down' (1918): 'I have not in these notes attempted the Paterine art of appreciation, e.g., as in taking the perhaps sole readable paragraph of Pico Mirandola and writing an empurpled descant.' [Cited in Donoghue, p.120.]

[l] Thomas, *Walter Pater*, p.101.

[li] Symons, *A Study of Walter Pater*, p.5.

[lii] *Appreciations*, pp.17;19;35.

[liii] Wright, II, p.133. Of Marcus Aurelius's 'extraordinary innate susceptibility to words' Pater applies the phrase '*la parole pour la parole*, as the French say'. *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.228. In the scene in which the rhetorician Cornelius Fronto delivers his oration on Stoicism, members of the fashionable audience, 'these amateurs of exquisite language' sit with their 'tablets open for careful record of felicitous word or phrase'. (*WWP*, III, p.7.) In *Gaston de Latour* Pater describes Montaigne's working-methods: 'Notes of expressive facts, of words also worthy of note (for he was a lover of style), collected in the first instance for the help of an irregular memory, were becoming, in the quaintly labelled drawers, with labels of wise old maxim or device, the primary, rude stuff, or "protoplasm", of his intended work, and already gave token of its scope and variety'. *WWP*, IV, p.246.

[liv] Yeats, 'The Phases of the Moon' (l.26), *W.B. Yeats: Selected Poems*, ed. Timothy Webb (London: penguin, 1991), p.109.

[lv] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.155.

[lvi] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, pp.54;60.

[lvii] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.100. See Linda Dowling's discussion of Pater's effort 'to employ English as a classical dialect, to bestow a belated and paradoxical vitality on a literary language that linguistic science had declared to be dead.' *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle*, p.xv.

[lviii] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.100.

[lix] See Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin-de-Siècle*.

[lx] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, pp;102;105.

[lxi] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.104. See the general discussion in Lene Østermark-Johansen, 'The Death of Euphues: Euphuism and Decadence in Late-Victorian Literature', *English Literature in Transition* 45 (2002): pp.4-25.

[lxii] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.103. How would University literature departments answer Pater's question?

[lxiii] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2014), pp.20-21. 'Other men have sought the values of power and directness', Kenneth Burke would write; 'Pater was interested, rather, in laying numerous angles of approach'. Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Los Altos, California: Hermes Publications, 1931;1953), p.12. T.S. Eliot observed: 'what Pater tries to do in prose… Swinburne often does in verse: to arouse indefinite evocation', 'Prose and Verse', *Chapbook* 22 (April 1921), pp.7-8.

[lxiv] We might think of 'perfect explicitness' as being aligned to a metaphysics of 'Being', to presence, as opposed to one of 'Otherness' or difference. (I'll return to the 1980s/90s below.) The aesthetic question of 'outline' (design) is central to Renaissance thinking, but has a long afterlife in the nineteenth century, as indeed it has an earlier life in Greek thought. In *Plato and Platonism* Pater suggests that the 'desire towards Dorian order and *ascêsis*, asserts everywhere the principle of outline, in political and moral life'. *WWP*, VI, p.110.

[lxv] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.160.

[lxvi] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.133.

[lxvii] Ford Madox Hueffer, *A Critical Essay on His Art* (1902), p.85. Ezra Pound, *Personae* (1909), *Collected Early Poems* ed. Michael John King (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), p.97. For Gaston de Latour, drawn to the duskiness of churches, 'twilight came in close identity with its moral or intellectual counterpart, as the welcome requisite for that part of the *soul* which loves twilight, and is, in truth, never quite at rest out of it'. *Gaston de Latour, WWP*, IV, p.191.

[lxviii] *CH*, p.86.

[lxix] Christopher Ricks, 'Walter Pater, Matthew Arnold and Misquotation', *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: OUP, 1984), p.397.

[lxx] Ricks, *The Force of Poetry*, p.398.

[lxxi] T.S. Eliot, 'Arnold and Pater', (1930), *Selected Essays of T.S. Eliot* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1932), pp.346-357; (p.350).

[lxxii] See Stephen Cheeke, *Transfiguration: The Religion of Art in Nineteenth-Century Literature Before Aestheticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[lxxiii] Ricks, *The Force of Poetry*, p.408.

[lxxiv] Denis Donoghue, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (1994), p.7. Angela Leighton has called it Pater's 'reforming' style. See *On Form* pp.74-98. The word Donoghue applied to the method was 'adumbration' (one that had already been used in a negative sense by Mrs Oliphant): 'In the absence of a sustainable relation between consciousness and action in the world, Pater and other writers similar in temper settled to the work of adumbration, of working their sentences "towards a better life".' (p.327)

[lxxv] Donoghue, p.297.

[lxxvi] Donoghue, p.195.

[lxxvii] 'His prose feels haunted, as if the spirits of the dead come out when no-one else is home. ... [The] sense of a person behind the scenes of his prose is generated in large part as a textual effect'. Carolyn Williams, *Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), p.44.

[lxxviii] *The Renaissance*, p.xx.

[lxxix] *CH*, p. 87. This is an idea of Pater as a certain kind of Aesthete that has been particularly durable, but it is one in which aestheticism has a rather narrow definition (fixed in attitudes of opposition to life, subjective, essentially secular, but also apart from reality). Wolfgang Iser's formidable 1960 study of Pater, *Walter Pater: Die Autonomie de Ästhetischen*, translated into English in 1987, had defined the deadlock of this view of the aesthetic position by drawing largely upon the schema of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. *Walter Pater: The Aesthetic Moment* trans. David Henry Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

[lxxx] *The Renaissance*, p.188.

[lxxxi] *The Renaissance*, p.92.

[lxxxii] 'Undulancy' is the morsel-word applied to Montaigne's sceptical philosophy, in *Gaston de Latour*, *WWP*, IV, p.251.

[lxxxiii] *Appreciations*, *WWP*, V, p.11.

[lxxxiv] *Plato and Platonism*, *WWP*, VI, p.103. The 'centripetal' force he associates with 'the perfect flower of the Dorian genius' in Lacedæmonia. (p.103.) 'Such Platonic quality you may trace of course not only in work of Doric, or, more largely, of Hellenic lineage, but at all times, as the very conscience of art, its saving salt, even in ages of decadence'. (p.282.)

[lxxxv] *Appreciations*, *WWP*, V, p.10.

[lxxxvi] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.106.

[lxxxvii] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.159.

[lxxxviii] *The Renaissance*, p.46. 'That preoccupation of the *dilettante* with what might seem mere details of form, after all, did but serve the purpose of bringing to the surface, sincerely and in their integrity, certain strong personal intuitions, a certain vision or apprehension of things as really being, with important results, thus, rather than thus – intuitions which the artistic or literary faculty was called upon to follow, with the exactness of wax or clay, clothing the model within.' *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, II, p.106.

[lxxxix] *Appreciations*, *WWP*, V, pp.25-6.

[xc] *Plato and Platonism*, *WWP*, VI, p.120-121.

[xci] *Plato and Platonism*, *WWP*, VI, p.129.

[xcii] *Marius the Epicurean*, *WWP*, III, p.70.