

CHAPTER 1

Pater in the 1990s

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THE UNDISGUISED DISTASTE for the work of Walter Pater a generation ago in, for example, René Wellek's disparaging dismissal in 1965 that "today Pater is under a cloud" now seems very distant! The advent in the past decade of new ways of thinking about text and of the relationship between "literature" and culture has led to insights into the work of Pater which traditional critical practices did not permit. In particular two general trends can be perceived. In the first place readings of Pater's work have been enlivened by emphases on language as a system, by attention to discourses other than simply the "literary," and by the tolerance of disruption, plurality, and self-consciousness within texts; all of these have allowed the distinguishing characteristics of Pater his relativism and subjectivism to be welcomed rather than dismissed. The second trend is an interest in the production and reception of works which in its turn has led to a reassessment of the importance of Pater's career as a teacher, and a renewed interest in his transactions with publishers and late nineteenth-century publishing institutions, particularly the periodical press. The general impetus of this research has been to revalue what was hitherto considered marginal or secondary in Pater's work, such as the early or uncollected essays. In the 1990s Pater the critic and Pater the novelist will be joined by other, less familiar Paters the university teacher, the professional, the writer of philosophy and of mythography. All in all these lines of research have alerted critics to the diverse elements which make up the construction of "Pater" elements which Pater himself was the first to select. The essays contained in this volume gather together the strands of this recent research. They include documentary, theoretical, and exploratory work on a broad range of Pater's criticism, fiction, philosophy, and art history. The volume appreciates the past yet looks to the future by engaging with current projects, such as editing the *Collected Works* and the biography. It offers to the critic of Pater, the postgraduate student, and the interested reader a summary of the current state of research, but it also

isolates what will be the main areas of interest in Pater for literary critics and historians in the coming decade.

It has often been noted that Pater's work tests most of the rules of orthodox literary history. As Ian Fletcher remarked, Pater is a novelist, an essayist, and an historian of philosophy and art whose work exists at the margins of all of these genres. For these reasons describing and, more importantly, accounting for these "anomalous" generic features and for the accompanying unique textual qualities of his work has proved remarkably difficult. For many years the study of Pater was hampered by a relative paucity of essential material no proper edition, no bibliography, no biography, and so forth. In the past two decades some significant work has begun to rectify this situation: it includes an edition of the letters, two biographies and a two-volume monograph on the life and work, two bibliographies, annotated scholarly editions of *The Renaissance* and of *Marius the Epicurean*, and a detailed analysis of Pater's reading sources. The two central developments in Pater studies in the 1990s will take place in the areas of editing and biography: a scholarly edition of his collected works is in train and a new biography is due in 1994. Both projects will provide basic materials for research. It is fitting, then, that the issues of editing and biography form the subject of the first group of essays in the present volume, presenting new discoveries about the life, and addressing some of the most intractable problems faced by the editors of the *Collected Works*.

The first and perhaps most startling essay is by Billie Andrew Inman who, in an exemplary piece of scholarly investigation, pieces together the events in Pater's private life in the fateful years between 1874 and 1876. Critics have known for some time that Pater's career at Oxford was marked by a scandal and the first specific details of it emerged in 1980. In her examination of the correspondence between Philip Gell and Alfred Milner, Inman has discovered confirmation of the homosexual relationship between the Balliol undergraduate, William Money Hardinge, and Pater. She suggests that the relationship with Hardinge and the trauma of its discovery had lasting consequences for Pater's work. Inman gives important new insights into the relationship between Pater, Jowett and W. H. Mallock, and in so doing corrects some errors of fact in Richard Ellmann's biography of Oscar Wilde (1987). Editorial issues relate to the biography in obvious ways: they are discussed in the essays which follow Inman's. The problems of editing Pater, practical and financial as well as intellectual, have taxed the group of scholars working on the *Collected Works* for some time. The conditions under which the texts of Pater's works have been transmitted to twentieth-century readers are well-known. Much of his work was written in the first place for various periodicals, and subsequently heavily revised for book publication. Most of the remaining material the unfinished, or unpublished, or uncollected work has come down to us via the filtering medium of his literary executor, Charles Shadwell. The resulting "Pater" is very like Robert Ross's "Wilde" in the sense that it is partly a product of editorial rather than authorial decisions. The problems produced by the textual history of Pater's works are addressed by Gerald Monsman, Ian Small and Laurel Brake. Monsman discusses the issues raised in editing the unpublished manuscript

chapters of *Gaston de Latour*, and he examines the ways that work has been, might be, and will be produced. Small discusses how some of the larger issues involved in theories of textual editing and annotation are manifested in particular works by Pater, and he examines their implications for any future editions of the works. The forthcoming edition of the *Collected Works* is (for the most part) printing Pater's texts in their earliest published (that is, largely periodical) form. Writers as varied as Pater, Oscar Wilde and George Gissing well knew that the conditions for professional authors in the late nineteenth century determined to a large extent how their work was received. The complex relationship between the conditions and circumstances of periodical and book publication, and the ways in which Pater has been (and is) read is a topic discussed in this volume by Laurel Brake.

The second group of essays links the biographical with the textual by way of addressing the intertextual elements of Pater's work. One strand of recent research on Pater has taken his reading of other writers as its subject. Pater's commerce with other authors was once dismissed as dishonest, unoriginal or inaccurate, most famously perhaps in Christopher Ricks's comparison of Pater's use of quotation with that of Matthew Arnold. One of the happy consequences of the apparatuses of the scholarly editions published in the 1980s was a demonstration of how complex Pater's intertextual strategies are. The emphasis of much contemporary research is upon the special nature of Pater's engagement with other writers, seeing in his use of their work a highly radical instance of intertextuality. In the present volume three contributors discuss some intertextual elements in Pater's work. J. P. Ward assesses the significance of the influence of Wordsworth on Pater. Lesley Higgins throws fresh light on the relationship between Pater and one of his best known students, Gerard Manley Hopkins, showing that although Hopkins's undergraduate essays for Pater are saturated with the latter's thought, they at the same time reveal a critical engagement with it. F. C. McGrath discusses and in a useful appendix prints Joyce's parodies of Pater in *Ulysses* and the general implications about Joyce's notion of style which may be drawn from them.

The next group of essays discusses from radically different starting-points a more familiar concern the concepts of the aesthetic and the ethical in Pater's work. Taken together, these essays aim to controvert traditional, almost orthodox, ways of viewing the relationship between Pater's aesthetic or "impressionist" criticism and contemporary ethical or cultural concerns. Paul Tucker retains an interest in the notion of intertextuality for, by reexamining the German influences on Pater's thought, he is able to reassess the nature of the ethical and aesthetic in Pater's work, arguing that they are concepts which have been inadequately discriminated in the past. The next essay, by Richard Dellamora, retains an interest in biography. A recent development in cultural theory the foregrounding of gender by women's and gay studies has radically affected perceptions of Pater. Here the guiding proposition is that all writing is gendered, and that Pater's is no exception. Dellamora analyzes Pater's work in the context of late-nineteenth-century constructions of

masculinity, and argues that such an analysis exposes the blindness of some modern critical accounts of Pater, particularly that of Harold Bloom.

The final and largest category of essays in this volume takes as its subject the context of Pater's work. That context, particularly Pater's commerce with European culture, has become an important topic in recent scholarship. Critics as varied as John Conlon, Patricia Clements and Linda Dowling have documented both the extent and the significance of European culture for late nineteenth-century British writers, Pater included. Some papers here suggest ways in which such research might proceed in the future. Indeed the essays in this group employ some of the new approaches suggested by recent theoretical developments in literary studies. They reveal that the "Pater" favoured by anthologists from W. B. Yeats onwards the author, that is, of *The Renaissance*, *Marius the Epicurean* and some of the essays in *Appreciations* is a very partial one. Works hitherto considered as "secondary" or "not literature" *Gaston de Latour*, *Greek Studies* and *Plato and Platonism*, for instance now attract critical attention. Hayden Ward examines "Pascal," Pater's last essay, setting it against recurrent concerns in the *oeuvre*, but also emphasizing its uniqueness. Indeed, the essays by Hayden Ward and Gerald Monsman (and, later, by Jane Spirit), add considerably to our knowledge of the "unfinished" Pater and of his preoccupations and achievements during the last four years of his life. J. B. Bullen examines a further context to Pater's early work, illuminating his view of the Renaissance by comparing it with the main currents of mid-nineteenth-century Renaissance historiography and some modern theories of history. Bullen perceives a shift in some of the essays of *The Renaissance* from the metaphoric to the metonymic, and in his view such a shift corresponds to Roland Barthes's distinction between the writing of history as "analysis" and the writing of history as "enactment." In a paper which complements Bullen's, M. F. Moran discusses Pater's mythic fiction, seeing in it Pater's view of mythology as "the expression of the experience of a culture," and an interrogation of the processes of interpretation and ascribing meaning. Here, as elsewhere, a new and quite different Pater comes into view. A context of a different sort is adduced by Bernard Richards, who continues the themes of the "undervalued" Pater of the preceding essays. He takes his subject from some of the less well-known later essays, and addresses a hitherto neglected topic Pater's accounts of architecture. Anne Varty returns to another neglected piece, "Diaphaneitè," one of Pater's earliest writings, but one published only posthumously. The context which she uses to explain the concerns of the essay is as with Paul Tucker Pater's exposure to contemporary German thought. Hayden Ward argues that Pater's last essay, "Pascal," contains elements of his earlier work; Anne Varty explains how the early "Diaphaneitè" is reappropriated and recapitulated in fragments in the later work. Finally Jane Spirit continues the theme of rehabilitating the "unknown" and late Pater by discussing a philosophical context the nineteenth-century European reputations of two thinkers who influenced him, Michel Montaigne and Giordano Bruno. In so doing she provides both a new way of regarding *Gaston de Latour* and a companion study to Monsman's earlier account of the manuscript of it.

The essays contained in this volume are important, then, in several distinct ways. In the first place they reflect upon the scholarly and critical achievements of the past, often, as with Richard Dellamora's engagement with the hidden biases of Harold Bloom's views of Pater, through a reevaluation of them. The volume also engages with current concerns, particularly in its discussions of projects such as the biography or scholarly editions. Most importantly, though, the essays contained here point to the future for Pater studies. By exemplifying the relevance of new thinking about how texts and works are to be understood in the study of discourses such as historiography or myth or masculinity, or of compositional strategies such as intertextuality, *Pater in the 1990s* indicates where new research on Pater will be most fruitful.