

CHAPTER 15

The Crystal Man: A Study of "Diaphaneitè"

ANNE VARTY

"DIAPHANEITÈ," composed probably early in 1864 and published only posthumously in 1895, is notoriously difficult to elucidate.¹ It tempts the critic by seeming to offer a kind of manifesto for Pater's subsequent work ("A majority of such would be the regeneration of the world")² but it does not easily yield its meaning. Perhaps the critic should not be too concerned by this; the essay is the earliest piece in Pater's corpus, he never revised it for publication himself (the manuscript is in Shadwell's hand),³ and the internal evidence of the piece suggests that it was a collection of notes rather than a sustained argument. Pater, in writing about the inner perfection of man, was himself most inward in his utterance. However we know that he delivered the piece (or some version of it) to the Old Mortality Society in February 1864⁴ and that many fragments of the essay are worked into "Winckelmann," first published three years later in 1867 and continuously revised until 1893.⁵ "Diaphaneitè" therefore provided Pater with a body of thought to which his imagination continually resorted.

The essay describes a certain type of ideal man and calls for a renaissance of the type. In the 1867 version of "Winckelmann" Pater warns himself as much as his reader against abuse of the term "ideal": " `Ideal' is one of those terms which through a pretended culture have become tarnished and edgeless. How great, then, is the charm when in Hegel's writings we find it attached to a fresh, clear-cut conception! With him the ideal is a *Versinnlichen* of the idea the idea turned into an object of sense."⁶ Having reminded himself of the desirability of "objects of sense" as anchors, or indeed instantiations, for the ideal, and putting that into practice effectively in "Winckelmann," Pater deleted these sentences from all subsequent versions of the essay. In "Diaphaneitè" exemplars of the ideal are less readily distinguishable, but they are there, if submerged nonetheless. The "objects of sense," illustrations of the ideal type, in "Diaphaneitè" are of two kinds: images and individuals. On the one hand we are given the images of crystal and sculpture; on the other hand, the historical figures Raphael and Goethe. While these two kinds of

Versinnlichen function as independent constellations of ideas in the essay, they can also function conjointly. Raphael is described indirectly in terms of sculpture, Goethe in terms of crystal. "Over and over again the world has been surprised by the heroism, the insight, the passion, of this clear crystal nature," Pater announces.⁷ The crystal image itself is not a common one in Pater's subsequent work, despite the fact that other British aesthetes, under the influence of Gautier and Baudelaire, came to write about gems and precious stones as artifacts which elude the cycle of decay and death, and Pater's own attitude of mind is characterized by the "hard, gem-like flame" of the "Conclusion."⁸ It is not until *Plato and Platonism* (1893) when describing Plato, who came to occupy the position of ideal man in Pater's mind, that he uses the crystal image again directly: "For [Plato], as for Dante, in the impassioned glow of his conceptions, the material and the spiritual are blent and fused together. While, in that fire and heat, what is spiritual attains the definite visibility of a crystal, what is material, on the other hand, will lose its earthiness and impurity."⁹ This use of the image represents a development in Pater's thought since "Diaphaneitè" because here it is not the mind of Plato which is "crystal," but what, in the furnace of his visionary imagination, his mind sees and makes manifest for others.

Two instances of the crystal metaphor as characterization of an individual occur in material by Carlyle which Pater had read before the composition of "Diaphaneitè."¹⁰ The first, in the chapter "The Hero as Poet" in *On Heroes* (already shown to be significant for the composition of "Diaphaneitè")¹¹ reads: "Of [Goethe] too you say that he *saw* the object; you may say what he himself says of Shakespeare: 'His char-acters are like watches with dial plates of transparent crystal; they show you the hour like others, and the inward mechanism also is all visible'."¹² The second occurs in *The French Revolution* and concerns not Charlotte Corday (a passage about whom is quoted in "Diaphaneitè"), but another woman of the Revolution, Madame Roland de la Platrière:

Reader, mark that queenlike burgher-woman: beautiful, Amazonian graceful to the eye; more so to the mind. Unconscious of her worth (as all worth is), is her greatness, of her crystal clearness; genuine, the creature of Sincerity and Nature, in an age of Artificiality, Pollution and Cant; there, in her still completeness, in her still invincibility. . . .¹³

The first passage is about seeing and being seen; both Goethe and his creations reveal their inner lives through their outer manifestations, like transparent crystal. It is significant that Carlyle transfers an appreciation of subjects in art to a subject in life, as though aesthetic criteria were as applicable to life as to art. The second passage is about personal integrity and moral worth, where again the inner life is seen as congruent with the outer and a radiant example in an unenlightened age, presented in aesthetic rather than moral terms. These two examples of the "crystal" self, one a poet, the other a revolutionary, may have fused in Pater's mind, to emerge as an abstract picture of "revolutionism . . . softened, harmonised, subdued."¹⁴

The association of Goethe with the crystal image had also been made by G. H. Lewes in his *Life of Goethe*, the second edition of which appeared in December 1863 (marked 1864 on the title page).¹⁵ Lewes uses the metaphor as follows:

All men of genius go through this process of crystallisation. . . . The diamond, it is said, can only be polished by its own dust; is not this symbolical of the truth that only by its own fallings-off can genius properly be taught?

He was crystallising slowly; slowly gaining the complete command over himself.

The crystallising process which commenced in Weimar was completed in Rome.¹⁶

Lewes uses the verb "to crystallise" to describe the action which the mind of genius performs upon itself as it matures to perfection, turning outward circumstances to its advantage. Pater uses the noun/adjective "crystal" to denote the already completed product of this process. When Lewes announces that "the crystallising process which commenced in Weimar was completed in Rome" he refers to the fact that it was on Goethe's journey to Italy, and in particular during his sojourn in Rome, that he encountered the writings of Winckelmann. These made a new dimension of experience vivid to him (that of ancient sculptural form) and determined the direction his creativity was to take. A major aspect of Pater's interest in Winckelmann is the effect which the scholar's imagination had on the poet.

It may even be Goethe's response to Raphael, evoked by the Italian journey, and reported by Lewes as follows, which qualified the painter as a subject for "Diaphaneité": "if Raphael were to paint peasants at an inn he could not help making them look like Apostles, whereas Teniers would make them look like Dutch boors; each artist working according to his own inborn genius."¹⁷ In Pater's essay Raphael is likened to antique sculpture by juxtaposition rather than direct allusion. The reference to "Raphael . . . even in outward form a youth . . . yet surprising all the world" is followed immediately by reference to the "sexless beauty" of "the Greek statues."¹⁸ The juxtaposition is startling and abrupt, as the long central paragraph of the essay about the desirable approximation of life to art sweeps to a close. It is best understood in the context of Hegel's teaching about the significance of ancient Greek sculpture in the *Aesthetics*, which Pater was reading in 1863 and to which he confesses his debt in "Winckelmann."¹⁹

In the introduction to the *Aesthetics*, Hegel discusses how the terms "art" and "beauty" are to be understood. As an idealist he defines art as the expression of the highest ideas in

sensuous form, and beauty as the material representation of the Spirit. But he also speaks more conventionally in terms of the form and content of a work of art. He argues that in a good work of art the form must contribute something essential to the content, and the content must justify the form in which it is treated. Hegel's account of how the reciprocity of form and content creates beauty uses imagery of light, shining and radiance which anticipates that by Pater in "Diaphaneitè":

the spirit and the soul shine through the human eye, through a man's face, flesh, skin, through his whole figure, and here the meaning is always something wider than what shows itself in the immediate appearance. . . . According to this view, to sum up, we have characterised as the elements of the beautiful something inward, a content, and something outward which signifies that content; the inner shines in the outer and makes itself known through the outer. . . .²⁰

This congruence of "inward" and "outer" form accords with the way Pater had found and redeployed his crystal imagery. Hegel, like Pater after him, transfers an account of physical human beauty to aesthetic beauty, describing the latter in terms of the former. Hegel introduces the human individual to his argument simply as a way of illustrating how the unity of aesthetic form and content may be understood. An individual exemplifies the union of "inner" and "outer" (soul and body), which is like the union of form and content in the aesthetic domain which Hegel is establishing. In Pater's work this distinction between the argument and the illustration is discarded.

In "Diaphaneitè" Pater isolates moments or aspects of life as they are arrested by historiography or the imagination and he applies aesthetic criteria to them. Hegel does likewise. The very passage from the *Aesthetics* which Pater translates in "Winckelmann" shows Hegel doing just this:

They are great and free, and have grown up on the soil of their own individuality, creating themselves out of themselves, and moulding themselves to what they were and willed to be. The age of Pericles was rich in such characters: Pericles himself; Phidias, Plato, above all Sophocles, Thucydides also, Xenophon and Socrates, each in his own order, without the perfection of one being diminished by that of the others. They are ideal artists of themselves, cast each in one flawless mould works of art which stand before us as an immortal presentment of the gods.²¹

However, whereas Hegel had confined his endeavours to find human lives susceptible of aesthetic appreciation to figures of fifth-century Athens, Pater plunders more recent history for such figures and selects, for instance, Raphael.

Hegel's commentary on the significance of Phideian sculpture develops his account of the relation between aesthetic form and content. This kind of sculpture "forms individuals whom it treats and shapes in their objective spiritual character as complete and perfect in themselves, in independent repose, exempt from relation to anything else."²² He concludes: "what must be brought before our eyes in undimmed clarity is the eternal element in gods and men, divested of caprice and accidental egotism."²³ By the time of "Winckelmann," Pater regarded these features of Hellenic art as a kind of absolute ideal expression of human perfection and perfectibility which reveals itself recurrently through art (and sometimes life) across history. He moves towards this view in "Diaphaneitè" by declaring that ideal man is "like a relic."²⁴ In the implied likeness between Raphael and such a work of art, Pater offers sexuality as a metonym for individuality and individual desire. The ideal man requires nothing to complement or complete him. He, like a Greek statue, is entirely self-composed and stands outside natural cycles. In "Winckelmann" he states this more clearly. Phideian sculpture "unveils man in the repose of his unchanging characteristics. Its white light, purged from the angry blood-like stains of action and passion, reveals not what is accidental in man, but the god, as opposed to man's restless movement. It records the first naive, unperplexed recognition of man by himself."²⁵

The compatibility, even the blending, of the metaphors of sculpture and of crystal, as Pater uses them to indicate the congruence of inner and outer lives which reveals something archetypal about man, can be demonstrated by the metamorphosis of a statement from Lewes's *Life of Goethe* in "Diaphaneitè" and again in "Winckelmann." Lewes, introducing the subject of Goethe's relationship with Frau von Stein, wrote: "It is a silver thread woven among the many-coloured threads which formed the tapestry of his life. I will here detach it, to consider it by itself."²⁶ Pater retains the image but, eclipsing the solid Frau von Stein, alters its significance in terms that are too similar to be coincidental. Pater, writing about what for him was ideal or archetypal about Goethe, stated that "[i]t is a thread of pure white light that one might disentwine from the tumultuary richness of Goethe's nature."²⁷ In "Winckelmann" this became: "Through the tumultuous richness of Goethe's culture, the influence of Winckelmann is always discernible, as the strong, regulative under-current of a clear antique motive."²⁸

An examination of the contexts in which sentences from "Dia-phaneitè" are redeployed in "Winckelmann" reveals that the early essay is applied as much to ancient Greek sculpture as to Winckelmann himself, indicating their interchangeability in Pater's mind. So, for instance, when in "Diaphaneitè" the ideal temperament had been the subject of the sentence "[i]t is like the reminiscence of a forgotten culture . . ." in the later essay it is "he [Winckelmann]" who "seems to realise that fancy of the reminiscence of a forgotten knowledge."²⁹ And when, in "Diaphaneitè," it had been the ideal man of whom Pater had said, "[I]ike all the higher forms of inward life this character is a subtle blending and interpenetration of intellectual, moral and spiritual elements," in "Winckelmann" it is of the youths depicted in the Parthenon frieze and of the *adorante* that Pater declares:

This colourless, unclassified purity of life, with its blending and interpenetration of intellectual, spiritual, and physical elements, still folded together, pregnant with the possibilities of a whole world closed within it, is the highest expression of that indifference which lies beyond all that is relative or partial.³⁰

One simile in "Diaphaneitè" had prepared the way for this two-fold application of the early essay. There Pater had written: "[s]uch a character is like a relic from the classical age, laid open by accident to our alien modern atmosphere."³¹ And in "Winckelmann" Pater states that Winckelmann's own nature was "itself like a relic of classical antiquity laid open by accident to our modern atmosphere."³² Already in the opening lines of "Winckelmann" this simile had become a metaphor. Goethe, Pater states, "classes him with certain works of art."³³ Pater goes on to insist that Winckelmann unifies himself with his object of study: "[h]e is *en rapport* with it; it penetrates him, and becomes part of his temperament."³⁴ This identification of the individual with his subject anticipates the use to which Pater put his crystal metaphor in relation to Plato.

It is a feature of Pater's portrayal of ideal man that ethical and aesthetic categories of judgment are merged, so that the aesthetic subsumes the ethical. What is beautiful is good, and nothing can be good unless it is beautiful. Goethe classes Winckelmann as a work of art, Hegel classes Pericles as a work of art, Pater classes Raphael, Goethe and Winckelmann as works of art. Each one is to be admired, and their form of life emulated. No doubt Pater had taken note of Goethe's dictum, cited by Carlyle in "The Hero as Poet," that "The Beautiful is higher than the Good; the Beautiful includes it in the Good."³⁵

Looking forward to the imaginary portrait "Duke Carl of Rosenmold" we can see that these early standards of taste continued to affect Pater's mature imagination. Raphael, Winckelmann and Goethe, the diaphanous triumvirate, all appear in the portrait as standards against which the achievements of Duke Carl are measured. The portrait provides a fairy-tale setting for an account of the development of eighteenth-century taste in Germany. The narrative voice chooses to call it an account of "*Enlightening*" in the closing paragraphs.³⁶ Here Pater announces, in the first person, that Duke Carl has been a prophet for Goethe, preparing the way for one who appears "like a son of the gods."³⁷

Duke Carl's own "enlightening" begins when he escapes from the perpetual "candle-light" of the Rosenmold court into the "broad day" of an attic lumber room.³⁸ There he finds the *Ars Versificandi: The Art of Versification* by Conrad Celtes, and his aesthetic education begins. The transition from artificial to daylight is a symbolic move. We remember from "Diaphaneitè" the allusion to Dante's ascent to Purgatory: "[h]e who is ever looking for the breaking of a light he knows not whence about him, notes with a strange heedfulness the faintest paleness in the sky."³⁹ In "Winckelmann" this has become, "Dante, passing

from the darkness of the *Inferno*, is filled with a sharp and joyful sense of light."⁴⁰ It is stated to illustrate Winckelmann's enthusiasm on moving to Rome where he encountered the Hellenic light of antiquity. Duke Carl then, is in the attic sunlight, and in the intellectual light of the discovered Hellenic culture shed by Celtes's book. He wants to bring Apollo, the god of light, to Germany. He sets up a naive and amusing cult of Apollo in Rosenmold, and soon his courtiers are telling him that he is the Apollo he has told them of.

But Pater ironizes their belief and Carl's earnest endeavours. Duke Carl is far from an Apollonian figure. To indicate how far short of this measure Duke Carl falls, Pater introduces the work of one of his exemplary figures to Rosenmold, and tests Carl's sensitivity to it. Raphael arrives in Rosenmold:

For ten thousand marks day ever to be remembered! a genuine work of "the Urbinate," from the cabinet of a certain commercially-minded Italian grand-duke, was on its way to Rosenmold, anxiously awaited as it came over rainy mountain-passes, and along the rough German roads, through doubtful weather. The tribune, the throne itself, were made ready in the presence-chamber, with hangings in the grand-ducal colours, laced with gold, together with a speech and an ode. Late at night, at last, the wagon was heard rumbling into the courtyard, with the guest arrived in safety, but, if one must confess one's self, perhaps forbidding at first sight. From a comfortless portico, with all the grotesqueness of the Middle Age, supported by brown, aged bishops, whose meditations no incident could distract, Our Lady looked out no better than an unpretending nun, with nothing to say the like of which one was used to hear. Certainly one was not stimulated by, enwrapped, absorbed in the great master's doings; only, with much private disappointment, put on one's mettle to defend him against critics notoriously wanting in sensitivity, and against one's self.⁴¹

This account is a parody of the events which took place in 1754 when the *Sistine Madonna*, purchased by Augustus III, arrived in his Dresden court, and was displayed on the throne for want of a better place to put her. The anecdote is told by Passavant in his 1839 study of Raphael which, as a contemporary work about the artist, Pater may well have consulted.⁴² The cost of the purchase was noted by Winckelmann in a letter to Berendis on 17 September 1754.⁴³

Duke Carl's immaturity is marked by his failure to respond to Raphael's painting. The date of this failure is significant. It was not until 1755 that Winckelmann published his *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der Griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*. On 4 June 1755 Winckelmann wrote to Berendis to describe the king's favourable reception of the work, despite the criticism of his own taste.⁴⁴ Winckelmann

lists five features of the work which he believed to be innovative. The third of these is his promotion of Raphael: "the first bringing to light of the virtue of the ancients and of Raphael, whom nobody has hitherto recognized."⁴⁵ Carl, though exhibiting "a really heroic effort of mind at a disadvantage,"⁴⁶ is possessed by the spirit of the age and needs the insight of a Winckelmann before he can transcend the atmosphere of decaying medievalism which prevails in Rosenmold.

In "Winckelmann" Pater had explained what purpose this culture served: "By hastening the decline of art, by withdrawing interest from it, and yet keeping the thread of its traditions, it has suffered the human mind to repose, that it might awake when the day came with eyes refreshed to those antique forms."⁴⁷ Carl experiences the period of awakening from this repose. He suffers a sense of displacement in Rosenmold culture. He entertains the fancy that "he must really belong by descent to a southern race," and like the diaphanous type, he seems to have "the imperfect reminiscence of something that had passed in earlier life."⁴⁸

Gradually he anticipates events which passed in both Goethe's life and in his fiction. Like Goethe, he spends time in Strasbourg admiring the Gothic features of the cathedral there. As Goethe had later scorned the taste which he extolled in *Von Deutscher Baukunst*, so the narrative voice tells us that Carl's stay in Strasbourg was "one long mistake."⁴⁹ But Carl can also exclaim in a moment of insight, "For you, France, Italy, Hellas, is here!" as Wilhelm Meister was to learn to say in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795), "*Hier oder nirgend ist Amerika!*"⁵⁰

Carl's very posturing as Apollo had been as anticipation of Goethe. Lewes presents Goethe as an Apollo figure when he describes what the poet was like in 1774:

Those . . . who think of him as the calm stately minister the old Jupiter throned in Weimar, will feel some difficulty perhaps in recognising the young Apollo of this period. But it must be remembered that not only was he young, impetuous, bursting into life, and trying his eagle wings with wanton confidence of strength; he was, moreover, a Rhinelander, with the gay blood of that race . . . not a Northerner muddled with beer.⁵¹

"Duke Carl of Rosenmold" closes with an episode from Goethe's life, in which Goethe is seen by Pater as the *Resurgam* of Carl.⁵² The episode which Pater cites was the subject of an engraving by Wilhelm Kaulbach. It depicts the poet in the posture of a latter-day Apollo Belvedere. The engraving is called "Goethe in Frankfurt," and was made to illustrate *Goethe Galerie. Goethes Frauengestalten* (Munich, 1862). It was published in Britain in 1867, with a new commentary by Lewes, as *Female Characters of Goethe. From the Original Drawings of Wilhelm Kaulbach. With Explanatory Text by G. H. Lewes.*⁵³ The book was certainly available to Pater, and the engraving may have

impressed him. For there was an image of his ideal man, dressed in eighteenth-century costume, but posing as the god of light and poetry, a historical figure conforming to the pattern of classical sculpture, there to "regenerate the world" as Duke Carl had hoped to.