

CHAPTER 8

Pater Speaking Bloom Speaking Joyce

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PATER'S THEORY OF STYLE was essentially Hegelian and expressionistic.¹ For Hegel all art was the sensuous manifestation of the absolute Idea. In adapting Hegel Pater typically ignored his emphasis on the absolute Idea and limited art to expressing the individual mind of the artist. Style for Pater was the external expression of an inner vision, an inner vision he characterized as the writer's "imaginative sense of fact."² Furthermore, he insisted on an absolute fidelity to that inner vision and on the precise accommodation of language to it.

Pater's expressive orientation, however, also anticipated contemporary Heideggerian attitudes towards language as constitutive of expression.³ Pater was fond of saying, "Style is the man." In his monograph on Pater, Ian Fletcher provides an effective gloss on this statement when he says that style for Pater was "a mode of perception, a total responsive gesture of the whole personality."⁴ Without much effort or distortion, I think we can push Pater's notion of style even further towards its Heideggerian conclusion and give it a post-modern turn by looking at Pater's own style in the context of the stylistic experiments of Joyce in the second half of *Ulysses*, particularly Joyce's parody of Pater in the "Oxen of the Sun" episode.

Joyce was one of a number of Modernists who was profoundly influenced by Pater's views on style and language and who continued to develop them. In *Ulysses* there appear to be two views of style contending with each other. One is a modernist view that is very close to Pater's expressive ideal. According to this view each character has a distinct style of expression and these various modes of expression provide multiple perspectives on the experiences portrayed in the novel. Joyce uses the metaphor of parallax throughout *Ulysses* to suggest this notion of multiple perspectives. Parallax refers to the apparent displacement of a heavenly body when viewed from two divergent points on the earth's

surface.

Both Joyce and Pater realized that multiple perspectives did not amount to absolute or complete knowledge of anything. No work of art can exhaust all possible contexts or perspectives, for they are theoretically infinite. There is always another perspective, another way of looking at something, another style of seeing it. In *Plato and Platonism* Pater says that room "must be left to the last in any legitimate dialectical process for possible after-thoughts; for the introduction, so to speak, of yet another interlocutor in the dialogue." "Another turn in the endless road," Pater adds, "may change the whole character of the perspective."⁵

The second half of *Ulysses* is nothing but one turn in the road after another. Every episode shifts perspective dramatically and, except for Molly's concluding monologue, the characters' individual styles of expression become subsumed under a bewildering variety of discourse forms, what Bakhtin calls incorporated genres: in the "Cyclops" episode we see things through most of the printed sources available to the average middle-class Dubliner; in "Nausicaa" we see Bloom through the eyes of Gerty McDowell, or rather through her language, the language of sentimental romances; in "Circe" everything is altered by the hallucinatory effect of dream work; in "Eumaeus" we stumble through an old man's tired prose; in "Ithaca" we submit to a catechistical inquisition of scientific discourse.

In the "Oxen of the Sun" episode the stylistic pluralism of *Ulysses* achieves its most extensive form. Here a series of parodies proceeds through the history of English prose style from its Latin and medieval roots to modern slang. The point of the "Oxen" parodies has been construed in a number of ways: to suggest the evolution of English prose style;⁶ to add to while enclosing all previous English prose (a very Hegelian notion);⁷ to make words reproduce objects and processes;⁸ to suggest the provisional nature of any one style;⁹ to suggest the limits of English prose style;¹⁰ to expose the inadequacy or futility of English prose style;¹¹ to chart the decay of English prose style;¹² to exhibit language as pure system;¹³ to discredit the category of style as such.¹⁴ Deconstructionists would say that the "Oxen" parodies suggest the ultimate displacement and indeterminateness of all discourse.

I would like to suggest another possibility that links the parodies of "Oxen" with the parodies and styles of all the other episodes in *Ulysses*, and that is to view style not merely as a way of perceiving but as a way of constituting what we see. In this sense style could be compared not so much to a mirror (as in classical mimetic theories) or to a lens that colors or distorts (as in Romantic expressionistic theories), but rather to a scientific instrument designed to detect or measure something we cannot observe directly, such as the wave-length of light or the behavior of atomic particles. As such an instrument of perception, style not only makes things appear but also determines how they appear. This

post-modern view of style is adumbrated by Pater and brought to fruition in the second half of *Ulysses*.

Joyce critics have long noticed how repetitious the "Oxen" episode is. Many details and material that appear elsewhere in the novel, especially in episodes that come before "Oxen," appear in the different narrative styles of "Oxen" itself. In one sense, this repetition creates the possibility of multiple perspectives, or the parallax effect. The metaphor of parallax and the notion of multiple perspectives, however, do not adequately account for the stylistic effects of these incorporated genres.¹⁵ These languages, these forms of discourse, are instruments of perception that give us access to what otherwise would remain unseen in *Ulysses*. In other words, they make things appear, and through the repetitions we observe not so much the same things from different perspectives as different things that bear varying degrees of resemblance to each other.

It might be useful to consider the analogy of two artists painting a person's portrait. Do they see the same person? Did Wyndham Lewis and Brancusi, for instance, see the same person in their drawings of Joyce?¹⁶ Does each reader of *Ulysses* perceive the same text? It may be that in the end we have only our styles of seeing, which we often borrow from great writers like Pater.

At this point Joyce's parody of Pater can bring this insight into the open for us:

The stranger [Leopold Bloom] still regarded on the face [of Stephen Dedalus] before him a slow recession of that false calm there, imposed, as it seemed, by habit or some studied trick, upon words so embittered as to accuse in their speaker an unhealthiness, a *flair*, for the cruder things of life. A scene [from eighteen years ago] disengages itself in the observer's memory, evoked, it would seem, by a word of so natural a homeliness as if those days were really present there (as some thought) with their immediate pleasures. A shaven space of lawn one soft May evening, the wellremembered grove of lilacs at Roundtown, purple and white, fragrant slender spectators of the game but with much real interest in the pellets as they run slowly forward over the sward or collide and stop, one by its fellow, with a brief alert shock. And yonder about that grey urn where the water moves at times in thoughtful irrigation you saw another as fragrant sisterhood, Floey, Atty, Tiny and their darker friend [Molly Bloom] with I know not what of arresting in her pose then, Our Lady of the Cherries, a comely brace of them pendent from an ear, bringing out the foreign warmth of the skin so daintily against the cool ardent fruit. A lad [Stephen] of four or five in linseywoolsey (blossomtime but there will be cheer in the kindly hearth when ere long the bowls are gathered and hatched) is standing on the urn secured by that circle of girlish fond hands. He frowns a little just as this

young man does now with a perhaps too conscious enjoyment of the danger but must needs glance at whiles towards where his mother watches from the *piazzetta* giving upon the flowerclose with a faint shadow of remoteness or of reproach (*alles Vergängliche*) in her glad look.¹⁷

In this passage Joyce invokes his model in several ways: through the atmospheric effect achieved; through allusion to some of Pater's well-known texts; and by using some typical Paterian syntax, phrasing, and diction. For example, the prose is peppered with complex sentences marked by many qualifying or parenthetical phrases, such as "it would seem," "as it seemed," and "but must needs glance at whiles." Typical Paterian diction would include "wellremembered," "comely," his use of "there" in the phrase "really present there," and his sprinkling of foreign words. *Alles Vergängliche* also invokes a key Paterian idea the fleeting nature of experience. Characteristic Paterian phrasing also would include "a perhaps too conscious enjoyment of the danger" and "the cool ardent fruit." "Fragrant sisterhood" and "linseywoolsey" are Joyce's exaggeration of Paterian diction.

But even more interesting is what Joyce does not do. He does not deploy any significant ideas of Pater beyond what is necessary to mark the passage as stereotypically Paterian. He also does not mimic some of the purple passages Pater was famous for, such as the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* or his description of the Mona Lisa, passages Joyce did imitate elsewhere, as in the bird-girl description in *Portrait*. Of course, Joyce had to make a few allusions to some of the more famous passages to ensure recognition of his model. He alludes, for example, to Pater's Mona Lisa, who becomes Molly Bloom characterized as "Our Lady of the Cherries." The phrase "that circle of fantastic rocks" from the Mona Lisa passage becomes "that circle of girlish fond hands." The phrase "a scene disengages itself in the observer's memory" and the reference to immediate pleasures and fleeting experience mimic ideas and phrases that can be found in essays like the "Preface" and "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* and Pater's essay on Wordsworth. In general, however, Joyce's parody of Pater, which is typical of the other parodies in "Oxen," seems to be modelled on some of Pater's less notable descriptive passages from *Marius the Epicurean* and *Imaginary Portraits*, like those Joyce copied into his notebooks during 1919 and 1920 while he was working on the "Oxen" episode.¹⁸ Compare, for example, Marius's first view of Marcus Aurelius with the description of Stephen in Joyce's parody: "The nostrils and mouth seemed capable almost of peevishness; and Marius noted in them, as in the hands, and in the spare body generally, what was new to his experience something of asceticism, as we say, of a bodily gymnastic, by which, although it told pleasantly in the clear blue humours of the eye, the flesh had scarcely been an equal gainer with the spirit."¹⁹ Or a description from "Duke Carl of Rosenmold" with the parody's description of Mrs. Dedalus: "From the 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."²⁰ Or this description from "A Prince of Court Painters" with the

parody's description of the lawn scene: ". . . `The evening will be a wet one'. The storm is always brooding through the massy splendour of the trees, above those sun-dried glades or lawns, where delicate children may be trusted thinly clad; and the secular trees themselves will hardly outlast another generation."²¹

Joyce's preference for Pater's quieter prose rather than his purple passages had precedents in Lionel Johnson and George Saintsbury. Johnson preferred the "passionate simplicity of tone" in *Marius* and the "finely-wrought miniatures" of *Imaginary Portraits*, while Saintsbury admired Pater's quiet rhythms more than the purple prose of the Mona Lisa passage.²² Joyce is known to have used Saintsbury's *A History of English Prose Rhythm* while he was composing "Oxen of the Sun," and the passage Saintsbury chooses from *Marius* is one of those Joyce copied into his notebook.

By choosing less notable descriptive passages, Joyce could appropriate the signs or stylistic markers of Pater (the sentence structure, characteristic phrases, allusions, and atmospheric effect), but emptied of any significant content. Roland Barthes has noted how when myth appropriates signs it "prefers to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for a signification, such as caricatures, pastiches, symbols, etc."²³ Signs, however, as Barthes has demonstrated, are not transparent, and they can never be completely emptied of their prior content. There is always a residue. But by choosing other than famous passages, Joyce could minimize the historical residue of the content and focus more on the pure effects of style. Pater himself preferred landscape paintings where the subject matter "counts for so little" and could be more readily shaped to the artist's inner mood and vision.²⁴ These overall effects of style, then, become the focus of the "Oxen" episode more so than the stylistic markers themselves.

One of the most typical effects of Pater's style, despite his reputation as a priest of sensory experience, is to rarify what he describes, to aestheticize it. Pater himself captures the spirit of his own prose in his characterization of William Morris's "aesthetic poetry" as "a finer ideal, extracted from what in relation to any actual world is already an ideal."²⁵ A passage from this early essay on Morris aptly illustrates the effect I am referring to. Calling Morris a "Hellenist of the middle age,"²⁶ Pater dwells upon the shading of religion "into sensuous love, and sensuous love into religion" that was evident in the tension between the "mystic passion" of medieval religion and the "rebellious flesh" of the great romantic lovers, such as Lancelot and Abelard.²⁷ According to Pater, this tension resulted in a "beautiful disease or disorder of the senses," which he captures in his description of typical lovers of the Middle Ages:

Here, under this strange complex of conditions, as in some medicated air, exotic flowers of sentiment expand, among 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.²⁸

This passage, fragile, precious, exotic, rarefied, and ritualistic itself, expresses a great deal of the Paterian temperament. This rarefied sensuousness, almost drained of its blood, diaphanous as it were, so that a taper's flame would shine through it, is an important quality of Pater's own sensibility.

Joyce captures this effect of Pater's style superbly, an effect that is readily apparent if we compare parts of the Pater parody to renditions of similar material elsewhere in *Ulysses*. For example, compare how Pater's style characterizes Stephen Dedalus's dissolute lifestyle with how the style of John Wyclif characterizes it earlier in the "Oxen" episode. Thinking in Pater's style Bloom notes that Stephen used "words so embittered as to accuse in their speaker an unhealthiness, a *flair*, for the cruder things of life."²⁹ The style of Wyclif, on the other hand, is much more direct and specific. It says that Stephen "lived riotously with those wastrels and murdered his goods with whores."³⁰ Wyclif's characterization of Stephen comes at the end of a paragraph in which Bloom sadly ponders the loss of his son Rudy and grieves no less for another man's son (Stephen) who is squandering his health carousing with medical students. The passage Joyce imitates here is the parable of the prodigal son from Wyclif's translation of the Bible.³¹ The phrase "murdered his goods with whores" is uttered in the parable by the jealous elder brother of the prodigal son who objects to his father's joyous celebration of the fallen son's return. Even in Joyce's context of Bloom grieving for his lost son, the phrase retains its tone of judgment and condemnation. Moreover, the phrase is quite specific if not graphic about the dissolute son's offences.

In the Pater parody Bloom again is contemplating Stephen, but the father's sorrow and the judgmental tone are gone. The unhealthiness becomes a decadent flair for the cruder things of life. What those cruder things are remains vague and undefined. In other words, Stephen is no longer the guilty black sheep returned to the fold. Moreover, Stephen no longer inhabits a moral universe. His misdeeds are not sins to be forgiven but rather a style to be flaunted; the prodigal son becomes an Oscar Wilde. The observer too undergoes a transformation. He is no longer the forgiving father who welcomes his prodigal child home, but a detached aesthetic observer trying to capture in an expressive phrase, *un mot juste*, the look and tone of the object observed. We have moved from a moral universe of sin and forgiveness to a decadent aesthetic universe where manners and morals are matters of style and precise phrasing. The atmosphere has changed and both the observer and the observed have become transformed. In a very real sense, the context and all the elements within it have been reconstituted.

To take another example, compare how Bloom describes a scene in his own voice with

how he describes it in the style of Pater. Here is a passage from the "Hades" episode in Bloom's own voice. As in the Pater passage, Bloom is remembering a social gathering that took place about eighteen years previously at Mat Dillon's, where the men were bowling on the lawn:

Mat Dillon's long ago. Jolly Mat. Convivial evenings. Cold fowl, cigars, the Tantalus glasses. Heart of gold really. Yes, Menton. Got his rag out that evening on the bowlinggreen because I sailed inside him. Pure fluke of mine: the bias. Why he took such a rooted dislike to me. Hate at first sight. Molly and Floey Dillon linked under the lilactree, laughing. Fellow always like that, mortified if women are by.³²

Now compare this passage of Bloom speaking Bloom with Pater speaking Bloom from "Oxen":

A scene disengages itself in the observer's memory, evoked, it would seem, by a word of so natural a homeliness as if those days were really present there (as some thought) with their immediate pleasures. A shaven space of lawn one soft May evening, the wellremembered grove of lilacs at Roundtown, purple and white, fragrant slender spectators of the game but with much real interest in the pellets as they run slowly forward over the sward or collide and stop, one by its fellow, with a brief alert shock.³³

Notice the overall effect of these two contrasting descriptions. Notice the different choice of detail. In his own voice Bloom focuses on very specific, concrete detail names, emotions, the english he put on the ball, and so forth. In the first version of the scene Bloom is trying to explain to himself why Menton dislikes him. Bloom speculates that it was because he embarrassed him before some women in a bowling match at Mat Dillon's. This speculation masks perhaps a more fundamental reason, Menton's anti-semitism, which Bloom prefers to ignore, as he does most anti-semitic slights he encounters throughout the day from other Dubliners.

When the scene is rendered in Pater's voice much of the specificity evaporates, especially the emotions: the bowling match almost disappears; it becomes a generic game; the balls become pellets; the participants disappear; the spectators become the lilacs; and the competitive emotions of the match are given to the lilacs and reduced to the abstract phrase "much real interest." In this instance Bloom remembers the scene in connection with Stephen rather than Menton. His relation to Stephen here, however, lacks the emotional content of the earlier recollection of Menton. As with the Paterian description of the dissolute adult Stephen, the Paterian memory of the younger Stephen is from the point of view of a detached aesthetic observer, not of someone involved in the scene. At the end of the Pater passage the child Stephen is described with the same precious quality

as the description of the adult Stephen at the beginning of the passage: Stephen's frown suggests "a perhaps too conscious enjoyment of the danger"; his mother's "glad look," peering "from the *piazzetta* giving upon the flowerclose" exhibits "a faint shadow of remoteness or of reproach." The emotions here are "faint" and subdued. The diction is impressionistic, suggestively descriptive, and static. The whole scene rendered in Pater's style becomes more like a painting than an episode from Bloom's life; it has all the finery of a delicately wrought tableau and none of the emotional substance of Bloom's encounter with Menton. Instead we have a dreamy painting of an 1890s garden-party. Again the context has been transformed and all the specifics within it have been reconstituted.

At this point we might ask quite legitimately whether we could call these two descriptions versions of the same scene. They are in the sense that both descriptions refer to something that occurred at the same time and place. Because some of the details of the passages bear a certain degree of resemblance to each other, we can agree that Pater speaking Bloom and Bloom speaking Bloom are both observing an event on the bowling green at Mat Dillon's one day eighteen years ago. But do the two styles construe the same scene? The principles of focus, organization, and selection, as well as the diction, tone, and effect are completely different.

Joyce's parodies in "Oxen of the Sun" appear to suggest that different styles, as instruments of perception, do not perceive the same things. In other words, Pater speaking Bloom and Bloom speaking Bloom are not simply two ways of seeing the same scene. Rather, the different styles constitute different things that bear varying degrees of resemblance to each other.

Years ago Walton Litz said that in the view of style Joyce developed in the second half of *Ulysses* the artist creates rather than discovers the significance of things through language.³⁴ Surprisingly, few Joyce critics have pushed Litz's insight to the point of saying that language creates the world not just for the writer himself but for us too insofar as we use his style or styles as instruments of vision.

"Style is the man," Pater was fond of saying, and Joyce, when once asked about politics, said, "I'm only interested in style."³⁵ These are not the statements of narrow-minded aesthetes. From an epistemological perspective, style not only encompasses everything but constitutes everything, including the nature of our personalities and of our humanity. Things can only be made apparent, that is, made to appear, through one style or another. There is no transparent or neutral style. Derridean indeterminacy notwithstanding, language (as Heidegger has shown) makes things appear, but style, like a scientific instrument, determines how they appear. Oscar Wilde was not simply being outrageous when he said in "The Decay of Lying" that "truth is entirely and absolutely a matter of style" and that "it is style that makes us believe in a thing nothing but style."³⁶ Things in themselves, as Kant pointed out, are beyond our ken; and outside of style we can know

nothing of them. Style, in other words, is everything, as Joyce and Pater knew and as the "Oxen of the Sun" episode so extravagantly demonstrates.