Transfigured World

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the bond or copula of the world" (R, 40). In Marius, Pater works out a fictional form in which the central character becomes the pivot-point of an elaborately recursive play with backgrounds and foregrounds. Thus the fictional form of Marius the Epicurean is another example of Pater's figure of relief. For in one sense the transparent hero is represented in the foreground, and the reader sees through him into the colorful multiplicity of the second century, but in another sense the consciousness of Marius is the background against which the panorama of the past is displayed. On the one hand, historical specificity is defined in this novel as a matter of background, against which Marius's consciousness is thrown into relief. But on the other hand, Marius's consciousness is the background within which alone the past can be transmitted and thus in retrospect revived or thrown into relief. The elaborate working of this figure of relief on the level of the novel's total form is only one of the important ways in which Marius the Epicurean is a magisterial example of Pater's modern art of aesthetic historicism.

2. Autobiography of the Zeitgeist

The point has been made many times that the character of Marius the Epicurean is a recognizable mask for Pater's own "epicurean" sensibility. This particular connection of the character of Marius to Pater himself is usually made in order to suggest a palinodic motive for the composition of the novel. In 1877 Pater dropped the "Conclusion" from his second edition of The Renaissance, and when he restored it to the third edition in 1888, three years after the publication of Marius the Epicurean, he added the following note of explanation:

This brief "Conclusion" was omitted in the second edition of this book, as I conceived it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall. On the whole, I have thought it best to reprint it here, with some slight changes which bring it closer to my original

17. Monsman makes a similar point and extends it generally to several of Pater's "visionary texts" in his Walter Pater's Art of Autobiography (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980). He calls attention to Pater's "multireflexive interplay between inner and outer textual levels" and associates Pater's textual strategy with techniques of postmodernism (pp. 48, 5).
meaning. I have dealt more fully in *Marius the Epicurean* with the thoughts suggested by it. [R, 233]

The pretext of *Marius* was defensive, this argument runs—a defense of *Marius*'s pre-text, Pater's own *Renaissance*. When Lawrence Evans calls *Marius* Pater's *apologia pro vita sua*, it is this specific sense of its "autobiographical" valence to which he alludes.

However, as I began this book by arguing, many of the "thoughts" represented in the "Conclusion" are never owned by Pater in the first place, but are carefully staged as an impersonation of "modern thought." To bring these thoughts "closer to [his] original meaning" is to distance them more definitively. In *Marius the Epicurean*, Pater more decisively detaches himself from those "modern" thoughts by casting them as the thoughts of a fictive, hypothetical persona. When ideas are thus thrown into relief within the mind of a particular character in a particular situation, they are relativized by their context. Like the epigraph from the *Cratylus* prefacing the "Conclusion," Marius's extreme distance in time from Pater's own age works to demonstrate that the disturbingly "modern" thought of the nineteenth century had its analogue in an ancient, venerable, and revered philosophical tradition.

The fictional plot of self-culture works to show what Marius thinks of the thoughts he entertains, how provisionally (though seriously) he regards them, how he "holds his theories lightly," as Pater says of Plato (A, 69). Pater translates the Latin *contextus* as "clothed," and the temperamental coloring of Marius's character does indeed clothe each system of thought he essays (ME II, 59). Marius entertains systems of thought at the distance of speculation, not with the closeness of identification we call belief. In other words, he uses them as "instruments of criticism," as guides along a journey of self-culture more comprehensive than any of its separate, partial phases (R, 237). Like Goethe's, his "proper instinct of self-culture"

struggles with [every divided form of culture] till its secret is won from each, and then lets each fall back into its place, in the supreme, artistic view of life. With a kind of passionate coldness such natures rejoice to be away from and past their former selves. [R, 229]

Even after his visionary moment of coming to a willed "conclusion," Marius wonders: "Would he be faithful to himself, to his own habits of mind . . . if he did but remain just there?" [ME II, 72]. This mobility,

the by now familiar aesthetic dynamic of identification and detachment, is one of Marius's only articles of belief. (The other is that he must "hold by what his eyes really saw.")

But *Marius the Epicurean* is certainly not autobiographical in any conventional sense of the word. The novel focuses so closely on the "sensations and ideas" of its title character that it is almost possible to forget that it is narrated by another "person." A narrator occupies the position of the first person, whereas Marius is described at the figurative distance of the third. We read of "his" sensations and ideas in long passages of free indirect discourse. The narrator is for the most part recessive, an effaced background for Marius's feelings and thoughts in the foreground. Marius's development seems to be seen from the inside out, so to speak, even though the story is told in an objective mode, as if from the outside in. Through its representation of the central character the novel seems introspective, and through its representation of the narrator it seems retrospective, though these two functions of traditional autobiography have been divided between "persons." But how can we accurately speak of autobiography at all when the novel is written in the third person?

The important sense in which *Marius the Epicurean* may be usefully called autobiographical is an effect of its narrative structure. A clue lies in the fact that the narrator is not only distanced from but also explicitly identified with Marius the Epicurean. He narrates this story of second-century Rome from the great distance of a perspective in late-nineteenth-century England, and yet when the narrator assumes the foreground by taking on the personal pronoun "I," that narrator frequently uses the occasion to draw analogies between Marius's age and his own. "Let the reader pardon me if here and there I seem to be passing from Marius to his modern representatives—from Rome to Paris or London," this narrator demurs, after offering the general remark that Marius's "age and our own have much in common—many difficulties and hopes" (ME II, 14). Analogies like these establish similarity across the space of historical difference. They bind the figures of Marius and his narrator together in a relation of mutual reflection, for the narrator interprets Marius's age as not only analogous to but also prefigurative of his own age.

2. See Inman's description of "the objective-subjective technique" whereby "he always seemed to be writing about himself, even though he very rarely made a personal reference or even expressed a personal opinion" (Billie Andrew Inman, *Walter Pater's Reading*, [New York: Garland, 1981], p. 58).
4. See also, e.g., ME I, 20, 173, 185, 239.
Marius's early experiences are narratively structured to be "formative" of later ones; in other words, his early experiences prefigure his later experiences, establishing structures of thinking and feeling that are recapitulated again and again over the course of his life story. But because the narrator makes analogies between Marius's experiences and his own contemporary conditions, second-century culture in general is made to seem "formative" of later ages. Marius's individual experiences, then, are made to represent structures of cultural experience that are recapitulated again and again over the course of the centuries. The narrator has retrospective access to all ages of Western history. He draws analogies not only between Marius's age and his own, but between any of the "intervening" ages as well. Thus, from the perspective of the narrator all the cultural practices from the pre-Christian survivals of the religion of Numa to the late nineteenth century are knit together in one continuous development. This narrator "binds the ages each to each," using a version of the modern, historic method.

One of Pater's most interesting narrative choices is the construction of this analogous, prefigurative, or evolutionary relation between the central character and the narrator, and this relation is crucial to an understanding of the novel. The narrator mediates the otherness of Marius by showing it to be essentially another, earlier stage of the same overarching development in which he still participates. He looks back, in other words, to an earlier period of his own cultural past. It is as if Marius and the narrator were in relation to one another as past and present phases of the same person, though the "person" in question is not an individual person but an overarching personal figure for Western culture in general.

This narrative presents a wonderful example of what Paul de Man calls "specular structure." In the figure of specularity, two subjects "determine each other by mutual reflexive substitution." De Man argues that this figure occurs to some degree in all texts, but that the "specular structure is interiorized in a text in which the author declares himself the subject of his own understanding," in other words, in a traditional, first-person autobiographical narrative. What we find instead in *Marius the Epicurean* is the interesting example of a text

7. Ibid., p. 921.
in which the figure of self-understanding has been masked by the assumption of difference between “persons.” The author has not declared himself the subject of his own understanding in the traditional way, and yet the specular structure of Marius the Epicurean operates to generate the effect of self-understanding across the supposed difference between narrator and protagonist.

Theory of autobiography has traditionally drawn this distinction between “narrator” and “protagonist” in order to hypostatize two temporalities of the same “self”: the “I” remembering and writing in the present, and the “I” in the past, experiencing the events that led up to and conditioned the present state of retrospection. Subtending this distinction is the fundamental and unspoken assumption of personal development, through which all differences are ultimately united under the figure of the same retrospective “I.”

James Olney, for example, exploring various types of autobiography, describes the autobiography of memory, in which the “I” controls a double reference: “here and now, there and then, both the perpetual present and the historic past—and it is the tenuous yet tensile thread of memory that joins the two ‘I’s.” Jean Starobinski argues that the “style” of autobiography is characterized by a double “deviation”—of time and of identity—which establishes autobiographical reflection; this double deviation marks the difference between present and past, as well as a change within the “I.” That change is obscured by a “personal mark,” the “pronomial constancy” of the “I,” which covers the difference within and asserts continuity over change. But this “constancy” is an “ambiguous constancy,” because the retrospective stance depends precisely on a difference in temporality.

De Man’s exposition of specular structure develops further the emphasis found in Starobinski’s formulation: an emphasis on defining autobiography not with reference to a “real life” outside the text but through attention to the structure of figuration which produces the illusion of such a reference. This line of argument makes it clear that the distinction drawn between “narrator” and “protagonist” is a working distinction only. The sense of memory is itself an effect of figuration. Whereas the traditional understanding

of the autobiographical figure emphasizes the unity of the "I" through memory, the more recent understanding emphasizes the differences within the "I," which are covered by that "personal mark."¹⁰

Pater's novel graphically displays both the figure of temporal difference which makes for historical retrospection, and the consolidation of temporalities within a figure of personal identity. Instead of emphasizing stability and continuity in the "I," which covers fundamental difference, the novel emphasizes the apparent differences that obscure a fundamental continuity. The figure of self-understanding has been separated into two personae, figuratively reunified in their specular relation. Thus the novel enacts the autobiographical play of similarity and difference within a self-reflexive identity. At first glance, the development represented in the novel does not appear to be personal development. And yet through this particular relation of narrator and character, historical development is cast precisely in personal terms.

Rather than the figure of an older, wiser person looking back over the course of a lifetime, to chart his development as the "protagonist" who eventually became the present "narrator"—instead of a narrator who projects a figure of his past self as "other" than his present self, and then in the end recovers that "other" as "same"—we have a narrator in the present looking back over the course of centuries to chart the growth of a more distantly displaced "other." But the structure of the figure works the same way. Through the framework of analogy, the narrator insists on his developmental relationship with the character Marius; the narrator and Marius are related as later and earlier stages of the same continuing identity. The implication of this relation is of course evolutionary. Young epicureans like Marius are the precursors of their modern representatives, as the second century is the precursor of the nineteenth century. In *Marius the Epicurean* the specular relation between narrator and central character projects transhistorical continuity as a personal figure, "born" in Marius's time, aging and retrospective in Pater's.

In this sense, *Marius the Epicurean* should be read not as an autobiography of Pater himself but as an autobiography of the *Zeitgeist*. The "time-spirit" looks back, in the old age of the nineteenth century, to remember and to "place" an earlier phase of his own life history. Seasoned readers of Pater might think that

¹⁰ I am using the figures of Olney, Starobinski, and de Man to sketch the lines of a more complicated debate. Other important figures in this revisionary discussion of autobiographical figuralism include Roland Barthes, Emile Benveniste, Gérard Genette, and Philippe Lejeune.
they recognize both narrator and protagonist as displaced versions of Pater's own habitual persona. The point I am making, however, is a formal one. Even if one had no knowledge of the author of *Marius the Epicurean* or of his other works, one could still recognize the figures of narrator and protagonist as two temporalities of the same figurative identity. But that identity should not be taken to refer to the historical identity of Walter Pater as its autobiographical subject. Let us turn briefly to another example. Pater's first imaginary portrait, “The Child in the House,” has also been called autobiographical. It might clarify the point I am making about *Marius* to look at the similar narrative effects generated in that essay-reverie. For again, whether Florian Deleal, the central character of “The Child in the House,” can be equated in any way with the historical Pater is less important than the fact that a version of specular structure is set up in the narrative.

In the first paragraph, which tells of Florian Deleal making the decision to note “some things in the story of his spirit,” a personalized narrator is not evident. In other words, the narration begins in the position of the third person, at a decisive distance from “Florian”: “he” decided to note some things about “his” spirit. The figurative difference between present and past is transfigured as space, as distance, and as reverie: “In the house and garden of his dream he saw a child moving.” From his vantage later in time, Florian could “watch” (as if from a distance) the gradual expansion of his soul within “the old house,” as if the child were not himself, as if the soul in question were not his own (*MS*, 173–74). But soon a first-person narrator emerges; by the third paragraph the position of the narrator has been taken by an “I.” This transference suggests that the boundaries between “Florian” and the narrator are obscure. The titular “child in the house” seems to refer simultaneously to the young Florian and to an earlier state of the narrator, who describes “the child of whom I am writing” (*MS*, 175; emphasis added). Again, though in a different way from Marius and his narrator, this central character and his narrator are figured both as the same “person” and as different “persons.” The slippage from third to first person in this narrative creates the effect of specularity, of gathering both Florian and narrator within the figure of a self-reflexive “I.”

The “identity” hypostatized through the specular relation of narrator and character in *Marius the Epicurean* is a personal figure for the historical identity of Western culture. Pater argues in *The Renaissance* against the “superficial view” that divides history into periods, and
he reserves his special criticism for the "trenchant and absolute" division conventionally made between Pagan and Christian. That trenchant division between Pagan and Christian is precisely the one that Marius the Epicurean works to repair, with its notion of development so gradual as to be evanescent, nearly invisible, diaphanous. Against these "superficial" divisions Pater posits "the deeper view... which preserves the identity of European culture" (R, 225). Pater's language here should alert us to the aesthetic status of this "deeper" ground against which separate figures are only apparently or conventionally divided. The specular relation between Marius and his narrator constructs this "deeper view."

Because Marius plays the part of the transparent hero, a sort of specular exchange also takes place between him and the other characters in his second-century cultural milieu. Like Diaphaneitê, Marius's consciousness is the site of the internalization of "all that is really lifegiving in the established order of things" (MS, 251). Thus Marius, like his narrator, sums up and "contains" the important cultural forces of his day. His receptivity is played out in the plot through his relation with supposedly external realities—other characters, cities, books, and cultural institutions—that reflect his state of internal development at any given point in the narrative. Even "world-historical" figures, such as Marcus Aurelius, or documented lesser historical figures, such as Apuleius or Cecilia, are seen chiefly as they relate to Marius's development and are thus rendered as "minor" characters.

These minor characters are ranged in developmental series. Each character reflects a particular stage of Marius's development, and each series reflects the larger arc of historical development he internalizes over the course of his lifetime. The familiar device of the guide-figure, for example, has been multiplied across the text, each guide or companion indicating the issues involved in that particular stage of Marius's life: the young priest of Aesculapius who urges Marius to develop his visual capacity, the pagan poet Flavian, the Stoic Emperor Marcus Aurelius, through whose example of self-consciousness Marius learns to become his own guide, the Christian knight Cornelius, and finally that "divine companion" Marius envisions on the Sabine Hills."

This treatment of minor characters is a familiar feature in first-person narratives, where the shape of everything conveyed is palpably

\[11\] I discuss this serial patterning in another, related context and at greater length below. See Part Three, sec. 5.
reflected through the central narrating consciousness. In such narratives, minor characters are often ranged in a series, reflecting the stage-by-stage development of the central character. In *Jane Eyre*, for example, other characters not only are seen retrospectively by and through the autobiographical “I” in the present time of narration but also are somewhat “flattened” (partly because their consciousnesses cannot be fully represented) and reduced to the value they have with respect to Jane’s development at each point in the story. The Reed children, Helen Burns, Blanche Ingram, Bertha Mason—even to some extent Edward Fairfax Rochester and St. John Rivers—are in large part represented as foils for Jane Eyre, externalized markers of her current stage of internal development. The pattern they fall into with respect to one another is usually read as a configuration imposed by the adult Jane—that is, the mature retrospective “narrator.” The narrative structure thus becomes the sign of her achieved psychological coherence as “protagonist.” It is easier, simply because it is habitual, to see this effect when the narration is in the first person, but the same structuring principle is even more pronounced in *Marius the Epicurean*, where all the ostensibly “other” characters seem in a sense to be epiphenomena of the central consciousness of Marius.\[12\]

The fiction of development is marked in this novel by Marius’s internalization of these supposedly external, cultural phenomena. That fiction is maintained by a series of specular relations, as one “external” reflection of Marius’s personal development yields to another. With this reflexive relationship established between the individual and his surrounding culture, the borders between exterior and interior are simultaneously asserted and broken down, defended and violated. This continuous exchange between internal and external provides another demonstration of historical expression, and the relation between narrator and character personalizes historical retrospection as self-knowledge.

In *Marius the Epicurean*, historical development is imagined as successive stages of internalization and transmission. Thus Marius’s consciousness comprehends the cultural developments of his day, and

\[12\] My argument here is close to, but pointedly different from, Spengemann’s exploration of “poetic autobiography.” He too recognizes in modernist texts the peculiar sense that every character is an expression of a central consciousness, but he associates that central consciousness with the author. For example, in his analysis the characters of *The Scarlet Letter* are finally seen to represent aspects of Hawthorne himself. I would argue instead that the “central” consciousness around which all the other characters radiate must be represented as the central figure in the text. See William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1980), pp. 110–65.
the nineteenth-century narrator, from a point much later in historical time, does the same. Both figures occupy the position at the end of the line, for Marius is the last of his pagan "race," and the narrator speaks from the latest moment of development represented in the novel. In other words, both Marius and his narrator, at different points along a continuous line of development, show that "the composite experience of all the ages is part of each one of us" (B, 196).

Thus Marius the Epicurean presents a complex example of the interaction of genealogical and metafigural impulses in aesthetic historicism, for the plot of self-culture shows lines of development being absorbed by a mind in the present, and in Marius that plot has been doubled. Both Marius and the narrator represent that figurative position at the end of the line, where the retrospective mind in the present preserves all parts of the past in one place. But the narrator, due to his later, more present position, also comprehends Marius as part of his late-nineteenth-century culture. Caught up in "the intoxication of belatedness," this narrator regards Marius at the distance of speculation and sees an earlier figure of his own developmental type.

3 · The Transcendental Induction

The specular structure of Marius the Epicurean displays personal identity and historical culture as correlative and interlocking developments. Taken together in their specular relation, narrator and protagonist represent the individual self and its generalized projection, its transcendent "other," the overarching Zeitgeist. In examining the specular structure of Marius, I have so far concentrated chiefly on the retrospective stance of the narrator, within whose perspective all past ages may be gathered together and preserved. However, the novel also provides an understanding of how that concept of the overarching Zeitgeist is constructed, from the perspective of the individual. This section focuses on "The Child in the House" and chapter 19 of Marius the Epicurean, "The Will as Vision," both of which are concerned

1. Monsman notes the coherence of form resulting from "unity of mental development and its reflection of the nineteenth-century Zeitgeist" [Pater's Portraits, p. 66].