Walter Pater
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Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire.

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TWO RECENT STUDIES of “The Myth of Demeter and Persephone” (1876) regard Pater’s portrait of Demeter as a rare instance of his theorizing on female gender ideology. In “The Emergence of Pater’s Marius Mentality, 1874–1875,” Billie Andrew Inman argues that Pater reclaims the story of Demeter’s travails as “a celebration of maternity,” which forecasts the reconciliation of pagan and Christian conceptions of the family in Marius the Epicurean. Inman maintains that Pater’s location of an “ideal expression” of the sentiment of sorrow and awe in the context of mother and child prefigures “Marius’s childhood religion of Numa, with his mother at the center, and the Christianity that he sees later, with Cecilia at the center.”

Lesley Higgins insists, however, that we must properly read Pater’s Demeter next to his ekphrasis of La Gioconda as a matriarchal figure of empowerment. Like La Gioconda, Demeter countervails the masculine type of polychrome subjectivity that proliferates within Pater’s oeuvre. The “deeper mythology of Demeter” (GS 95) must consider how this proto-feminist figure resists any easy gender stereotypes associated with her mythological role as mother, an image, Higgins contends, only too easily appropriated and diluted by Victorian discourses of domesticity.

Both views entertain certain historical evidence available to Pater as probable “catalysts” for the essay, namely a fragment of a Homeric “Hymn to Demeter” discovered in Moscow in 1777 and artifacts excavated in 1858 by Charles Thomas Newton at a small cave sanctuary dedicated to Demeter at the ancient Greek port of Cnidus (on the southwest coast of Turkey). While Inman and Higgins focus on the recovered text, Pater also sounds the “deeper mythology of Demeter” among the physical signifiers unearthed by Newton. I suggest that by taking a closer look at Pater’s engagement with the archaeological materials, we can appreciate how he actually harmonizes ma-
triarchy and maternity. For Pater creates a site for female aesthetic-historicist sensibility out of the physical traces of the maternal Demeter unearthed by Newton. Pater's protean Demeter emerges as a feminine trope for cultural continuity between modern Europe and ancient Greece, a trope that celebrates an empowered Demeter by placing her in situ within the domestic material culture she inhabited at Cnidus.

This ambivalent view is not entirely idiosyncratic, for Pater constructs Demeter within a nascent archaeological consciousness in the late nineteenth century. Pater's Demeter registers broader professional anxieties surrounding the discipline of classical archaeology itself as it contended for a voice in the representation of ancient Greece and its cultural legacy to modern Europe. To understand the kinds of statements Pater could make about Demeter it is necessary to reflect not only upon Victorian discourses of gender identity but upon the disciplinary controls over representation of the classical world. In a recent volume entitled Classical Greece: Ancient Histories and Modern Archaeologies, classical archaeologist Ian Morris examines the complex discursive strands in which classical archaeology contended for professional status within and without the academy in the late nineteenth century. Morris argues that since archaeology by its very nature shaped its practices outside of the environmental controls of the universities, it posed a potentially serious threat to textual Greece. Yet, institutionally subordinate to classical philology, intellectually allied with the iconographic and aesthetic conventions of art history, and hermeneutically isolated from non-text-based classification schemes in prehistoric archaeology, the threat of an artifactual Greece was effectively neutralized.

Morris claims, moreover, that classical archaeology in the nineteenth century also had to contend with a powerful meta-narrative that absorbed classical philology and art history themselves: that is, a complex bundle of ideas about European origins encompassed by the term “Hellenism,” which he defines simply as “the idealisation of ancient Greece as the birthplace of a European spirit.” Because this idealizing impulse tended to isolate Greece from historical development, Hellenism is static, and thereby fundamentally at odds with archaeology. The overarching image of Greece as the “child of the race”—in the Wordsworthian sense that “the child is the father of the man”—authorizes a version of cultural continuity that simultaneously protects and preserves the “child” from maturation, from the corruption of historical process. Enshrined within a model of “universal human experience” and embedded in narratives of European heritage that helped define and stabilize elitist culture, this version of Greek antiquity was devoid of actual people and their real concerns about power, conflict, and social change.
In the 1870s and after, classical archaeologists secured a professional and ideological niche within Hellenism by striving for high standards of scientific methodology while remaining classicists. Classical archaeology was thereby constituted within the Hellenic penumbra as an unthreatening practice focused upon data acquisition and management of collections. As Morris relates, the “problem with Hellenist archaeology is not its commendable level of detail, but the idea that in archaeology mastery of a vast body of artefacts is all there is. . . . In the late nineteenth century archaeologists of Greece decided that the compiler and classifier of excavational data in a multi-volume site report was the ideal creative persona.” But by focusing on non-narrative forms archaeologists denied themselves the right to shape the story of the relationship between ancient Greece and the West. The survival of classical archaeology within the dominant discourse of Hellenism produced a tension between the “classical” ideology of stability and permanent value and the “archaeological” view that offered material evidence of change, and, thus, a rival system for valuing the Greeks, which in turn questioned the legitimacy of cultural relativism endorsed by classical philology.

In *Greek Studies* Pater himself quietly crosses and blurs these disciplinary boundaries within what we may call his archaeological aestheticism, a hybrid narrative form that folds art history and archaeology into the familiar essay he employed throughout his creative life. On one hand, objects drawn from the earth evoke a sense of deep collective unconsciousness periodically disturbed into sudden revelation. Unearthed sculptural forms like the Venus de Melos or the Aeginetan Marbles (*GS* 190) are agents from deep archaeological time returning to minister to culture. Yet their very fragmentation betrays for Pater the impossibility of such ontological communion. For archaeology also produced disturbing material evidence of historical disjunction, belatedness, and erasure. Pater offers a compromise. Deflating the myth of the happy Greek in favor of a developmental approach to Greek culture, Pater endorses a centrifugal and fragmented Greece struggling—as in the nineteenth century—with the burdens of its own modernity. Curiously and simultaneously teleologic and analogic, Pater deploys two versions of archaeology, a “vertical,” evolutionary view that constructs and affirms Hellenic origins in a mastering genealogical narrative, and a “horizontal” or “archaeological” perspective that locates and isolates aesthetics within particular cultural contexts. Both views ultimately represent desire for continuity and identification with antiquity, but from different perspectives: in the first instance, through evolutionary theory and, in the second, a modernist suspicion of hegemonic discourse that isolates the ideal from the real past and, thereby, from the cultural anxieties of the present.

Turning to models of art history and classicism, Pater fashions an anthropological archaeology that potentially challenged the legitimacy of both. Pa-
ter finds a rich source for his archaeological aestheticism in Charles Newton, the first Keeper of Greek and Roman antiquities at the British Museum (a post he held from 1861 to 1888). In Morris’s mind, Newton’s work reveals the acute tensions between archaeology and Hellenism in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Resisting the “childhood of Europe” approach and more attuned to anthropology than most archaeologists of his day, Newton promoted collection and arrangement on typological principles over those of aesthetic value or rarity. Shifting focus from art to artifacts, Newton leveled aesthetic Hellenism within the material culture of everyday life, treating traditionally aestheticized objects like statuary and ceramics as parts of symbolic systems inseparable from their domestic function. He viewed, for instance, the vases at the British Museum as textbooks of ritual culture, for they displayed “the penetration of Greek religion into all details of daily life and revealed religious practices and stories not included in the traditional myths.”

Newton’s most famous student, Jane Harrison, subsequently used these materials in her exposé of the irrational under-texture of Greek cults. While certainly as Eurocentric as any Hellenist, Newton’s emphasis on change began an archaeological critique of static Hellenism.

These tensions between art and archaeology and stasis and change underscore Newton’s *A History of Discoveries at Halicarnassus, Cnidus, and Branchidae* (1862), the account of his expedition to several Hellenistic sites in Turkey from October 1856 to June 1859. The report is largely a prosaic inventory of artifacts, to which is appended the scholarly visual ephemera of elevation and architectural drawings and sketches of artifacts executed by his draughtsman R. P. Pullan. This cataloguing impulse devotes as much energy to lamps, terracotta figures, dedications, stelae and glass bottles as to statuary. While several statues along with “minor” pieces of more anthropological interest began to be removed to the British Museum in June of 1857, the comprehensive site report democratizes artifacts and, in turn, artifactual analysis. The text’s speculative nature, moreover, represents a clear departure from material Hellenism collected in the museum. For Newton’s report has overtly moral overtones designed to bring artifacts into clearer cultural focus than is possible within the aesthetic cast of the sculpture galleries.

In the hermeneutic and discursive spaces between excavation and reportage, Newton adopts a double-identity as agent for the British Museum and purveyor of archaeological data. Newton resolves this tension as a textual issue by translating artifacts from a discourse of aesthetics into extensions of human use through constant placement in situ. The text strives to give a clear picture of the activities at this religious site, a view that cannot be recreated, he says, in the “opaque gloom of a London museum.” Newton traverses these discursive distances by offering a cultural analysis both of
ordinary artifacts and statuary within the interpretive realm of mythography. This double-vision offers at once a conservative reading that gauges the religious function of the statuary through the familiar narrative of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, but a departure from iconographical analysis by locating the myth within its material trappings in order to “determine the particular form of worship of which this spot may have been the seat.”

Similarly, in “The Myth of Demeter and Persephone,” Pater conflates iconography, mythology, and archaeology to engage artifacts at the intersection of their religious, aesthetic, and practical functions. If Newton in principle challenged the metanarrative of Hellenism through objective appeals to data and change, the subversive nature of Pater’s reading, while appealing to the scientific logos of Newton’s text, is generated between the cultural uses of Newton’s finds operating in the cave sanctuary and in the present with their re-contextualization in the British Museum. Pater and Newton share certain goals: to bring “home” to Britain a more complete view of religious practices of the Greeks as they operated and evolved at Cnidus. To this end Pater adapts Newton’s cataloguing instinct and semantic sensitivity to artfactual analysis to the palingenetic configurations of evolutionary Hellenism that characterize much of The Renaissance. Reading the signs of disciplinary cross-fertilization, Pater observes, “what we actually possess is some actual fragments of poetry, some actual fragments of sculpture; and with a curiosity, justified by the direct aesthetic beauty of these fragments, we feel our way backwards to that engaging picture of the poet-people, with which the ingenuity of modern theory has filled the void in our knowledge” (GS 112). Pater teases symbolic systems out of Greek material culture and challenges the notion of Greek repose by drawing archaeology and mythography into a narrative of continuity that places artifacts in a double relation between Greek antiquity and European modernity.

From out of the prosaic material conditions of Newton’s site report, Pater traces an evolutionary model of the myth of Demeter and Persephone. He states that there are three successive phases in the elaboration of myth, each corresponding to an artistic treatment of its religious sentiment and to a particular phase of cultural evolution. The first is the oral culture’s mystical apprehension of seasonal change, the primitive impressions of the phenomena of the natural world; the second is the “poetical” or “literary” phase, in which the poets, as in the Homeric hymn to Demeter (GS 83–91), become the depositories of the popular imagination; then, finally, an “ethical” stage. This taxonomy introduces a strange dichotomy. Pater argues that the first phase of Greek myth is mystic because it articulates the early Greeks digging into the physical earth for sustenance, whereas the ethical plastic phase articulates “abstract symbols, . . . intensely characteristic . . . of moral or spiritual conditions” (GS 91). Linda Dowling focuses on this semantic inversion
in her groundbreaking article on “Walter Pater and Archaeology.”21 In his characterization of the myth, then, “‘mystical’ means not impalpable but earthy; ‘ethical’ means not moral, but sensuous.”22 In other words, Pater’s use of the term “ethical” begins to merge, in Dowling’s words, “with qualities other people would call ‘aesthetic.’”23 Following the development of the myth, the mystical origins of the Chthonic deities are ultimately spatialized into human form in statuary. Dowling shows us that corporeal figures exhumed from the earth are for Pater archaeological tropes or “figures” with which to recover the spiritual conditions and cultural origins of ancient Greece and their legacy to the West.24

Pater follows this evolution in form and sensibility in Newton’s excavations at Cnidus. In particular, “three statues of the best style of Greek sculpture, now in the British Museum” (GS 140), represent for Pater adequate aesthetic expressions of the ethical phase of the myth. These are a figurine of Persephone, a statue of Demeter enthroned, and a life-size freestanding sculpture that Newton believes to represent either Demeter in old age or a portrait of a priestess (Figs. 1–3).25 Fashioned by artists contemporary with Praxiteles or belonging “to the generation immediately succeeding him,”26 these works express the impulse toward ideal beauty ascribed to high Greek sculpture by neoclassical theorists like J. J. Winckelmann and Joshua Reynolds. Isolated from their archaeological ground within the sculpture gallery, however, their symbolic function, which to Pater is inseparable from their aesthetic fashioning, is lost upon the visitor. Pater turns to Newton’s report to salvage contextual absence for these museum pieces. Together with the humble relics and votive offerings in Newton’s text, we see, in Pater’s words, the “two faces of the Greek religion confronting each other,” with “its provincial superstitions, and its curious magic rites, but also with its means of really solemn impressions, in the culminating forms of Greek art” (GS 142). Connecting the mystical, earth-bound expression of Chthonic worship with the sensuous aesthetics of full-fledged sculptural humanism, Pater’s double reading at once locates sculpture within Hellenic discourse, yet his broadly anthropological view troubles any easy formulation of and identification with Greek origins. Accepting the implications of change available at this site, Pater, like Newton, began to undermine a Hellenistic discourse that relegated archaeology to the status of “handmaiden to the classics.”

Pater’s evolutionary aesthetic model gathers “a stock of poetical impressions” (GS 82) available to the archaeologist, art historian, and mythographer. Within his tripartite scheme, Pater does more than materially corroborate the details of the narrative of the rape and return of Persephone. He writes change itself into the story, from which the astute modern reader can discern the supposedly calm Greeks themselves troubled and burdened by the sense of their own being in time. Originating in an aesthetic response
to the seasons, Pater argues that over time the Greeks translated the historical reality of change and loss into a transcendental image of a mother and daughter. Pater opens the essay by emphasizing the function of change itself as the basis of culture: “From the vague and fluctuating union, in which together [Demeter and Persephone] had represented the earth and its changes, the mother and the daughter define themselves with special functions, and with fixed, well-understood relationships, the incidents and emotions of which soon weave themselves into a pathetic story” (GS 92).27 The fluctuations of the earth from which the primitive mind began to form Demeter and Persephone is, by the fifth century BC, a historical narrative, a “pathetic story.” Recovery for the modern imagination, too, relies upon forms of modern identification, the separation of Demeter’s role as agricultural deity and earth mother into her “special functions” as an actual mother. This pathetic appeal engages a semiotic relationship that accommodates material culture and historical narrativity. For the humanistic drive of Pater’s characterization of Demeter and Persephone draws upon images of domesticity that appeal to the actual material conditions of home-life found by Newton at Cnidus. Foregrounding the poetic and subjective nature of mother and daughterhood, Pater translates the materials of Newton’s archaeology into a decidedly feminine historical trope.

In this vein, Pater speculates that “it might seem, when we consider the interest of this story in itself, and its importance in the Greek religion, that no adequate expression of it had remained to us in works of art” (GS 140). Newton’s History of Discoveries fills in the gap. In “the year 1857, the discovery of the marbles, in the sacred precinct of Demeter at Cnidus, restored to us an illustration of the myth in its artistic phase, hardly less central than the Homeric hymn in its poetical phase” (GS 140). Knowing, he continues, “so little, as we do, of the greater mysteries of Demeter, this glance into an actual religious place dedicated to her, and with the air of her worship still about it, is doubly interesting” (GS 142–43). Pater negotiates the silences between the seen and the unseen, between mute artifact and potential symbolic meaning, by questioning the very physicality of archaeological traces unearthed by Newton. The shrine preserves Demeter’s older mystic character celebrated in Eleusian rites, but Pater transfigures fertility rites into gendered images of domesticity and erects a symbolic structure of home-life itself as the locus of culture. Pater reinvests the site, a gloomy enclosure poised above a chasm that signals her more dire identity as an infernal deity, with domestic peace, over which Demeter reigns as mother. She is, as Pater relates, “the founder of civilised order [and the] peaceful homes of men, scattered about the land, in their security” (GS 108).

Developing what he characterizes as Newton’s “divinations” (GS 142) into the nature of the Cnidian Demeter, Pater observes that the shrine is of
Figure 1   Statue of Persephone from Cnidus
Figure 2 Statue of Seated Demeter from Cnidus
Figure 3 Statue of Demeter from Cnidus
Figure 4  *The Demeter of Cnidus in the Mausoleum Room at the British Museum*

George Kilburne, c. 1880
“simple construction, and designed for private use, the site itself having been private property, consecrated by a particular family, for their own religious uses, although other persons, servants or dependants of the founders, may also have frequented it” (GS 141). His speculations about the demographics of the worshippers underscores the drive to localize, particularize, and domesticate this religious space. The insignificance of the site is the measure of actual archaeological and anthropological importance, for it registers the humble and perhaps typical forms of ritual and material culture in contrast to the big-scale excavation of public precincts that Morris contends is the bread and butter of Hellenist archaeology.

What Pater finds so useful and fascinating at Cnidus is the dual expression of domestic use and religious sentiment. That the Greeks themselves collapsed worship and ritual within their very ordinary material culture enables the archaeologist to, as Pater puns, bring the “every-day aspect of Greek religion home to us” (GS 142; my emphasis). Pater’s taxonomy does not show evolution of sensibility away from primordial responses to the earth and its changes, but ascribes these very motives to the development of material culture itself. For example, votive lamps, offered “in memory of the torches with which Demeter sought Persephone” conflate the three phases of the myth: “those torches in the hands of Demeter being indeed originally the artificial warmth and brightness of lamp and fire, on winter nights” (GS 143). Similarly, lead dirae, or curse scrolls, represent domestic veneration of Demeter as a kind of household god. Appealing to the avenging character of the deities (stemming from Demeter in her sorrow withholding agricultural produce), the dirae afford real insight into the “gloomier side of the Greek religion” (GS 143). Yet the nature of the curses again takes us into what Pater assumes are the familial concerns of Greek women, “reminding us of the permanence of certain odd ways of human thought” (GS 143). A “woman binds with her spell the person who seduces her husband away from her and her children; another, the person who has accused her of preparing poison for her husband; another devotes one who has not restored a borrowed garment, or has stolen a bracelet, or certain drinking-horns” (GS 143–44).

Demeter in the plastic phase is at once an icon of seasonal change, a trope in a domestic narrative, and a beautiful woman and mother. Her aesthetic value in the Paterian sense is, in other words, a direct measure of her archaeological value in the Newtonian. As Pater relates, in “this living picture, we find still lingering on, at the foot of the beautiful Greek marbles, that phase of religious temper which a cynical mind might think a truer link of its unity and permanence than any higher aesthetic instincts—a phase of it, which the art of sculpture, humanising and refining man’s conceptions of the unseen, tended constantly to do away” (GS 144). Pater here challenges the hermeneutic limitations placed on sculpture within Hellenic discourse.
by confronting aesthetics with the archaeological and anthropological consideration of the Greeks as producers of material culture, rather than material culture as a passive reflection of Greek repose and confidence.

When Pater argues that the sanctuary at Cnidus is “one of the graves of that old religion, but with much still fresh in it” (GS 142), the freshness for the modern imagination resides primarily in its statuary. Yet, by preserving the older character of the myth within the very material body of late Hellenistic sculpture, Pater nonetheless asks his reader to look at statuary in a new way through Newton. Where Pater’s and Newton’s texts diverge in matters of archaeological detail, they reconcile over the issue of the importance of the site as a fresh view upon the Greek world. While Newton’s prose in History of Discoveries generally vacillates between inventory and iconographical classification, moments of metaphorical and metaphysical reflection underscore Pater’s vision of the gradual impression of the myth of Demeter and Persephone into material culture. Newton is attracted particularly to the standing female statue, which he claims is a “peculiar type” in the Greek world: the “features and form are those of an elderly woman wasted with sorrow, and do not exhibit that matronly comeliness and maturity of form which usually characterize Demeter in ancient art.”

Newton concludes that the “deity here represented is the Demeter Achæa,” the epithet ἀχαῖα deriving from the Greek ἀχός, meaning “grief.” In the Homeric hymn, Demeter, “wandering in search of the lost Persephone, assumed the form and garb of an old woman.” This attribution is important for Pater’s characterization of Demeter, for it privileges the narrative depiction of Demeter over the ritual function of the site. To this “type of the sorrowing Demeter” not “as yet recognized in any extant monument of ancient art,” Newton ascribes his own epithet, “Mater Dolorosa, wandering disconsolately in search of her daughter.” Transliterating Achæa into “dolorosa” transcribes Greek religion into Christian iconography. For Newton’s scholarly readership, this identification is a purely descriptive means of classifying this hitherto unknown type of statuary.

This attribution, however, resonates metaphorically for his non-specialist audience. Newton in fact wrote three versions of Cnidus. A History of Discoveries at Halicarnasus, Cnidus, and Branchidae adopts often verbatim the business-like text of his dispatches to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, which were presented to Parliament in the 1858–1859 session. In 1865 he published a popular version of A History of Discoveries, entitled Travels and Discoveries in the Levant, which Pater read in 1874. Pater’s discussion of the statuary is at certain key moments rhetorically more attune to Newton’s popular abridged text, which entertains as much adventure, geography, and historical speculation as archaeology. The shift in readership signals a shift in tone and, indeed, nature of Chthonic worship at Cnidus. In
one instance, Pater forages *Travels* for more intimate and detailed information on the curse scrolls, drawing out voices and personalities that Newton passed over in the *History*. Newton in *Travels* lingers over the implications of Demeter Achæa the disconsolate mother, dropping altogether the epithet Achæa to claim her explicitly as “the Mater Dolorosa of Hellenic mythology.” What seems merely an iconographical convention in the scientific text is an overtly ethical ascription in the popular. This subtle shift is a theoretical touchstone in Pater’s version of the myth in its plastic phase. If Newton posed, as Morris asserts, a threat to static idealizing Hellenism through the site report, then his analogizing of Christian iconography to this particular and hitherto unknown type of Demeter is for Pater the material incarnation of a literary trope. With the “sentiment of that monumental Homeric presence,” Pater relates, “this statue is penetrated, uniting a certain solemnity of attitude and bearing, to a profound piteousness, an unrivalled pathos of expression” (*GS* 145), a type that resurfaces in the Renaissance in Michelangelo’s *Pietà* (*GS* 145). While the authority of Victorian classics resided partly in alliance with Anglican Christianity, the tenacity of Demeter’s iconographic foothold in Western culture elicits from Pater a new way of telling the story of identification with Greece. At Cnidus, Pater excavates the mother of the race.

Pater’s investigation into the myth of Demeter and Persephone amplifies the ethical undertones of Newton’s *Travels*. To Pater, the plastic representation of Demeter Achæa concludes the humanistic instincts of the Greeks, for she “has now defined [herself] for the Greek imagination, condensed from all the traditions which have now been traced, from the hymns of the poets, from the instinctive and unformulated mysticism of primitive minds. Demeter is become the divine sorrowing mother” (*GS* 136). Aestheticized within human form, the chthonic Demeter now lends herself, in Pater’s words, to the “correction of the sentiments of sorrow and awe, by the presentiment to the senses and the imagination of an ideal expression of them. Demeter cannot but seem the type of divine grief” (*GS* 93, my emphasis). We can see in his characterization of Demeter and its field of correspondences with modern forms of worship that Pater takes the conventions of sculptural Hellenism into new semantic territory opened up by Newton. “Correction” in Pater’s usage draws out the correspondences between Greek antiquity and European modernity. As Dowling observes, such rhetorical conflation necessitates a lightening of the “darker elements” of the particular forms of worship at Cnidus. By cleansing “these sepulchral precincts of any horror and corruption,” Pater’s aesthetic analysis of material remains effects for his sensitive reader, as she subtitled her essay, a “reconciliation with earth.” Pater reads the material remains of the myth, she argues, as an expression of the higher aesthetic instincts of the Greeks, and their power to transform the
earth as a source of mystery and dread into a beautiful expression of human desires and culture. In “The Myth of Demeter and Persephone,” Pater’s contemporaries were “invited to see in the tombs of Cnidos evidence of material immortality and the ever-resurrected life of culture.” Reinvesting sculpture with Hellenistic aesthetics corroborates the underground life of Demeter with the modern myth of Greek humanism.

I have argued that the rhetorical collusion with the Greek world necessary to effect a “reconciliation with earth” as the physical and ethical focus of Western culture represents at once Pater’s challenge to and immersion in Hellenic discourse. From a museological perspective, Pater is teaching his readers to view sculpture under the new light of Newton’s archaeology. He argues implicitly that the collecting impulse should not isolate sculpture from life, for direct and full aesthetic appreciation of Greek material culture requires an anthropological and archaeological consideration that joins artifact and art under the same cultural and religious aspirations of their makers. The teleological implications of Pater’s archaeological aesthetic operate not only to impress everyday artifacts with symbolic significance, but, conversely, to ground free-standing sculpture directly within the cultural work of the Greeks. His evolutionary model reconfigures the ground from which statuary literally and figuratively emerge. Pater transfigures the rich earth turned over by Newton into the rich soil of Greek culture and, thereby, alerts the museum visitor to the store of anthropological data hidden within what amounted to a jumbled boneyard in the British Museum (the artifacts shipped from Turkey were stored for want of space in “temporary” sheds under the museum collonade until 1880). In this sense, “The Myth of Demeter and Persephone” reworks an important theme of Pater’s early essay, “Winckelmann” (1867), which tries to reconcile the idealizing drive and serene Hellenism of Winckelmann’s developmental model of Greek art—which had centered on the image of the Roman copy of the Apollo Belvedere—with Pater’s sensitivity to the deeply ambiguous nature of Greek religion. For the eye “fixed on the sharp, bright edge of high Hellenic culture, . . . loses sight of the sombre world across which it strikes” (Ren/H 159). The first part of “Demeter and Persephone” is similarly devoted to correcting the “familiar view” of Greek religion as a “religion of mere cheerfulness, the worship by an untroubled, unreflecting humanity, conscious of no deeper needs, of the embodiments of its own joyous activity” (GS 110). Permitting “nothing but an Olympian, though perhaps weari-some calm,” this view “underestimates,” Pater argues, “the influence of the romantic spirit generally, in Greek poetry and art” (GS 111). The myth of Demeter and Persephone, “perhaps the most popular of all Greek legends, is sufficient to show that the ‘worship of sorrow’ was not without its function in Greek religion” (GS 111).
Though his teleological configuration of Greek aesthetics is rooted within the Hellenic metanarrative of cultural origins and inheritance, Pater’s reconceptualization of Demeter Achaea is archaeological in the sense that Morris contends is largely absent in the nineteenth century. Feminizing the trope of historical continuity actually creates conditions for artifactual analysis that steps outside the prescribed boundaries of sculptural humanism in order to engage artifactual remains in all their variety. Theorizing the sanctuary into a feminine and domestic space transfers the story of Demeter into an actual site of anthropological importance. Cultural evolution and inheritance are translated into maternity. The “conception of Demeter,” Pater observes, “is throughout chiefly human, and even domestic” (GS 148). In folding the primitive, ritualistic responses to seasonal change and the appeasement of demons and spirits into curious images of motherhood and domesticity, Pater transforms the Newtonian artifact into a metonym of Greek religion and culture. This reduction allows a double reading. Sculpture belongs properly within a semiotic system inseparable from ordinary items of domestic and ritualistic use. Sculpture signifies beyond aesthetic models of ideal beauty to its anthropological fashioning amid the shards of the Greek home presented by Newton. Functioning as a sign, however, Demeter’s double-identity of mother and goddess refashions modern sympathies within the metanarrative of Hellenism. In this sense, the worship of the Cnidian Demeter broadly prefigures a modern form of worship, the Victorian worship of the home.

George Kilburne’s 1880 watercolour commemorating the transfer in that year of Newton’s artifacts from the storage sheds to the new Mausoleum Room (Fig. 4) illustrates this sublimation of Greek ritual to Victorian genre by dramatizing the humanizing motive of Greek sculpture within Demeter and Persephone’s new “home” in the British Museum. Motherhood is the real subject of the painting. The Victorian mother and daughter invest the sculptural group with the symbolic meaning Pater communicates through archaeology. The mother, in a protective and instructive attitude, turns the daughter’s attention away from the stolid architectural forms and virile lions excavated at Halicarnasus towards the quiet arrangement of Demeter and Persephone. Cultural continuity over vast reaches of time is established in the material immediacy of the galleries and in the affection between a mother and daughter. The sculpture gallery, like the temple at Cnidus itself, is now a place for nostalgic home-thoughts. Just as Newton’s archaeology is in Pater’s hands the hermeneutic cipher for charting transfigurations through time, Pater’s archaeology asks the modern reader/observer to look beneath the museum’s iconography and gender ideologies suggested by Kilburne in order to achieve a deeper empathy with this distant ancestor.
The resonances between the “Myth of Demeter and Persephone” and Kilburne’s watercolour do suggest that Pater’s archaeological aesthetics are ultimately more at home in the sculpture galleries of the British Museum than in the field. Pater’s sense of a historically transparent sculptural humanism rising out of the materials of the earth is, of course, another myth as nostalgic and end-directed as Hellenism itself. Pater concludes the essay in this manner by boldly asking “What is there in this phase of ancient religion for us, at the present day?” (GS 151). His answer brings us full circle to the Epicurean “Conclusion” of The Renaissance. For the physical remains of Demeter and Persephone

embodied, in adequate symbols, [the Greeks’] deepest thoughts concerning the conditions of [their] physical and spiritual life, maintained their hold through many changes, and are still not without their solemnising power even for the modern mind, . . . abiding thus for the elevation and purifying of our sentiments, long after the earlier and simpler races of their worshippers have passed away. (GS 151)

The material past is in fact de-materialized within a rhetoric of heredity and beauty that predates, prefigures, and inevitably extends cultural “value” to the supposedly disinterested science to which Pater appeals.

Beautifying and redecorating the home in antiquity, Pater’s archaeological aestheticism is anachronistic and obsolescent in its moral for the modern reader; yet Pater’s archaeology is nonetheless visionary in its theoretical orientation and implications for an anthropological archaeology. In “The Myth of Demeter and Persephone” Pater creates an elastic version of Hellenism that retains cultural origins with Greece, but is able to recognize contradictions, conflict, and, most of all, change within Greek culture itself. Pater places material culture in time, in physical and religious conditions that penetrate the calm surface of the Greek world collected, fabricated, and preserved in the sculpture galleries of the British Museum. Pater’s classical archaeology is deeply embedded in the fundamental paradox of his aesthetic historicism: that, as Pater’s first biographer A. C. Benson recognized, “in the perceptions of these old imaginings we may not only draw nearer to the heart of the ancient world, but that they may bring us too, by sweet association and delicate shadowy imagery, some uplifting and enlarging of our own sympathies and hopes.”44