Schooling Leonardo: Collaboration, Desire, and the Challenge of Attribution in Pater

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I The “School” as Solution, as Problem

IN A REMARKABLE SHIFT in the history of reputation, starting in the middle years of the nineteenth century but continuing to our day, critics reversed the once-common practice of ascribing as many works as possible to artists of note. New methods of analysis along with the increasing value placed on scarcity made it more interesting and important not to swell the pages of the catalogues, but to reduce the number of works ascribed to a celebrated artist of the past. Pater was extremely responsive to the implications of this process, and offers a remarkable challenge to the implied concepts of authorship and art that motivated (and often still motivate) such reascriptions.¹

The subtle perversity of Walter Pater’s engagement with the topic of schools is traceable to the interplay of emerging concepts of attribution which are still troubling today with nineteenth-century notions of creativity which many feel have been left behind. Pater’s response to developments in art history anticipates the manner in which the recognition that more than one artist may have a hand in a work of art is liable to provoke a complex destabilization of ideas of art, works, and workers that still play an important role in contemporary culture.

While Pater is typical of his era in his concern with the topic of schools, he is quite untypical in what he manages to recover from the term. To start with, he insists on something that his contemporaries tend to acknowledge only gradually and as an unfortunate secondary consideration. The title of his 1877 essay, “The School of Giorgione” (not, it is to be noted, “Giorgione and his School”) makes the work of the scholars central, not ancillary. Citing the important revisionist work of Crowe and Cavalcaselle’s History of Paint-
ing in North Italy (1871), Pater gives the initial impression of being disturbed by their far-reaching reduction of the canon of Giorgione’s work, by the fact that “the great traditional reputation, woven with so profuse demand on men’s admiration, has been scrutinised thread by thread; and what remains of the most vivid and stimulating of Venetian masters . . . has been reduced almost to a name by most recent critics” (Ren/H 113). He responds to the challenge of such a reduction by proposing to explain not only the experience of the works of art themselves, but the history of the reputation in which they participate, which they support; the provoking of imitation of a sort resulting in unclear attributions becomes a characteristic of Giorgione’s style and achievement.

Pater’s most surprising engagement with the theme of attribution, influence, and the work of many hands is to be found, however, in his earlier and far more audacious essay on Leonardo. In that seminal piece, Pater acknowledges the challenge of the de-attributions decimating Leonardo’s canon. But he finds in this development not a loss but the possibility of a still greater intimacy with the artist. If Giorgione’s style is so diffused as to make the fact of diffusion itself part of his style, Pater is well aware that a key element in Leonardo’s reputation is the idea of individual recognition. The Baptism of Christ (1469–1480) by Leonardo’s master, Verrochio, is famous in art history because Vasari tells us that one of the angels was the work of the student’s hand (Fig. 1). After seeing the work of the younger man, Vasari claims in a much-cited anecdote, Verrochio abandoned painting altogether. But the topic of identification in Leonardo is generally less clear than the neat story of recognition relayed by Vasari; the painter’s images were copied in his own day; his style imitated; and his workshop produced copies and adaptations. Canvases on which he is known or thought to have participated are still scanned, weighed, and reconsidered by art historians in the hope of ascertaining the precise elements attesting to the presence of his hand.

Pater raises the possibility of engaging in such an activity, only to dismiss it, or to cast doubt on its value for the kind of appreciation in which he is engaged: “For others remain the editing of the thirteen books of his manuscripts, and the separation by technical criticism of what in his reputed works is really his, from what is only half his, or the work of his pupils. But a lover of strange souls may still analyse for himself the impression made on him by those works, and try to reach through it a definition of the chief elements of Leonardo’s genius” (Ren/H 78).

The challenge to the reader of Pater is to establish what it may mean to, on the one hand, admit that “technical criticism” has removed certain canvases from Leonardo’s catalogue, while, on the other hand, still proposing that these very same works may be analyzed so as to reveal something of Leonardo’s genius. Evidently, such a process of analysis is only possible if a
Figure 1 Verrochio, *Baptism of Christ*

Florence, Uffizi. Copyright Alinari/Art Resource, NY
quite radical notion of self-expression is at play, one in which the members of a particular school—artistic epigoni—become in themselves works of art. It is an argument that anticipates recent debates on attribution and the role of the workshop while in fact moving beyond them. Pater does not simply admit the value of the workshop and surrender the ambition of limiting admiration to the certified brush strokes of the master; as I will suggest below, he suggests that the school, rather than being the essentially uninteresting site of a mere falling away from an originary creative genius, is in itself one evidence of that genius and an important achievement in art.5

It would seem on first consideration that, if nowhere else, the relationship between love and knowledge should be straightforward enough in the realm of art-appreciation. And yet, throughout the nineteenth century, and to this day, developments in art history and connoisseurship have offered important challenges to the bases of the love of art.

As she comes to the close of her account of Leonardo in her influential popular guide of 1845, Memoirs of the Early Italian Painters (1845), Anna Jameson offers the following insights: “We have mentioned a few of the genuine works of Lionardo da Vinci; they are exceedingly rare. It appears certain that not one-third of the pictures attributed to him and bearing his name were the production of his own hand.” Jameson is here passing on to her readers a realization widespread among art historians by the middle of the century. Indeed, the acknowledgement of the need to reduce the number of works attributed to Leonardo becomes a standard form of closure in period discussions of the artist. We may cite Charles Clément, whose Michel-Ange, Léonard de Vinci, Raphael (1861) was a principal source for Pater’s essay on Leonardo: “the easel paintings that we may attribute to Leonardo da Vinci with certainty are exceedingly rare . . . we must remove from his oeuvre paintings of great beauty and importance.”6 Both authors go on for several paragraphs, carefully indicating which works in the major galleries are indeed the productions of Leonardo’s hand. In spite of the strength of their claims to rigor, by modern standards both authors are still modest in the number of works they exclude. More striking is the fact that Jameson and Clément are surprisingly full or praise for the objects they do remove from the canon (“paintings of great beauty and importance,” writes Clément).7

More intriguing still, both authors do almost immediately salvage something of what they give up. Jameson follows the acknowledgement that “not one-third of the pictures attributed to him and bearing his name were the productions of his hand,” with the recuperative suggestion that nevertheless “they were the creation of his mind, for he generally furnished the cartoons or designs from which his pupils executed pictures of various degrees of excellence.” It is the recognition of a “school” that recovers the value of Leon-
ardoesque works. Clément is more emphatic in his language: “Leader of a fervent and skilful school, his students often worked from his drawings or cartoons, and it is sometimes so difficult to tell their works from his that the most competent connoisseurs can be fooled.” By this account, the confusion of the art-historians is due to the force of Leonardo’s influence on his students; it is evidence of the direct role he had in designing and inspiring their works.

We might ask why Jameson and Clément need to offer these consolations—to insist on Leonardo’s participation in works by other hands? One important reason is that the challenge presented by the reshaping of an artist’s canon is more than practical. To become aware of the recalibration of the canon is to become uncertain about an important part of the hermeneutic circle; when art objects which had been identified as central to an artist’s achievement are no longer even accredited parts of the artist’s corpus, it seems impossible not to feel some discomfort with the evaluation of artistic merit itself. At the very least, the new knowledge may provoke a re-valuation of the terms which establish that merit. The problem of re-attribution finds some resolution in the idea of the school, the suggestion that what the viewer may be admiring is a work at some point touched by the mind of Leonardo. But this solution is an uncertain recovery from a double loss—of the object which once was held to be the work of the artist’s hand, and of the simple certainty that what is of value is the experience of a product directly produced by the creator’s hand.

As the field of art history was consolidated in the nineteenth century, it came to be characterized by an increasing concern with methodology, by the need to establish the criteria by which art objects could be ascribed to old masters. Nevertheless, the history of attribution and de-attribution should in no way be understood as one of simple progress in methodology. As Carol Gibson-Wood has indicated in *Studies in the Theory of Connnoisseurship*, attitudes towards attribution are themselves conditioned by a number of issues in the valuation of art. She notes that the “variability of attributions over the ages” is traceable to the fact that connoisseurs have not always been engaged in the same activity when they have ascribed a painting to an artist. The history of attribution itself is as much influenced by changing attitudes towards art as by technical discoveries. Among what she refers to as “changeable attitudes,” Gibson-Wood places “the importance assigned to an artist’s participation in his works.” As she points out, Vasari might well have regarded the origins of a painting in Giotto’s workshop as sufficient reason for attributing it to Giotto. That later connoisseurs have tended not to want to stop at that conclusion without clear evidence of the touch of the master’s hand has more to do with developments in concepts of the artist or of art work, than with breakthroughs in methods of analysis.
If attribution is a historically-bound and changing concept, the same and
more is true of the “school.” In his discussion of the term, the Dutch art his-
torian J. Bruyn emphasizes the remarkable range of distinct kinds of art-
objects the term has been able to subsume, from works produced by the ac-
tual studio workers or apprentices of a painter to those produced by the imi-
tators of his style. Indeed, Bruyn’s “The Concept of School” underlines the
breadth of what has come to be included in the category. “Time-honoured
usage,” he notes, “has given the word school a wider meaning, comprising
works by artists in their own right, which bear stylistically and technically a
close resemblance to those of a greater artist who was their teacher and
model, or may be so considered.” Bruyn’s “or may be so considered” is tell-
ing; work of such diverse provenance may be included in the term, that it is
best understood not as a practical identification, but as an evaluative de-
scriptor. The art historian notes that “the word is currently applied (and has
been so for more than two hundred years) to imply different, mostly vague
and often negative, notions rather than positive ones concerning the attribu-
tion of works of art.” By “negative” Bruyn in part means that the school has
been a place in which art history has come to locate objects about which it is
uncertain; he also means, of course, that belonging to a school has generally
been taken as clear evidence of a lesser achievement. There is then a double
negativity implied in the “school”: of information and of value. ¹¹

As is the case with concepts of attribution, so, with the concept of the
“school”—the meaning of both varies with the account of the artist accepted
in a given period. In particular, the implications of the word depend on
whether the artist is understood either as the author of a design which might
be effected by others, or, as Bruyn puts it, as the “creator of highly individual
works of art, which could only be fully appreciated because of the artist’s
own increasingly personal treatment of material.”¹² The dictionary offers
what appears to be quite a neutral definition, but the stigma that has typi-
cally attached itself to work belonging to the school is clearly suggested—
particularly when the definition turns to art:

The body of persons that are or have been taught by a particular master (in phi-
losophy, science, art, etc.); hence, in wider sense, a body or succession of persons
who in some department of speculation or practice are disciples of the same master,
or who are united by a general similarity of principles and methods. Also, in de-
scriptions of works of art. . . school of (an artist), used to designate an anonymous
work produced in the school of a particular artist. ¹³

Between discipleship and anonymity little room is left in which the
“scholar” may shine. Art history has voted with its feet in this matter; the
works of Leonardo’s “scholars” have little place in modern accounts of the
painter’s work, or anywhere outside specialized, often regional, studies. To
take an author who represents an important transition between the nine-
teenth century and a more recognizably modern aesthetic, we may ask what Bernard Berenson did with Leonardo’s schools. In his *North Italian Painters* of 1907 he identifies the issue I have been discussing when he treats “a line of Renaissance painting in Milan grouped around the artist who so determined its character and shaped its course that it has ever since been known as his school—the school of Leonardo da Vinci—while its finest products have commonly passed for his own.” In one awkward line Berenson opens the door to the scholars and then closes it. “Take away Leonardo’s share in these compositions,” he suggests “and you have taken away nearly all that gave them worth.”

Berenson does, at least, mention these artists. Current guides to the art of the Renaissance have little room for the followers of Leonardo, particularly as his “scholars.” A notable exception may prove the rule. Martin Kemp’s “‘The Madonna of the Yarnwinder’ in the Buccleuch Collection reconsidered in the context of Leonardo’s Studio’s Practice,” shows signs of the recent resurgence of interest in the studio (a more precise sub-division of the school), but in the following passage this distinguished scholar is unable to avoid suggesting a number of probably unsustainable distinctions:

I should like to propose that we consider the possibility of two more or less distinct levels of pictures which may be called “Leonardos.” One level comprises a handful of fully autograph, intensely personal, slowly-executed masterpieces which either stood from the first or subsequently moved outside the normal process of commission and payment; while the other level consists of high-quality products, generally small in scale, which were made with varying degrees of participation by the master and emerged from the studio as saleable objects. (My emphasis)

Kemp is willing to concede that what he calls “the conventional search for the ‘original’” is misguided insofar as the “original is assumed to be a unique product of Leonardo’s hand alone.” And yet, his proposal of a two-tier system of evaluation openly privileges works he can imagine to be by Leonardo’s hand—working alone.

In the nineteenth century, the solution to the problem of de-attribution, the “school,” raised two distinct but related challenges. For one thing, what to do with works that seem—but are not, or not entirely—the works of people we admire? For another, what are we to think of disciples? The nineteenth century was a particularly unfortunate time to be identified as a follower in the world of art (its principal competition in this regard was, of course, the century that followed). We may note that for all its classical cachet, the first instance of the term *epigone* given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from the nineteenth century, and that then, as today, it is usually a pejorative term: “One of a succeeding generation. Chiefly in plural the less distinguished successors of an illustrious generation.” In literature proper, contempt for followers is endemic to the early years of the twentieth century.
In 1928, Ezra Pound, for example, divides writers into categories, of which the first three (in descending order) are “The inventors,” “The masters,” and “The diluters.” The last set are described as follows: “these who follow either the inventors or the ‘great writers,’ and who produce something of lower intensity, some flabbier variant, some diffuseness or tumidity in the wake of the valid.” George Bernard Shaw, writing the year before Berenson’s *North Italian Painters*, is even more emphatic than Pound: “the first great comer . . . reaps the whole harvest and reduces those who come after to the rank of mere gleaners, or, worse than that, fools who go laboriously through all the motions of the reaper and binder in an empty field.”

Berenson’s response to the followers of Leonardo is temperate given the climate in which he was writing; what is there to say about the flabby, the diffuse, the gleaners and fools who follow in the wake or reap in an empty field?

Having challenged the attitudes of critics like Pound and Shaw, recent criticism has attempted to get beyond what is taken to be a late remnant of Romantic ideology in order to recuperate the work of collaboration. Walter Pater offers a surprisingly complex response to the challenge of the school, but it is one that salvages the value of the works of followers by making it reside in what they demonstrate about the originary master. The presence of the characteristics of an artist in spite of the absence of any physical work on his part becomes a manifestation of the powers of that artist to make others in his own creative image. When Pater notes that now there are few paintings, where there were once many, that can be traced directly to the labor of Giorgione, he asks “why the legend grew up above the name, why the name attached itself in many instances to the bravest works of other men.” Where the concept of the school might seem to offer a challenge to nineteenth-century notions of artistic originality, Pater finds in it the possibility of an achievement far more pervasive than any available in merely physical production. Thus, elusive attribution can become an essential, rather than accidental, characteristic of Giorgione’s style:

> Although the number of Giorgione’s extant works has been thus limited by recent criticism, all is not done when the real and the traditional elements in what concerns him have been discriminated; for, in what is connected with a great name, much that is not real is often very stimulating. For the aesthetic philosopher, therefore, over and above the real Giorgione and his authentic extant works, there remains the Giorgionesque also—an influence, a spirit or type in art, active in men so different as those to whom many of his supposed works are really assignable. A veritable school, in fact, grew together out of all those fascinating works rightly or wrongly attributed to him; out of many copies from, or variations on him, by unknown or uncertain workmen, whose drawings and designs were, for various reasons, prized as his; out of the immediate impression he made upon his contemporaries, and with which he continued in men’s minds; out of many traditions of subject and treatment, which really descend from him to our time, and by retracing which we fill out the original image. (*Ren/H* 116)
The decimation of the canon allows the appreciation of Giorgione’s achievement in ways that the simple work of his hand never could have. The school is evidence of a kind of force of personality which it is Pater’s aim to celebrate. Not surprisingly, it also becomes a site for the exploration of the kinds of teacher-pupil relationships which fascinate the critic. In order to understand what it may mean to be a disciple in Pater, it is important to bear in mind the erotic component only suggested in the above description of the chain of influence originating in Giorgione.

II “The temptations of the scholar”

*The Renaissance* returns repeatedly to the erotics of learning, to accounts of learning as an erotic process deeply enmeshed with the acquisition or expression of mastery. The first tale in “Two Early French Stories,” which is the first essay in the book, is that of Heloise and Abelard—“how the old priest had testified his love for her by giving her an education then unrivalled.” Education as the testimony of love: in this process, the intellectual life is not interrupted by physical passion even while it provokes temptation by lessening the bonds of quotidian morality. Pater’s Abelard is meant to be exemplary. He is said to prefigure “the character of the Renaissance, that movement in which, in various ways, the human mind wins for itself a new kingdom of feeling and sensation and thought” (*Ren/H* 5). The erotic-intellectual interplay of the scholar’s life is characteristic of the freeing of the mind that Pater associates with the period from which he took the name for his book. If the manifestation of Abelard’s passion is pedagogic, its initial impetus is no less intellectual: “You conceive the temptations of the scholar,” notes Pater, the second person address being in itself a gesture of seduction, “and that for one who knew so well how to assign its exact value to every abstract thought, those restraints which life on the consciences of other men had been relaxed” (*Ren/H* 3–4).

Time and again Pater draws attention to the interpenetration of the passions and the mind, of the erotic and the pedagogic. The relation between Ficino and his student, Pico della Mirandola is more than simply intellectual. Thus, in Pater’s description of their first encounter, the older man is shown burning a lamp before a bust of Plato, as before a saint, and, of the younger one it is said that “his hair [was] yellow and abundant;’ and trimmed with more than the usual artifice of the time” (*Ren/H* 28). The point to note is the interpenetration of erotic power and intellectual tutelage. As in psychoanalysis, the elements do not co-exist; they are component parts of each other. It is in the interweaving of the desire of the instructor and that of the student that knowledge and passion emerge together. This interweaving shapes the treatment of schools in Pater’s very first publication on a visual artist, his essay on Leonardo da Vinci. I will close my own
discussion by demonstrating the remarkable, and still challenging manner in which the topic of schools and scholars is marked in this important piece.

III  Leonardo: “mixed obscurely with the product of meaner hands”

As might be expected, very recent studies (especially those focusing on the art of northern Italy and in northern Italian collections) have begun to identify the particular achievement of individual followers of Leonardo. David Alan Brown, for example, in a recent discussion of Andrea Solario, emphasizes the variety to be found among Leonardo’s followers. “To their imitation of Leonardo,” he writes, “his pupils and followers brought a number of outlooks, conditioned in each case by their previous training, their own individual temperaments and goals, and their sources in other artists’s work.” This is sophisticated and entirely convincing, but it is a recu-
peration openly based on the desire to escape the stigma of the school: “Solario in particular,” Brown notes, “does not deserve the negative epithet of ‘follower.’ Instead he represents what we might call constructive or creative imitation . . . he treats his Leonardoesque prototypes in a highly personal way, combining them with other sources or styles and in so doing transform-

While the force of an achievement not based on claims of full originality is likely to be greeted more sympathetically today than in the early part of the last century, it is important to realize that this is precisely not Pa-

ter’s argument. Brown wants to argue for the real mastery of Solario even as the painter works in an idiom established by Leonardo. Because Pater takes the notion of school as more than a simple category in which to place works of art whose direct links to the admired artist are in question, he is able to use the productions of the school of Leonardo to illuminate the attainments of Leonardo himself. He engages the works of Leonardo’s students as manifesta-
tions, ultimately, of Leonardo’s own genius. Rather than shying away from works that, at the time he is writing, are known or suspected to be mixed produc-
tions, or by other hands entirely, he uses them as evidence of Leonardo’s achievement no less than are his unquestionably certified pieces.

Pater’s treatment of Leonardo’s drawings is telling. As much of the work of the essay is done by unexpected juxtaposition rather than by direct argu-
ment, it will be necessary to quote at length. In the drawings Pater finds “Leonardo’s type of womanly beauty” (Fig. 2). His description of this type, however, is quite oblique, and its abstractions have provoked a number of in-

They are not of the Christian family, or of Raphael’s. They are the clairvoyants, through whom, as through delicate instruments, one becomes aware of the subtler
Figure 2  Leonardo, *An Old Man and a Youth Facing One Another*

Florence, Uffizi. Copyright Alinari/Art Resource, NY

The figure on the right is generally identified as Caprotti (Salai)
forces of nature, and the modes of their action, all that is magnetic in it, all those finer conditions wherein material things rise to that subtlety of operation which constitutes them spiritual, where only the finer nerves and the keener touch can follow. It is as if in certain significant examples we actually saw those forces at their work on human flesh. Nervous, electric, faint always with some inexplicable faintness, these people seem to be subject to exceptional conditions, to feel powers at work in the common air unfelt by others, to become, as it were, the receptacle of them, and pass them on to us in a chain of secret influences.

But among the more youthful heads there is one at Florence which Love chooses for its own—the head of a young man, which may well be the likeness of Andrea Salaino, beloved of Leonardo for his curled and waving hair . . . and afterwards his favourite pupil and servant . . . [A]nd in return Salaino identified himself so entirely with Leonardo, that the picture of St. Anne, in the Louvre, has been attributed to him. (Ren/H 91–92)

The key to the passage lies in the unmotivated turn to pupils and to love indicated in the strangely agent-less choice made by a personified “Love” (“there is one at Florence which Love chooses for its own”).

Pater is interested in identifying the particular form of beauty represented in Leonardo’s work with the perfect modulation and transmission of influence. These beautiful beings, at once receptacles and transmitters, are the students in Leonardo’s school. They are not simply weak imitators of the achievement of another; rather, they are perfect conduits of the force of genius. They are beautiful because of this perfection.21 At this moment in the essay influence itself openly becomes Pater’s theme, and in Leonardo’s school he finds the beauty of its full manifestation. The unlikely “But” that moves the reader from one paragraph to the next suggests not contrast but continuity. Salaino, the young man who had been with him since the age of ten and who was to become Leonardo’s student and heir, functions as a passionate embodiment of that perfect transmission of influence which earlier he had described so abstractly. Misled by his sources, Pater garbles the name: not Andrea Salaino, but Gian Giacomo Caprotti, known as Salai or Salaino, “little devil.” We will call him Caprotti, this impossibly perfect student who becomes chief instance of what Pater sought in his pupils, a combination of erotic charm and fantastic malleability. Such malleability, compounded of intellectual sympathy and selflessness, becomes by far the most important part of the students’ appeal.22

As the passage continues—the “But” that marked the earlier unmotivated transition between paragraphs is answered by an “And” with a similar effect:

It illustrates Leonardo’s usual choice of pupils, men of some natural charm of person or intercourse like Salaino, or men of birth and princely habits of life . . . men with just enough genius to be capable of initiation into his secret, for the sake of which they were ready to efface their own individuality . . . Out of the secret places
of a unique temperament he brought strange blossoms and fruits hitherto un-
known; and for him, the novel impression conveyed, the exquisite effect woven,
counted as an end in itself—a perfect end.

And these pupils of his acquired his manner so thoroughly, that though the
number of Leonardo’s authentic works is very small indeed, there is a multitude of
other men’s pictures through which we undoubtedly see him, and come very near
to his genius. Sometimes, as in the little picture of the Madonna of the Balances . . .
we have a hand, rough enough by contrast, working upon some fine hint or sketch
of his. Sometimes, as in the subjects of the Daughter of Herodias and the Head of
John the Baptist, the lost originals have been re-echoed and varied upon again by
Luini and others. At other times the original remains, but has been a mere theme
or motive, a type of which the accessories might be modified or changed; and these
variations have but brought out the more the purpose, or expression of the original.
(Ren/H 92–93)

The “And” here, like that important later one in the description of the Mona
Lisa (“Hers is the head upon which all ‘the ends of the world are come,’ and
the eyelids are a little weary”) suggests an incommensurate relation and cau-
sality. The “novel impression,” “exquisite effect,” the perfect “end in itself” is
the pupil who has effaced himself enough to become a manifestation of the
artistic will of the master.

Pater’s presentation of the intertwined lines of passion, creativity, and
self-effacement culminates not with a drawing, but with a provocative treat-
ment of a painting, Leonardo’s Saint John the Baptist (Fig. 3) After drawing
out the perverse seductiveness of a figure “whose delicate brown flesh and
woman’s hair no one would go out into the wilderness to seek, and whose
treacheryousmilewouldhaveusunderstandsomethingfarbeyondtheout-
ward gesture or circumstance,” Pater traces the (progressively less religious)
variations on this work effected by Leonardo’s epigoni, concluding that, “No
one ever ruled over the mere subject in hand more entirely than Leonardo, or
bent it more dexterously to purely artistic ends” (Ren/H 93). It is by looking
at what he claims Leonardo’s students saw that Pater finds the conviction of
what he claims they recognized, that “though he handles sacred subjects
continually, he is the most profane of painters: the given person or sub-
ject”—he lists a number of religious ones—“is often merely the pretext for a
kind of work which carries one altogether beyond the range of its conven-
tional associations.” Pater is particularly intrigued by the case of the Bacchus
at the Louvre, a painting the uncertainty of whose attribution to Leonardo is
not unrelated to its clear basis in that artist’s John the Baptist (Fig. 4). In Pa-
ter’s account, the slippage from the representation of a figure of divine as-
ceticism to the representation of a god of wine and fecund pleasures suggests
the essentially erotic impulses motivating the original painting of a beautiful
young man. For more recent students of art the presence of desire in the re-
ligious and even ascetic drives may be less shocking than the near complete
surrender of artistic originality evident in the work of Leonardo’s students, Caprotti among them (Fig. 5). However, Pater’s prose works to inextricably bind the two phenomena, to demonstrate in its own seductive misdirections that together they constitute the complex and moving form of influence discoverable in the school.

It is no accident that Pater’s discussion of Leonardo’s school ends with what he presents as Leonardo’s transgressive remaking of sacred themes into profane manifestations of his own desires. The achievement of the painter is manifested in the force by which he makes into reflections of his own will entities that might be understood to offer the greatest resistance to such remaking: sacred images, other artists. For Pater, an important part of the pleasure offered by Leonardo’s work is the possibility of witnessing the subtle but pervasive work of personal influence, whether it consist in making a St. John into a Bacchus or a Caprotti into a Leonardo. In his treatment of Leonardo’s school, as so often, Pater carries out his own project of creative re-invention. He also anticipates a paradox made characteristically more open in the writing of his own followers—Oscar Wilde in particular: the possibility that individuals themselves may be understood as works of art insofar as they are recognized as formed in a web of influence. The school of Leonardo, as presented by Pater, becomes far more than a heuristic dumping ground for works of dubious attribution. Because Pater’s aim is to touch the most intimate depths of the “strange soul” of the artist, Leonardo’s effect on his followers is as rich a source for that contact as autograph paintings accredited by the archives or the connoisseurs. Luini is as recognizable as a register of Leonardo’s genius as the Mona Lisa. Pater manages to use the fact of the school to recuperate a sense of intimacy and admiration for the power of the artist which runs the risk of being lost should the recalibration of the canon continue to decimate the authenticated work of his hand. The fact of the school is evidence of the success of the personality. The work of Leonardo’s scholars becomes an illustration of the power of creative influence.

Because Pater has slighter biographical sources for the essay on Giorgione, he cannot tell the same story of a passionate disciple. Giorgione offers an instance of an influence even more ineffable and more diffuse. It is in tracing the charm of a personality that could inspire so much imitation along with observing the fascination of influence itself at work that Pater finds reparations for the losses visited on art lovers by the new scholarship:

As regards Giorgione himself, we have indeed to take note of all those negations and exceptions, by which, at first sight, a “new Vasari” seems merely to have confused our apprehension of a delightful object, to have explained away in our inheritance from past time what seemed of high value there. Yet it is not with a full understanding even of those exceptions that one can leave off just at this point. Properly qualified, such exceptions are but a salt of genuineness in our knowledge; and beyond all those strictly ascertained facts, we must take note of that indirect
Figure 3  Leonardo, *Saint John the Baptist*

Paris, Louvre. Copyright Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY
Figure 4 Studio of Leonardo, *St. John the Baptist or Bacchus in a Landscape*

Paris, Louvre. Copyright Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY
Figure 5  Gian Giacomo Caprotti (Salai), *Saint John the Baptist*

Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana
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influence by which one like Giorgione, for instance, enlarges his permanent efficacy and really makes himself felt in our culture. In a just impression of that, is the essential truth, the vraie vérité, concerning him. (Ren/H 121–22)

Bruyn and Gibson-Wood are convincing when they claim that what is determining in the treatment of schools and of attribution at a given time is nothing less than the reigning notion of what an artist is and how that way of being is manifested in his or her creations. I have tried to suggest ways in which Pater is responding to a particular development in culture which is far from having achieved resolution in our own day. By not looking away from the effects on the artistic canon of contemporary developments in connoisseurship and the history of art, Pater arrives at a more complex and richer account of the relation of artist and school than that which has been available in later eras, when, aside from a few recent exceptions, the work of followers, once so important, has largely fallen out of accounts of artistic achievement.

An important element in Pater’s engagement with the topic of schools is his emphasis on the erotics of instruction. It is what gives his treatment of the topic its most provocative edge. Recent work on the erotics of literary and artistic collaboration seems at once citable and yet inadequate when faced with what Pater describes, a more unbalanced set of relationships than such a term should probably encompass, one that involves a disturbing relation to power on the one hand and to self-effacement on the other. By not needing the physical work of the artist to locate the artist’s achievement, Pater uses nineteenth-century scholarship to offer a vision of what art may be that is at once an apotheosis of the claims of artistic power we tend to associate with the period, and something stranger. Ultimately, his ideas on art may be more shocking today than those open gestures towards transgressive sexuality that have been identified by recent critics. They are not, however, separable. Pater presents us with a recovery of the work of the school which at once challenges long-lived notions of individual artistic achievement and any simple sense that the acknowledgment of working together will always and necessarily undermine the centrality of the single individual as the determinant element required for the admiration of art. The works of Leonardo’s scholars—Luini, Menzi, and even Caprotti—become visible in Pater’s essay in ways that they are not in the current accounts of art history, but the artists themselves are understood as masterpieces by Leonardo da Vinci. Their beauty is the beauty of influence, and it is a beauty, as always in Pater, following Baudelaire, “mixed with strangeness.”