The Dialectics of Sense and Spirit in Pater and Joyce

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Critical estimation of the importance of Pater to Joyce falls into two camps. One is represented by T. S. Eliot, who stated that Joyce was greatly interested in Pater but soon outgrew him. The other is represented by Perry Meisel, who, half a century later, argued that Pater's influence on Joyce pervades his entire oeuvre. Eliot in the 1920s and Peter Ackroyd in the 1990s have admitted that Pater was important to such writers as the young Joyce and the young Yeats, but they have maintained that the major figures whom Pater influenced quickly outgrew their adolescent enthusiasms and produced works that greatly transcend him. To such critics, Pater is famous as a prose stylist and as the writer of a phrase or passage ("hard, gemlike flame," the Leonardo essay) that will endure as long as the English language is read; he is not, however, regarded as a major precursor of Modernism. Even Richard Ellmann, to whom we owe so much, trivialized Pater's importance. In all of his writings on Joyce, Ellmann only mentions Pater in passing—and never as a shaping influence. This short-sightedness even extends to Ellmann's study of Wilde. Unlike Harold Bloom, who said that Wilde "vulgarized" Pater; Ellmann said that Wilde "outgrew" him. Considering that the second sentence of *A Picture of Dorian Gray* contains the term "flamelike" and that Pater's idea of Botticelli as a "critic" of Dante and the Wordsworth essay anticipate Wilde's view of criticism as creation in "The Critic as Artist" (Wilde's novel and essay were both written after 1889, when Wilde was thirty-five), one wonders when, according to Ellmann, Wilde came of age. Ellmann's attitude is symptomatic of the critical prejudice against Pater during this century.
Although Pater has long occupied a place in the canon, scholarly editions of only a few of his works began to appear only after 1980.

There are several ways of observing the parallels that I have tried to present in this project. One way is to regard some of them as signs of parallel development. At school, Pater considered a religious vocation, but by the time he entered Oxford, he became agnostic and aesthetic. Similarly, Joyce abandoned Catholicism at University College to become a poet. Pater dramatizes his transition from pious ascetic to aesthetic theorist in Marius; Joyce does so in Portrait. One may also regard the parallels as signs of intellectual kinship. Pater and Joyce were both interested in Flaubert and French Symbolism, a movement that pervaded English poetry during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They also read the dialecticians Bruno, Vico, and Berkeley. Still another is to regard the parallels as signs of influence. All of the similarities probably fall into all three categories. However, as Kunsterromans, Portrait and Marius resemble each other far too closely to dismiss the idea that Pater's novel did not influence Joyce's. I believe that Marius is the principal precursor of the Portrait. As Michael Levey states in his introduction (1985) to Pater's book, whose hero dies at age forty-six, "there is certainly a sense in which Marius can be read as A Portrait of the Artist as a Middle-aged Man."4

As the Mangan essay reveals, Joyce read a good deal of Pater before he turned twenty, and, since Pater was the most famous aesthetic theorist in Britain in the 1890s, he probably had him in mind when he developed his aesthetic theories in Paris and Trieste. Those theories, which appear in the Trieste Notebook and in Part V of Portrait, echo various ideas from Pater. Stephen expresses a belief in "art for art's sake." Joyce's theory that aesthetic apprehension is a subjective experience echoes Pater's famous revision of Matthew Arnold in the "Preface" to The Renaissance. He also discusses Flaubertian impersonality in metaphors that recall Pater's in his essay "Style," which influenced Joyce's notion of impersonal form almost as much as Flaubert had.

Aside from these early writings, Pater's influence is felt in Joyce's epiphanies, not only in Portrait but also in Ulysses. Scholes and Kain, the first to explore this influence, note that several types of epiphanies in Pater anticipate Joyce, and Joyce probably borrowed his conception from Pater. As I explain in Chapter 4, Joyce's lyric epiphany is a moment of aesthetic bliss. Such moments are strewn throughout Pater's works and perhaps originated in the "Conclusion" to The Renaissance. Another Joycean version is the dramatic epiphany, in which a "spiritual manifestation" emerges from the mundane. The chapter "Sunt Lacrimae Rerum" in Marius contains this kind
of revelation. Finally, Joyce's characters' epiphanies, such as the one at Sandymount, are often moments of self-discovery that emerge from dialectical synthesis. In this study, the principal parallel between Pater's epiphanies and Joyce's is the reconciliation of sense and spirit that occurs during these moments. Many of the epiphanies in Pater's tales and in *Marius* function in this way, and Joyce might have developed his version under their influence.

Also important is the Mona Lisa passage in *The Renaissance*, which helped shape Joyce's depictions of women. The passage, with its spiritual and seductive images of womanhood, surely resonated in the young Irish Catholic who struggled to transcend his inherited sense of woman as either virgin mother or destructive siren. Like the epiphanies, Pater's Mona Lisa represents a synthesis of sense and spirit, of pagan and Christian ideals, a synthesis that Joyce bodies forth in the bird-girl on the strand, the temptress of the villanelle, Gerty McDowell, and Molly Bloom. This woman, in most of her guises, symbolizes the call to experience. This motif is important in Pater and Joyce and is central to Stephen's and Marius's development. The bird-girl invites Stephen to abandon sensual repression—the same call that Marius experiences through Flavian and Prior St. Jean through Apollo. Ronsard awakens Gaston's thirst for experience, and soon after, he too abandons his pursuit of the priesthood. Molly Bloom is Joyce's most potent symbol of the invitation to creative art through creative life. Like Lady Lisa, she has in the world of *Ulysses* unparalleled knowledge of sensual life, and she best embodies the desire for frank experience that Pater and Joyce both ultimately champion.

Equally pervasive is the "Conclusion" to *The Renaissance* and the "perpetual weaving and unweaving" passage. In "Portrait of the Artist," Joyce first articulates his idea of the self as protean, and in "Scylla and Charybdis," he paraphrases Pater to reiterate this notion. Meisel argues that the passage is behind Gabriel's sense of dissolution at the end of "The Dead," and I have suggested that Joyce's epiphanies of dissolution in *Portrait* may also be indebted to it. I also sense that it colors Anna Livia's deliquescence at the end of *Finnegans Wake*, where she "unweaves" herself on the last page and weaves herself anew on the first.

If many of the parallels that I have discussed are, in fact, examples of influence, why did Joyce never acknowledge them when he admitted that Ibsen, Aristotle and others held sway over him? Joyce never mentions Pater by name in his fiction, and he refers to him briefly only a few times in his letters. Yet he parodied him in *Ulysses*, especially in "Oxen of the Sun." One explanation for the putative repression may be the influence paradigm of
Harold Bloom and Perry Meisel: Pater so influenced Joyce that he had to repress this fact in order to maintain artistic integrity. Another reason may be that *The Renaissance* was a notorious work, derided by people from George Eliot to T. S. Eliot. It was vilified by people whom Joyce would have respected and who were not part of the bourgeois crowd that detested Ibsen. Many also regarded as risible Pater's self-conscious writing style, which Joyce, influenced by that style himself, ironically parodied. Pater was regarded in the 1890s as the father of "aestheticism," which was very nearly a euphemism for homosexuality. At the turn of the century, aesthetes were not only regarded as aberrant, but as proponents of a superficial aesthetic that was easily and unflatteringly caricatured. Although Joyce was disinclined to shrink from literary controversies, he may have desired to distance himself from Pater for these reasons.

The appearance of *The Renaissance* in 1873 influenced a vast number of young English writers. If a single figure other than Shakespeare influenced an entire generation of young writers during the last quarter of the nineteenth-century in Britain, it was Pater. Writers as diverse as Gerald Manley Hopkins and Wilde fell under his spell, and it extended to Yeats and "the tragic generation," Arthur Symons, Virginia Woolf and Bloomsbury. Joyce may not have wanted to fall into a mass category of youths enchanted by *The Renaissance*, a book whose "Conclusion" was so notoriously popular that the author had to delete it from the second edition for fear that "it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall."5

While many of the shared motifs may be a result of parallel development rather than repressed influence, I am inclined to think that the truth about Joyce's relationship to Pater lies closer to Perry Meisel's claim of unacknowledged influence than to T. S. Eliot's contention that Joyce outgrew Pater. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Meisel stated that *Portrait* is "Joyce's most Paterian text, almost flamboyantly burdened by a precise precedent in Pater's imaginary portraits."6 Joyce did not cast off Pater after he left Dublin or after he finished *Portrait*. With Alan Perlis, I feel that the sense-loving Pater influenced *Ulysses* nearly as much as he did *Portrait*. In the later text, Joyce's heroes, Leopold and Molly Bloom, are the "embodiment of that Aesthetic Hero of Pater's who would allow sensation to flow unimpeded to him."7

Pater's most lasting influence on Joyce is the reconciliation of sense and spirit antinomies. This is the chief subject of *The Renaissance*, a phase of cultural history that was to Pater a synthesis between the paganism of the classical world and the spirituality of the Middle Ages. It is also the focus of *Marius the Epicurean*, whose protagonist passes through sense/spirit cycles and reaches a reconciliation between spirit and sensual beauty in a Christian
community. This kind of reconciliation forms the climax of *Ulysses*, where “Stoom” and “Blephen” merge under Molly’s window. I surmise that Joyce felt that this dialectical resolution was true to his own experience, and he gravitated towards its literary representations in Pater, whom he regarded as a kindred spirit. As discussed in Chapter 2, Joyce drew most heavily on Bruno, while Pater used Hegel, but both dialecticians agree that, at a certain stage, sense/spirit dichotomies no longer remain antithetical but become identities.

It seems fitting to close with the last words of Anna Livia Plurabelle, which may also be the last words of Pater’s Mona Lisa, the mother of Joyce’s female archetypes. Like Joyce in his three novels, let us give the last word to the female, as she weaves and unweaves herself, recalling the perpetual resurgence of Pater; whose “Conclusion” we may cryptically intuit in Anna’s fading voice, under several guises within the work of the most significant novelist of the century:

Yes. Carry me along, taddy, like you done through the toy fair! If I seen him bearing down on me now under whitespread wings like he’d come from Arkangels, I sink I’d die down over his feet, humbly dumbly, only to washup. Yes, tid. There’s where. First. We pass through grass behush the bush to. Whish! A gull. Gulls. Far calls. Coming, far! End here. Us then. Finn, again! Take. Bussoftlhee, mememorie! Till thousandsthee. Lps. The keys to. Given! A way alone a last a loved a long the riverrun, past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs.