The Practice of Form: Arts of Life in Victorian Literature

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Stephen Tardif

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Dissertation Advisor: Professor Helen Vendler   Stephen Tardif

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Abstract

The Practice of Form: Arts of Life in Victorian Literature argues that Victorian poets,

prose stylists, and *fin-de-siècle* aesthetes used literary form as a means of self-making.

Connecting the resurgent interest in formal analysis in Victorian studies with its long-

standing focus on material contexts and cultures, this project offers a new way of

describing the *work* of literary works by taking form on the page to manifest the achieved

formation of the writer. Because it engages the writer in an embodied, situated activity

over time, literary form can be understood as something at once abstract *and* material.

This double life of form enables its analysis as a practice, a diurnal program of action that

draws its maker into a parallel process of personal formation. Four chapters illustrate this

practice of form. The first chapter shows how Alfred Lord Tennyson uses *In Memoriam*

to rid himself of the melancholy in which he seems to indulge. The second chapter shows

how Gerard Manley Hopkins uses the form of his ode, "The Wreck of the Deutschland,"

to describe the very response that his own poetic narrative produces. Walter Pater's

writing life is the subject of the third chapter, which details how he transforms a quiet life

of literary study into the arena in which aestheticism's pleasures are attained. The

phenomenon of transformation through form finds its apex in a final chapter on Oscar

Wilde, whose art strives to represent its own self-formative power as well as the very

changes that it produces. *The Practice of Form* thus re-imagines the relationship between

the lives and the works of key figures in Victorian literature by demonstrating how

changes that go unrecorded in the biographical record endure in the literary forms that

remain in their art.

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Introduction

> The work modifies its author. With each of the efforts of drawing it from him he undergoes a change. When completed, it reacts on him once more … he becomes the man who was capable of bringing it to birth. He re-fashions himself, as it were, into a creator of the finished product—a mythical being.
>
> —Paul Valéry[1]

> [I]f we try to discover what the poem is doing for the poet, we may discover a set of generalizations as to what poems do for everybody. With these in mind, we have cues for analyzing the sort of *eventfulness* that the poem contains. And in analyzing this eventfulness, we shall make basic discoveries about the *structure* of the work itself.
>
> —Kenneth Burke[2]

The Practice of Form is a study of the self-shaping that writers enact through their works. Its subject, therefore, is the common phenomenon of being changed by the act of writing, an experience shared by authors and critics alike. For instance, Blaise Pascal's observation—that the "last thing one discovers in composing a work is what to put first"[3]—affirms Stephen Greenblatt's conviction that "only in the act of writing can one discover what one needs to say."[4] Despite the frankness and frequency of such statements, the transformations that literature enacts are rarely a focus for literary criticism, in part because the topic inverts criticism's own analytic process; in E. M. Forster's distillation: "Think before you speak is criticism's motto; speak before you

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[1] *Analects*, trans. Stuart Gilbert, vol. 14, *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 230.

[2] *Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1973), 73.

[3] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2005), *xiii*.

[4] *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 177.

think is creation's."[5] To conceive of literary form as a means of self-formation thus requires the critic, as it were, to think in reverse—to place writing *before* the writer and to see the author as a result of her work.

The results of this reversal will be elaborated in the chapters that follow. Each of these case studies—of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Walter Pater, and Oscar Wilde—will examine different aspects of literary self-formation; but they will all show how the creative practices of these authors depend on the products to which they give rise, and how these authors shape themselves through the works which they produce. Literary form will ultimately emerge as the process through which the author's self-formation is accomplished. *The Practice of Form*, therefore, develops a picture of literature as a way of life, one through which subject formation itself becomes a kind of art. Before outlining the arc of its argument, the following pages will place it within the general context of literary studies and of Victorian studies in particular.

While scholarship on subject formation is vast—ranging from genre studies, to the "New Ethics," to Marxist thought and beyond—no recent thinker has engaged this topic more strikingly, nor with more impact, than Michel Foucault. In a project which Peter Sloterdijk characterizes as "the minute examination of regional and datable regimes of discourse and power," Foucault shows how institutions, via language, produced the category of the human.[6] This view is famously put forward in *The Order of Things*, and it laid the foundations for subsequent post-humanist projects such as Bruno Latour's Actor-

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[5] E. M. Forster, "The Raison d'Être of Criticism," *Horizon* 18 (Dec. 1948), 405.

[6] *Philosophical Temperaments: From Plato to Foucault*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (New York: Columbia UP, 2013), 98.

Network Theory and Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology, both of which take up Foucault's project of opening philosophical thought onto non-human horizons.[7] Yet in his later work on ancient techniques of self-care and medieval guides for self-examination, Foucault discovers the same shaping forces of political, medical, and carceral regimes of power deployed by human subjects themselves, and to the same end. In his historical investigations from *Discipline and Punish* to the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, the subjugating force of institutional power and its language goes only one way. But when Foucault fully turns towards the subject, he shows how these same apparatuses of constitution through language were self-directed and employed on a small scale. While it may still be an effect of language, this subject also speaks.

Foucault's discussion of the Greek practices associated with the commonplace book, or *hypomnemata*, offers an exemplary instance of this kind of self-constitution through discourse. Foucault insists that these ancient anthologies "do not constitute a 'narrative of oneself,'" for *"the intent is not…to reveal the hidden, nor to say the unsaid, but on the contrary to capture the already-said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read,* and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self."[8] On this account, the commonplace book and its reader—the anthologized form and the self-arranged subject—are two components in one process, held within a single circuit of self-

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[7] See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1994), Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007), and Graham Harman, *Towards Speculative Realism: Essays and Lectures*, (Winchester, UK: ZeroBooks, 2010).

[8] "Self Writing," in *The Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 210-211.

constitution that is enacted through repetitive reading. The subject, here, is both the cause

and effect of form: the arranging agent as well as the epiphenomenon of this arrangement

who is brought into being through organized and repeated exercises and practices.

The self-shaping power Foucault identifies in the practices associated with this

literary form is also a feature of well-crafted compositions in classical rhetoric. Following

the stage of *inventio*, the "finding and selection of the pertinent material for a particular

subject," the writer would move on to the *dispositio*, "the arrangement or structuring of

the material resulting from the first step."[9] The text, on this model, is a form assembled

from content with the reader always in mind. Indeed, "an artistic work," in this tradition,

"is a journey," and form, therefore, is not so much a spatial shape as a durational

experience. Mary Carruthers has shown that this aspect of art ultimately became

associated, in medieval literary discourse, with the concept of *ductus*, a term which might

be rendered as "leading" or "conduction":

> *Ductus* and its synonyms analyse the experience of artistic form as an
> ongoing, dynamic process rather than as the examination of a static or
> completed object. *Ductus* is the way by which a work leads someone
> through itself: that quality in a work's formal patterns which engages an
> audience and then sets a viewer or auditor or performer in motion within
> its structures, an experience more like travelling through stages along a
> route than like perceiving a whole object.[10]

Like the ancient commonplace book, the carefully constructed artwork or treatise is a

whole by virtue of the formative work of its component parts. In fact, because "artistic

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[9] James Finn Cotter, "Rhetoric and Poetic in Hopkins" in *Rereading Hopkins: Selected New Essays*, ed. Francis L. Fennell, in *English Literary Studies* (Victoria: U of Victoria P, 1996), 145.

[10] "The Concept of *Ductus*, or Journeying Through a Work of Art," *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010), 190.

form" is "an ongoing, dynamic process," the "whole object" can be conceived of as the reader's (or audience's) total experience of it in the past tense.

The medieval notion that a text induces a definite sequence of experience finds a parallel in modern descriptions of the training enacted *within* literature. Hugh Kenner's observation that certain works teach "us to read what we are reading," Stanley Fish's theory of "affective stylistics" which holds that "[t]he work and its result are one and the same thing; what a text *is* is what a text *does*," and Joshua Landy's account of what he calls "formative fictions"—texts that "present themselves as spiritual exercises…spaces for prolonged and active encounters that serve, over time, to hone our abilities"—are all entirely congruent with the historical projects of Foucault and Carruthers.[11] Yet, in each of these models, whether ancient or modern, what activates the self-shaping power of literary form is reading. Foucault, for instance, emphasizes not the assembly of the influential loci that the commonplace book collects—the act of forming its content—but only their repetition. In the rhetorical tradition, the impassive writer stands apart, enacting a dispassionate *dispositio* of the completed *inventio*, thus crafting, for the reader, a formative itinerary. Writing, on this model, devises an adventure through which the reader is conducted, but from which its creator is removed.

Even the spirited defense of the "agency of art works" offered in Rita Felski's 2015 book, *The Limits of Critique*, considers only one pole of literature's power. Taking

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[11] Hugh Kenner, "The Rhetoric of Silence," *James Joyce Quarterly* 14 (Summer 1977): 382; Greig E. Henderson and Christopher Brown, "Affective Stylistics," *Glossary of Literary Theory*, March 31, 1997, accessed September 6, 2016, http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/glossary/Affective_stylistics.html; Joshua Landy, *How to Do Things with Fictions* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 10.

stock of the trends in contemporary criticism, Felski encourages literary scholars to adopt

new postures toward their objects of study:

> Rather than looking behind the text—for its hidden causes, determining
> conditions, and noxious motives—we might place ourselves in front of the
> text, reflecting on what it unfurls, calls forth, makes possible. This is not
> idealism, aestheticism, or magical thinking but a recognition—long
> overdue—of the text's status as coactor: as something that makes a
> difference, that helps [make] things happen.[12]

This is a penetrating understanding of the relationship between readers and texts as

unfinished coactors in a reciprocal relationship of mutual influence. But what if Felski's

agential account of the commerce between reader and text were transposed back onto the

artist and the work during its formation? What if the very production of Landy's

formative fictions were a formative process? What if the artist, no less than the reader, is

shaped by the agency of the object that comes into being through the creative,

constituting, shaping act of form? And what if the unachieved idea of the finished work

of art exerted an organizational force on the artist throughout its production and before its

own creation was complete?

To pose these questions is to begin to narrate what Sloterdijk, in *The Art of*

Philosophy, calls "the second history of art," a history which details "the training

procedures of artists in their disciplines."[13] This history moves "the focus from the work

to the artist by defining the production of art producers as an independent dimension of

art history—which, incidentally, is the opposite of conventional biographism."[14] Further

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[12] Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015), 12.

[13] *The Art of Philosophy: Wisdom as a Practice* (New York: Columbia UP, 2012), 9.

[14] *The Art of Philosophy*, 9.

elaborating on the methods of this supplemental, second history, Sloterdijk explains what

its shift in focus entails:

> Just as the history of science usually presumes that the scientists who do
> their disciplines already exist, the history of art has assumed since time
> immemorial that artists are the natural protagonists of the business that
> produces works of art, and that these players have always existed as well.
> What would happen if we rotated the conceptual stage ninety degrees in
> both cases? *What if we observed artists in their efforts to become artists in
> the first place?* We could then see every phenomenon on this field more or
> less from a side view and, alongside the familiar history of art as a history
> of completed works, we could obtain a history of the training that made it
> possible to do art and the asceticism that shaped artists.[15]

For Sloterdijk, this side view opens a window onto the non-Euclidean universe of self-

affecting action. Since "[b]eing human means existing in an operatively curved space in

which actions return to affect the actor, works the worker, communications the

communicator, thoughts the thinker and feelings the feeler," the artist's primary act,

implicit in every external production, is the creation of the artist's own self.[16]

Thus must art itself be counted among the influences which inform its creation

and to which it bears witness. Indeed, since the practice of writing shapes, the present

study of literary self-formation need not take, as its twin focus, the text-in-process and its

effects in the author's life; for form *already* brings into view the most vital part of the

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[15] *The Art of Philosophy*, 9.

[16] Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. Wieland
Hoban (Malden: Polity P, 2013), 110. Such a perspective upon the *practicing* subject—an
emergent, processual person constantly shaped by self-reflexive acts—is fundamental to
this dissertation. It allows the models of literary self-formation outlined briefly above to
be extended beyond the pole of reception to that of creation—an expansion which would
make the already suggestive phenomenological projects of such scholars as Namwali
Serpell and Marielle Macé more compelling for being radically incomplete. See
C. Namwali Serpell, *Seven Modes of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2014) and
Marielle Macé, *Façons de Lire, Manières d'Être* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).

evidence that these realms also supply. To justify this counter-intuitive claim, one could

consider Finn Fordham's 2010 study, *I Do I Undo I Redo*, which employs precisely this

methodological road not taken, exploring, as its subtitle announces, *The Textual Genesis*

of Modernist Selves. Combining "biographical and genetic methods" to describe the

"formative relation between the manifold processes and experiences of textual

composition and the reformulations of the self," Fordham affirms that writing is "a

primary technology in the formation of an identity," and that the self "can be thought of

as taking its shapes" through it.[17] The compelling results of his efforts notwithstanding,

Fordham's focus on the emerging text and its ultimate results in the life and work of the

author attenuates the importance of the process he scrutinizes. The arduous process of

formation—the very self-shaping that Fordham details—is not actually erased by the

finished artifact. Indeed, the false starts, artistic choices, and invisible changes that the

final version of a literary work seems to conceal are present on the surface—what John

Ashbery calls the "visible core"—precisely by virtue of their conspicuous absence.[18] This

is a paradox, of course, and one that Paul Valéry frequently attempts to express:

> A piece of work that has taken a man three years of groupings, prunings,
> amendments, excisions, sortileges, is read and appraised in thirty minutes
> by another man. And this reader forms a mental picture of the author as a
> man who was capable of writing it all straight off, spontaneously—an
> infinitely "unlikely" sort of author. This author within the author used to
> be styled his "Muse."[19]

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[17] Finn Fordham, *I Do I Undo I Redo: The Textual Genesis of Modernist Selves* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 26, 16.

[18] John Ashbery, "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (New York: Viking, 1975), 70, l. 95.

[19] *Analects*, 237-238.

The unlikeliness of this authorial image is commensurate with the labor required to evoke it. Literary form is thus imagined, in the vignette above, as a kind of archive of the alterations it produced in its maker, a sort of photonegative image of a much revised manuscript page on which that very process is captured in, as it were, the perfect aspect.

Valéry offers an even bolder version of this paradox elsewhere in his *Analects*, where it is expressed in terms of a temporal relationship:

> After an author had finished a long work, he sees it in its final form as something he has never wanted, never conceived--and this precisely because he has bought it to birth. He has the terrible humiliation of feeling he is becoming the child of his work, borrowing from it unmistakable features, a likeness, peculiarities, a *ne plus ultra*, a mirror. And what is worst about that mirror is that in it he sees himself diminished, whittled down to "such and such" a man.[20]

Here, then, is something more radical than the medieval "'person-shaped' poems" described by James Simpson in which the "form of the soul" is correlated with "literary form," or the famous relationship between self and work claimed by Montaigne: "I am myself the matter of my book."[21] Instead, Valéry proposes the same kind of inversion glimpsed briefly in Foucault's account of the ancient Greek practices surrounding commonplace books through which the editors themselves were assembled by their anthologies. Fordham's conviction that "the self is not a presupposition but a consequence, an effect, a product of *textual construction*, of *writing processes*," finds its necessary consequence in Valéry's impossible re-ordering of logical relations.

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[20] *Analects*, 230-231.

[21] James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's* Anticlaudianus *and John Gower's* Confessio Amantis (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), 272; Montaigne qtd. in Fordham, *I Do I Undo I Redo*, 66, my translation.

It remains only to outline the method informed by this paradox—to preview what an approach to literature *as* practice looks like *in* practice. The first chapter of *The Practice of Form* examines Alfred Lord Tennyson's use of *In Memoriam*; it shows how the poet rids himself of the melancholy in which he seems, in the poem, to indulge by means of the poem itself. The elegy's famously fixed stanza form enables each piece of his accretive meditation to move him further from his initial anguish until he can end the elegy by undoing its beginning: the "Prologue" of *In Memoriam* is a palinode that disavows the poem it prefaces while testifying to the emotional progress it itself enacts. This interpretation departs from biographical readings of *In Memoriam* which take the poem to be a more-or-less repressed poetic diary, a loose, digressive set of thematically-related lyrics, in which public performance may overshadow sincere feeling. When read as a compendium of carefully arranged mental exercises—which all aim at the poet's own self-formation—the apparent disarray of his poem can be explained, and questions of Tennyson's sincerity can be suspended: the weaving-and-unweaving of *In Memoriam*'s undulating emotions are the means by which the poet subverts the emotions that his poem, nevertheless, presents and preserves.

In the second chapter, poetic form is employed in a very different way. Gerard Manley Hopkins uses the form of his ode, "The Wreck of the Deutschland," to describe the intense personal response that his own poetic narrative produces. In the short autobiographical overture, the poet gives the necessary context for the dramatic transformation that the poem itself elicits from him in its crucial central stanzas. This chapter engages one of the most frequently addressed issues in Hopkins scholarship— that of the relation of the parallel lyric and narrative parts of "Wreck of the

Deutschland"—and puts it on a new footing through a reading of the formative work of the poem's own form. This reading reveals that the connection between the parallel parts of the ode is actually causal: although in print the lyric section precedes the narrative one, "Part the Second" prompts the creation of its own preface because of the transformation that its writing precipitates.

The function of writing in the life of Walter Pater is the subject of the third chapter, which argues that the calls to live for pure sensation that Pater makes at the end of *The Renaissance* are not meant to encourage license in others, but to instill intensity in himself. All of Pater's exhortations are actually self-directed: to have "success in life," "to burn always with hard…gemlike flame," he must realize his own ideal within his own act.[22] Thus must his own polemic become the very vehicle through which he achieves the experience that he prescribes. The paradox that this argument produces—that a quiet life of literary study should be the arena in which aestheticism's pleasures are attained—resolves itself when the felt power of literary form in Pater's life is recognized. Pater's reputation as a forerunner of modernism is reaffirmed by this reading, which places him in the context of recent modernist studies of everyday habits.[23] The writer who claims, in *The Renaissance*, that "our failure is to form habits" arrives at this denunciation only through the practice of habit itself.[24]

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[22] *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980), 189.

[23] See, for example, Jeremy Braddock, *Collecting as Modernist Practice* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2011), Lisi Schoenbach, *Pragmatic Modernism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), and Andrew Goldstone, *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013).

[24] *The Renaissance*, 189.

The phenomenon of self-formation through form which is detailed in the first three chapters reaches an apex in Oscar Wilde, whose art not only constitutes a similar program of self-affecting practice, but also strives to represent the power that it possesses as well as the changes that it produces. Wilde's novel about a young man whose immoral acts materialize on a magic picture is a sustained allegory of art's transformative aspect. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* both realizes and disavows variations of Wilde's own possible selves while simultaneously demonstrating the major influences on his work. By representing its own formative power as well as the sources which shape it, Wilde's art realizes, within itself, an ideal of criticism, becoming the place where its own representation and contemplation can be enacted.

The arc of the argument presented here—from poetic form in its first pair of chapters to the prose of two major figures of aestheticism in its last—shows how the practice of form becomes the art of life in Victorian literature. One aim of this study is thus a new genealogy of aestheticism which traces it, not through its intellectual antecedents, but through the practices on which the movement ultimately depends. On this reading, Tennyson and Hopkins emerge as early practitioners of an aestheticism grounded in action, and the operative and performative poetic forms they employ are further distinguished from the organic form of Romantic poetry and the artificial form of modernist poetry.

Other aims of this study are germane to current methodological debates in Victorian studies. Without breaking with the field's long-standing focus on material contexts and cultures, the following chapters will offer a conceptual adjustment which broadens its scope. Because it engages the writer in an embodied, situated activity over

time, literary form can be understood as something at once abstract *and* material. This double life of form is precisely what enables the analysis of it as a practice, a diurnal program of action that draws its maker into a parallel process of personal formation. Rather than offering any riposte to historicist methods, then, this project participates in the radical historicism exemplified by Garrett Stewart's *Novel Violence* or the "historical poetics" of Simon Jarvis.[25] The turn towards the internal temporality of prose reading and prosody which each of these projects represents is expanded in the present reading, which brings into view the formative feedback of the emergent artwork on itself and its maker.

The well-known works of four canonical Victorian writers constitute an unlikely counter-archive; yet in an historical period dominated by the novel, any discussion of formation, self-development, and change inevitably turns to the *bildungsroman* in general—and the *künstlerroman* in particular—as the place to think about these topics. *The Practice of Form* thus seeks out new sites in which to pursue this research, following a line which is oblique to the notions of moral development in ethics, physical evolution in biology, and material growth in economics which emerge in distinctive ways in this period. Its focus is, instead, on the aesthetic discontents of Victorian progress who invert the its very logic by using their own art to make and remake themselves.

In his first Introduction to *The Creative Mind,* Henri Bergson brings this paradox into view when he asks: "When a musician composes a symphony, was his work possible before being real?":

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[25] Garrett Stewart, *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009), Simon Jarvis, "What Is Historical Poetics?" in *Theory Aside*, ed. Daniel Stout and Jason Potts (Durham: Duke UP, 2015).

Yes, if by this we mean that there was no insurmountable barrier to its realization. But from this completely negative sense of the word we pass, inadvertently, to a positive sense: we imagine that every thing which occurs could have been foreseen by any sufficiently informed mind, and that, in the form of an idea, it was thus pre-existent to its realization; an absurd conception in the case of a work of art, for from the moment that the musician has the precise and complete idea of the symphony he means to compose, his symphony is done. Neither in the artist's thought nor, what is more, in any other thought comparable to ours…did the symphony exist in its quality of being possible before being real"[26]

To Bergson's insightful caveat, *The Practice of Form* adds another: neither the symphony

nor its composer precede the work's completion. As Pierre Macherey observes, "the

author is the first reader of his own work," but this is because before that work is

finished, there *is* no author at all.[27]

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[26] *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Society, 1946), 22.

[27] Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (New York: Routledge, 2006), 54.

The Touch of Change: The Operative Form of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*

> This one fact the world hates, that the soul *becomes*
> —Ralph Waldo Emerson[1]

> The moment of change is the only poem
> —Adrienne Rich[2]

In his 2005 study of Tennyson, which culminates with a reading of *In Memoriam*, Seamus Perry remarks on an indifference which endures today. Critics, he writes, "were once much drawn to the question of [*In Memoriam'*s] achieved unity," and ruefully adds, almost in passing: "I suppose the issue seems less pressing now."[3] What was true ten years ago is true today, and the slighted status of this question—which Christopher Ricks called, forty years prior, "the first and most obvious" critical question about the poem[4]— is significant given Tennyson's reputation as the central Victorian poet and *In Memoriam*'s comparably preeminent status within his *oeuvre*. Herbert Tucker emphasized this point in the introduction to his 1993 collection of critical essays: because "Tennyson ranks among those cardinally representative writers whose work and reception hold larger implications for the state of scholarship within literary discourse," criticism of his poetry will inevitably be a touchstone for larger trends.[5]

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[1] "Self-Reliance," in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. David Mikics (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2012), 175.

[2] "Images for Godard," *The Will to Change: Poems 1968–1970* (New York: Norton, 1971), 49, l. 71.

[3] *Alfred Tennyson* (Tavistock: Northcote, 2005), 138.

[4] *Tennyson*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 202.

[5] *Critical Essays on Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Herbert F. Tucker (New York: G. K. Hall, 1993), 2.

The rise and fall of critical investigations of *In Memoriam*'s unity points to one such trend: across the disciplines known as the humanities, the very category of the human has been exposed to ever-increasing scrutiny and pressure. In literary studies, this trend has caused research topics connected to humanistic categories—such as literary form and human experience—to be neglected. But without a robust account of the human which nevertheless incorporates recent correctives to the category, criticism lacks the means to explain striking, humanistically-tinged features like the form of Tennyson's famous elegy. This chapter proposes a way to overcome this impasse by developing a notion of the human person that emerges from the poem itself. After an overview of the criticism that analyzes *In Memoriam*'s unity, the reading of the elegy that follows will show that, because of the intimate connection between formation and form in *In Memoriam*, a firm distinction between the literary object and the human subject is impossible. The identity of the poet is, in fact, an effect of his own poem. The elegy's strategy of formation-through-consolation will then be shown to be the means of its memorialization. The question of the poem's formal unity will thus lead to a consideration of the elegy's ultimate aim: the self-consolation that Tennyson enacts in *In Memoriam* is identical with his project of remembering Arthur Henry Hallam.

The Experience of Form: *In Memoriam*'s Reception

In Memoriam's striking appearance—a long elegy made up of individual lyrics—was noted by its first laudatory reviewers, but the curious literary form that would occupy criticism for a century thereafter was transformed by the poem's first readers into another occasion for praise. Edgar Shannon's reception history offers a summary of their views:

> *Hogg's Instructor* felt that though the poem was "thus made up of a series
> of detached parts, yet the unity of the whole unbroken, because there is
> ever a recurrence to one and the same melancholy event." The *Morning
> Post* said "not only is the unity of design and of subject apparent
> throughout, but the thoughts follow each other in natural sequence, the
> continuity of which renders it necessary to contemplate the work as a
> whole in order fully to appreciate its beauties." The *Eclectic* declared, "An
> organic unity informs the whole."[6]

Shannon's account is given in a chapter appropriately entitled, "The Pinnacle of
Success." The poem which secured Tennyson the laureateship within months of its
publication was, indeed, wildly popular, eventually becoming a favorite of the widowed
Queen Victoria herself. Tennyson's reputation, however, waned in the *fin de siècle*; in an
unreceptive climate, admiring critics of *In Memoriam* such as A.C. Bradley worked to
turn the compliments of the elegy's first enamored reviewers into substantial
observations by carefully delineating the poem's structure, showing how the whole was
assembled from sections, pairs, and parts. In a 1915 lecture entitled, "The Reaction
Against Tennyson," Bradley predicted the poet's eventual rehabilitation at the very
moment when he was near, in his words, the "nadir of his fame."[7]

But in the half-century following Bradley's prediction, efforts to demonstrate the
unity of the poem both multiplied and faltered—and precisely at a time when interest in
formal questions was on the rise. In fact, the more prominent such questions became, the
more the poem strained under the weight of formal scrutiny. By 1972, Ricks could begin
his own treatment of the subject with a general observation about the history of these
investigations: "Literary criticism since Tennyson's time has become more flexible in its

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[6] *Tennyson and the Reviewers: a Study of His Literary Reputation and of the Influence of
the Critics upon His Poetry 1827–1851* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1952), 147.

[7] *The Reaction Against Tennyson* (Oxford: Frederick Hall, 1917), 4.

ideas as to artistic unity…But it has also become more skilled at imagining some such unity where it may not exist."[8] The famed editor of Tennyson's *Collected Poems* simply passes over the interpretations of the elegy that, to his mind, imagine its unity into being and assembles, instead, a counter-archive to set against such readings: from Humphry House's trenchant assertion that it "is impossible to apprehend [*In Memoriam*] as a unified whole; for it is not a whole; and it fluctuates waywardly," to Charles Kingsley's rare contemporary acknowledgement that the poem lacks "a conscious or organic method," to the poet's own well-known concession regarding his lyrics: "I did not write them with any view of weaving them into a whole."[9]

Thus, when Perry observed in 2005 that the question of *In Memoriam*'s unity was no longer crucial, it was not merely because of a general waning of interest in such inquiries, but also because of a specific turn within Tennyson criticism: namely, a turn away from attempts to assemble its parts into a coherent whole which is reflected clearly enough in Ricks's remarks above. Examinations of the poem in the last half century have found many things in it—such as significant engagements with contemporary science[10] and novel expressions of male friendship[11]—but an obvious, recognizable principle of

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[8] *Tennyson*, 202.

[9] *Tennyson*, 202.

[10] See, for example, James Eli Adams, "Woman Red in Tooth and Claw: Nature and the Feminine in Tennyson and Darwin," *Victorian Studies* 33, no. 1 (Autumn 1989): 7-27; Barri J Gold, "The Consolation of Physics: Tennyson's Thermodynamic Solution," *PMLA* 117, no. 3 (May 2002): 449-464; and Michael Tomko, "Varieties of Geological Experience: Religion, Body, and Spirit in Tennyson's In Memoriam and Lyell's Principles of Geology," *Victorian Poetry* 42, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 113-134.

[11] See, for example, Jeff Nunokawa, "In Memoriam and the Extinction of the Homosexual," *ELH* 58, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 427-438; Christopher Craft, *Another Kind*

unity has not been one of them. A conspicuous feature of scholarship in the last half century examining *In Memoriam*'s unity is the proposal of a unique definition to describe the elegy's literary form. J. C. C. Mays's important 1965 article begins, in fact, by declaring that "to speak of the form of the poem is to describe its total effect."[12] Likewise, the chapter on Tennyson which concludes Isobel Armstrong's 1982 study, *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth-Century Poetry*, identifies "two kinds of poetic form operating within [*In Memoriam*]," one "linear, narrative, temporal, and external," and another which is "psychological, expressive[,] lyric, [and] non-temporal."[13] Perry, for his part, in a reading of the elegy which synthesizes the positions of both Mays and Armstrong, describes the poem's principle of coherence as "improvised form."[14] Thus, though separated by decades, each of these readings makes an implicit concession about the poem's unity by supplying the concepts necessary to illumine its elusive organization.

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of Love: Male Homosexual Desire in English Discourse, 1850-1920 (Berkeley: U of California P, 1994), 44-70; Sarah Rose Cole, "The Recovery of Friendship: Male Love and Developmental Narrative in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*," *Victorian Poetry* 50:1 (Spring 2012), 43-66; and Mary Jean Corbett, "No Second Friend?: Perpetual Maidenhood and Second Marriage in *In Memoriam* and 'The Conjugial Angel'", *ELH* 81, No. 1 (Spring 2014), 299-323.

[12] "*In Memoriam*: An Aspect of Form," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 35 (1965), 22.

[13] *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), 184.

[14] *Alfred Tennyson*, 152. Where Mays affirms that the poem's "pattern is emergent," and that, through its form, "one is given a direction rather than a destination" ("*In Memoriam*: An Aspect of Form," 33), Perry claims that *In Memoriam* "does not really toil towards an 'end' convincingly achieved…but exists instead in the more characteristic Tennysonian state of waiting for an end," 152. Likewise, where Armstrong sees *In Memoriam* as "a poem about death trying to be a poem about life" (*Language as Living Form in Nineteenth-Century Poetry*, 204), Perry sees "a broken poem about trying to pull yourself together," 152.

And, in doing so, they seem to prove Ricks's point about the dangers of critical acumen.

Pace Ricks, however, the motivation for investigations of *In Memoriam*'s structure cannot be entirely explained with reference to that "natural consequence of professional academicism" which spurs scholars to exculpate "works of art which deserve the higher compliment of not being whisked away into the [realm of the] irreproachable." Indeed, if the critical projects cited above all perform the same interpretive gesture of coining new terms, it is because of a felt unity present in the poem which nevertheless escapes the sieve of extant critical categories. Thus, critics either employ modified definitions to describe their experience of the poem—or, tellingly, they simply draw on their experience directly. This latter approach is exemplified by Timothy Peltason's *Reading* In Memoriam, a monograph from 1985 which offers what Ricks calls "a pertinacious defence" of the poem's unity, despite its disclaimer that the "question of voting 'yes' or 'no' on the unity of *In Memoriam*" is unimportant, since the elegy will, in any case, "still require our attentiveness to the arranged relations between their parts and to the…claims to significance made by these arrangements."[15] For Peltason, as for Mays, the real unity of the poem is the "experience of reading the entire thing"—and the success of his book lies precisely in its attention to the experience that the poem offers.

Peltason's use of the category of experience in his monograph is sufficient proof of its importance for reading the poem; yet an even more precise and essential critical concept—the one, in fact, which will be employed in this chapter—is mentioned in passing by Peltason in his reading of *In Memoriam*, a concept which offers a way to think

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[15] *Reading* In Memoriam (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 10. For Ricks' comments on Peltason, see *Tennyson*, 2nd ed., 377.

about experience in connection with the very formal problem which prompts its use in the first place. While noting that readings of the poem (such as the ones cited above) struggle to account for the disjointed juxtaposition of its lyric sections, Peltason asserts that this very "uncertain progress from one lyric to the next [is] an exemplary *spiritual exercise*," through which the poem offers an "experienced complexity of feeling."[16] That Tennyson's elegy is, in its entirety, a "spiritual exercise"—and that reading the poem as a single, sequential, act of self-formation can shed light on the perennial question of the poem's literary form—will be the burden of this chapter; before turning to that task, the concept of "spiritual exercises will be elaborated further.

Tennyson's Elegy as Spiritual Exercise

The work of Pierre Hadot offers a major reinterpretation of Greek and Roman philosophy. He demonstrates that the intellectual doctrines of their respective schools such as the Stoics, Platonists, and Epicureans were important primarily for the manner of life that they enabled their adherents to lead. Indeed, Hadot showed that texts which set forth these doctrines—which often survive in curiously arranged anthologies or elaborate, circuitous dialogues—are actually the very formative exercises through which various philosophic schools transmitted the real substance of their teachings. The consequences of Hadot's arresting thesis led him far afield from his domain as a classicist as he traced the enduring legacy of these "spiritual exercises" in the works of major philosophical and

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[16] *Reading* In Memoriam, 14.

literary figures from Montaigne to Wittgenstein.[17]

Hadot's "spiritual exercises" will be a key concept in the reading of *In Memoriam* which follows; but, for the purpose of the present section, the genesis of this concept is particularly relevant. Importantly, the original impetus for Hadot's intellectual project placing the human subject at the center of the seemingly abstract discourses of philosophy was, in fact, a formal, "strictly literary" problem. In a late interview, Hadot recalls the first inklings of his insight:

> I have always been struck by the fact that the historians say, "Aristotle is incoherent" and "Saint Augustine writes poorly"…[T]his is what led me to the idea that the philosophical works of antiquity were not written as the exposition of a system but in order to produce an effect of formation…I did not begin with more or less edifying considerations about philosophy as therapy...No, it was really a strictly literary problem, which is the following: For what reasons do ancient philosophical writings seem incoherent? Why is it so difficult to recognize their rational plane?[18]

Hadot's recovery of the lost art of living begins, then, in the face of the same apparent disorganization that faces readers of *In Memoriam*, and it elaborates itself from the same experience of coherence that those same readers report.

The paradox of *In Memoriam*—that an elegy with so singular a form should be produced by a poet so famous for his craftsmanship—invites a comparison with the ancient therapeutic texts that Hadot studies. Faced with the same existential problems that these therapeutic texts address, Tennyson uses the same means that they deploy in order

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[17] For an overview of Hadot's career and general approach, see the editor's introduction to Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Case (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 1-45.

[18] *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, trans. Marc Djaballah (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2009), 59.

to answer a question which was as pressing for wisdom-seeking ancients as it was for a

Victorian poet struck by the sudden loss of a sustaining friend: how to live?[19]

The formal innovations of *In Memoriam* were thus impelled by the problems

which they solve—problems which are, in fact, solved by means of form itself. The

contingent, aleatory arrangement of the poem and the heuristic, instrumental function of

its form are not the product of a premeditated design but, instead, emerge only through

the effect which it is discovered to produce. Richard Wilbur's observation—that "[o]ne

does not use poetry for its major purpose, as a means of organizing oneself and the world,

until one's world somehow gets out of hand"[20]— brings the exigent, inescapable horizon

of Tennyson's elegy into view. The sudden overwhelming turmoil that Hallam's death

precipitated in Tennyson's life spurred him to apply his famous poetic skill and his

formal ingenuity to a genuine existential dilemma. If, as Wallace Stevens has it, poetry is

"the mind in the act of finding/ What will suffice,"[21] then *In Memoriam* can be read as an

iterative, sequential search for shifting thresholds of sufficiency in which each

achievement opens onto new needs. T. S. Eliot's description of the poem's form as "a

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[19] In other words, instead of building a circumstantial case for the influence and imitation of past poets or old philosophers, this chapter will demonstrate a discovery rather than a recovery, one which is parallel with—but not dependent on—the texts, schools, practices, and formal problems which figure so centrally in Hadot's scholarship.

[20] Joseph Cox, "An Interview with Richard Wilbur," *WLA: War, Literature & the Arts* 10, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1998), 8.

[21] "Of Modern Poetry" in *Collected Poetry and Prose*. ed. Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997), 218, l.1.

diary" of which "one has to read every word" captures this aspect of the poem as a drama of incremental changes.[22]

But *In Memoriam* is more than a mere a record of those changes. Graham Greene noticed that since a novel "takes perhaps years to write, the author is not the same man at the end of the book as he was at the beginning as though [the novel] were something he had begun in childhood and was finishing now in old age."[23] The three symbolic years within *In Memoriam*'s internal chronology which mirror the seventeen that elapsed between Hallam's death and its publication more than meet Greene's criteria for the artwork's witness to the artist's personal change. But active in Tennyson's elegy is something beyond what Eliot's representational, confessional notion of the poem-as-diary captures, and more radical than Greene's similarly indexical conception of the relationship between artwork and art. Both Eliot and Greene imagine a mimetic relationship through which art captures and preserves growth and change. *In Memoriam*, however, *produces* the change which it also shows.

Tennyson's Sad Mechanic Exercise

Were it not for an historical irony whereby the word came to mean the very opposite of its etymological root, the aptest name for the literary form of *In Memoriam* would be "organic." The Greek word for tool, *organon*, echoes weakly but distinctly in the functional character of what are called organs, those anatomical tools which, when they work in concert, sustain the entities known as organisms. Thus does the vital substratum

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[22] "In Memoriam" in T. S. Eliot, *Essays Ancient and Modern* (New York: Harcourt, 1936), 196.

[23] *Collected Stories* (London: Bodley Head and Heinemann, 1972), ix.

of biological life inherit the adjective "organic," a word that all but conceals the instrumental metaphor at its root. To avoid any confusion with the resonant legacies of "organic form" while still marking its place between the natural and the artificial, between the living and the inert, and between the finished object and the creative process, the term "operative form" will be employed instead to describe both the literary form of the poem and its relationship with the author. This operative relationship between poet and poem is described in a crucial early lyric of the poem itself and, after giving it due consideration, the remainder of this chapter will show how the elegy's formal qualities— its stanzaic form, the spiritual exercises enacted in its individual sections, and its endings and beginnings—all contribute to the sustained formative process which Tennyson performs on himself by means of his poem.

Tennyson himself employs the concept of operation near the outset of his elegy, in a section describing the reflexive effect of his own poetic practice:

> I sometimes hold it half a sin
>   To put in words the grief I feel;
>   For words, like Nature, half reveal
> And half conceal the Soul within.
>
> But, for the unquiet heart and brain,
>   A use in measured language lies;
>   The sad mechanic exercise,
> Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.
>
> In words like weeds, I'll wrap me o'er
>   Like coarsest clothes against the cold:
>   But that large grief which these enfold
> Is given in outline and no more. [24]

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[24] "In Memoriam A.H.H." in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987), vol. 2, 322, ll. 1-12. References to the poem will hereafter be given in parentheses by section and line number.

In their commentary, Susan Shatto and Marion Shaw follow Bradley in identifying this lyric as the first of many "in which the poet's songs form the subject,"[25] a beginning which makes the terms used to describe these songs all the more significant. To Nature's organic form, the poet explicitly contrasts his poem's "mechanic" function; against the partial revelatory power of language, he sets the utility of the "exercise" itself.

This lyric begins with a stanza musing on the inherent limits of language's power to express the grief that the poet feels; by the third and final stanza, the poet has resolved to continue the enterprise of his elegy despite those limitations. Between them, another, separating stanza offers the means by which the poet reaches this renewed resolution. The turn which occurs in the second stanza is anticipated in the first wherein the poet holds his own poem "*half* a sin" because of what his words "*half* reveal" and "*half* conceal"—a held lexical note which, in each case, creates the expectation of another "half" of the poet's mind, and another moment which would answer the "sometimes" with which the stanza begins. This second space opens in the second stanza, wherein the problem of the poem's *representation* (of its always partial revelation and concealment) is solved with reference to the poem's *operation*, the "use" which is found in its "measured language."

Where the first and third stanzas emphasize dualism—the former through the repetition of the word "half," the latter through its contrast between the poet and his outline—this stanza, which announces the elegy's self-operative quality, does just the opposite. At first, the poet's "unquiet heart and brain" are aligned uncertainly with the "Soul" of the previous stanza: this pair seems to be introduced precisely so that some

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[25] *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, ed. Susan Shatto and Marion Shaw, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 166.

delineation of them might follow. Instead of teasing out any distinction, however, "heart and brain" are soon revealed to be a hendiadys, a unity artificially articulated as a list. The poet makes no outright equation, but the differences between heart and brain which a reader naturally anticipates never appear as the two are first yoked together through the "use" which they grammatically share, and are then fused further when the following two lines establish themselves in apposition to that same "use." This drive towards identity reaches its apex with the final simile, "Like dull narcotics, numbing pain": the first term, "dull narcotics," is a kind of etymological pleonasm, since "narcotics" derives from a Greek root which means dull, a conceptual doubling which resembles the assonant doubling of the u-sound in n*umb*ing and d*ull*.[26]

These intellectual and acoustic conflations are important because the elegy's project of self-consolation often unfolds through such acts of identification. From the yew tree in Section II into which the poet seems to "grow incorporate" to the two aspects of Venus with which the poet makes an equally complete identification in the last stanza of the "Hesper/Phosphor" section before employing them in a simile for himself, the poet is constantly finding objects that enable him to set aside the "use of 'I' and 'me'" he describes in Section XLV.[27] Indeed, the child's process, described in this section, of

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[26] The euphony of this last line—with its internal rhyme and, even more, its alliteration—also anticipates the conspicuous emphasis on repeated sounds in first two lines of the following stanza: "words," "weeds," and "wrap"; "coarsest," "clothes," and "cold." Yet, this initial continuation of the second stanza's verbal music only emphasizes the sudden drop off of patterned sounds in the final two lines, so that the third stanza, finally, resembles the first more than the second.

[27] See CXXI.17-20, XLV.6. On this point, see Armstrong on the "Collapse of Subject and Object" in the poem, *Language as Living Form in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Brighton: Harvester, 1982), 172-205, esp. 188 *et passim*.

"round[ing]…to a separate mind" inverts the imaginative exercise of identification one sees elsewhere throughout the elegy, a characteristic act which is echoed and anticipated in the conceptual leveling of the second stanza of Section V's appositions and equations. These acts, which stretch the poet beyond the "use of 'I' and 'me'," place the poet outside of a psychological ego made uninhabitable by grief for as long as the lyric section lasts, stretching him in salubrious directions below or above the reach of Hallam's loss.

The identifications of Section V are significant as an example of one of many mental exercises that the poet deploys throughout the elegy; but more important than this representative example of poetic self-formation is that this self-operative act rises to the level of content. It is a commonplace of poetry criticism to point out moments in which the content of a poem mirrors its form, and such mimetic moments could well be drawn from this stanza. (For example, the slight deviation from the otherwise flawless lilt of iambs that occurs with the metrical ripple of a repeated unstressed syllable in the first foot of the phase, "thĕ ŭn**quí** | ĕt h**éa**rt" translates the disquiet it describes into prosody.) But, in this stanza, a more interesting version of the same phenomenon occurs in that its terms are reversed: that is, the form of this stanza seems to mirror its content. In other words, although one could read *In Memoriam* as offering 713 instances of poetic ingenuity in which the poet brings a range of disparate material within his chosen stanza—"fitting aptest words to things" (LXXV.6), as he calls it—that number should actually be reduced by one since the second stanza of Section V seems, instead, to subordinate poetic craft to its content: the pulse of regular lines in which the poet's project of consolation is identified with his own poetic act of composition creates the uncanny effect of the otherwise invisible template of the stanza being materialized in

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content which, by realizing the very regularity of a "mechanic exercise" of "measured language" seems, likewise, to recede into the invisible, relational field of form.

This reading of the middle stanza of Section V finds an analogue in the "superversive poetics" recently proposed by Simon Jarvis in the pages of *MLQ*.[28] "A superversive line," Jarvis there explains, "is that line in a given poem which most eminently exploits the play…between the metrical desire to pause and the syntactic requirement to go on which distinguishes verse as verse." While such a line may "be quite marginal"—or even incidental—to the poem's argument and architecture, Jarvis affirms that a superversive line is, nevertheless, "critical to what makes the poem operative, to its force as a life machine which wishes to insert its lines and phrases into our brains and to have them reproduce there in the long-term life of the species." The significant terms that Jarvis deploys in his article—describing poems as "operatives…life machines" which are also "devices for body modification"—would be reason enough to cite them in the present study of *In Memoriam*. Not only do these terms strongly echo the language used by the poet himself in the fifth lyric section, but they also recall the language of the poem's first critics. Tennyson's friend, Edward Fitzgerald, uncharitably characterized *In Memoriam* as "a Poetical Machine of the highest order";[29] yet if the poem is, in fact, a mechanical means of body modification, Fitzgerald's judgement would

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[28] "Superversive Poetics: Browning's *Fifine at the Fair*," Modern Language Quarterly 77, no. 1 (March 2016), 121-141.

[29] Qtd. in Ricks, *Tennyson*, 212. Fitzgerald unwittingly anticipates one of William Carlos Williams's "two bald statements" in his "Author's Introduction" to *The Wedge*: "A poem is a small (or large) machine made out of words," *The Collected Poems of William Carlos Williams, 1939-1962*, ed, Christopher MacGowan, 2 vols. (New York: New Directions, 1988), vol. 2, 54.

be no criticism, being entirely consonant with an approach that makes "composition and technique, not theme and representation…the center of the historically material practices of poetry."[30]

Jarvis's analysis of the "metrico-rhythmic virtuosity" of individual lines—lines that exemplify a verse-thinking irreducible to narrative or plot—aligns with the present reading of the self-formative strategies of Tennyson's elegy which rises to the level of content in an exemplary way in Section V. Here, the operative logic of the poem is announced in a lyric which is also an emblem of the *In Memoriam* stanza writ large. Yet, before demonstrating the emblematic structure of this section—and the formative feature of the elegy's stanza more generally—it is necessary to note some differences with Jarvis's approach. For instance, rather than identifying supervenient instances in which the prosodic pulse of a poem beats with a special somatic force, an operative reading does not trace a line of self-development which is necessarily oblique to the poem's internal progress. Although it affords a similar priority to a literary work's body-modifying

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[30] For an example of this phenomenon in the work of a different poet, one could turn to Swinburne who is famous for his separation of sound and sense: T. S. Eliot observed that his language is "uprooted," separated from meaning, "Swinburne as Poet," *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* (London: Farber and Farber, 1932), 313, a judgement which Jerome McGann affirms but recuperates by suggesting that, in Simon Jarvis paraphrase of his argument, "the emptying-out of semantic reference which is so often complained of by Swinburne's critics might be just what makes possible what we might think of as the poet's prosodic intelligence," "Swinburne: The Insuperable Sea," *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Poetry*, ed. Matthew Bevis (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 522; see Jerome McGann, "Wagner, Baudelaire, Swinburne: Poetry in the Condition of Music," *Victorian Poetry* 47, no. 4 (Winter, 2009), 619–32. On McGann's reading, which Jarvis expands in his own direction, Swinburne achieves his characteristic "verse manner of perfectly-judged near-overload" in passages that evince this contrapuntal arrangement of prosodic language's matter and meaning. Commenting on a passage from *Tristram of Lyonesse*, Jarvis observes how the stress produced by the poem's profusion of sound patterns is precisely the point: "Reader's brains are to be overtaxed as much as possible while still observing certain fixed and retained constraints of rhyme and meter," 531.

effects, an operative reading attends firstly to the ordinal unfolding of literary form itself, according the utmost importance to the internal relationships which it creates within the body of the poem, and taking the external relationships of form as evidence of the internal self-directed work of formation. And, as Jarvis does, it elevates the relationships established by form over and against those which are announced on the level of content. An operative reading is, therefore, poised midway between his focus on the somatic modification of poetic material and the representational referents *of* that material, exploring the interaction between the two. Instead of focusing only on orthogonal instances of its supervesive achievement or—to put it in narratological terms—on the *fabula* of the poem's content, an operative reading of poetic form combines these foci by insisting on the *sujzet*, the unfolding temporality of spatial sequence constituted by the itinerary of each stanza's metrico-conceptual instructions.[31] These countervailing forces can be combined because an operative reading places the self where the plot should be: it is not the *fabula* of a story which *In Memoriam* arranges, organizes, distorts, distends, and works into new configurations, but rather the poet himself.

The final feature to note in Section V is that, in this inaugural self-referential lyric, the poet not only identifies the therapeutic quality of his own poem, but he does so in a lyric section which is, in a sense, a large-scale *In Memoriam* stanza. Shatto and Shaw describe the *abba* patterning of the elegy's eponymous stanza as "enclosed rhyme" and, by returning to the problem of representation announced in the first stanza in the last, this

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[31] For definitions of these terms, see Mieke Bal, Narratology: *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1997) 7-13.

lyric conspicuously bookends its beginning and its end in the same enclosing shape.[32]

Thus does Section V mirror the shape of the enclosed couplets of its stanzas in a way

which the previous sections of the poems do not. With four stanzas of four-beat lines,

each of these previous poems stands as a figure of perfection; and the balance of these

opening poems—like the balance of the *abba*-stanza itself—gives the impression of

equipoise, of forces which are harmoniously reconciled. The asymmetrical fifth section,

in contrast, reveals the obverse, operative side of these perfectly executed poems by

drawing attention to the stanza's enclosing structure with an odd-numbered section in

which a single medial stanza—which is "internal" to the poem—articulates the functional

character of the poet's own elegy.[33]

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[32] *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, ed. Susan Shatto and Marion Shaw, 158.

[33] The "use of measured language" identified in the fifth lyric of the poem is, therefore, performed in each gesture of opening and closing, no less than in the plateau of the stanza's middle lines, as each activity—of inauguration, delay, and closure—constitutes an intrinsic part of the stanza's poetic operation. An exemplary instance of these features of the elegy's proprietary stanza comes near the end of the poem, in CXXI, in the fifth (and final) stanza of another odd-numbered lyric:

> Sweet Hesper-Phosphor, double name
>> For what is one, the first, the last,
>> Thou, like my present and my past,
> Thy place is changed; thou art the same. (CXXI.17-20)

Here, the lyric's concluding stanza completes the perfect balance of the foregoing section (which has already devoted two stanzas to each opposed aspect of Venus), but does so only by disrupting its even symmetry with a poetic *aufheben* that makes explicit the identity already implied by the poem's own parallelism. This articulation completes the poem by drawing out the implicit identifications of the poem's parallel images of the evening and morning star. When filtered through this image of this double-aspect of Venus, the difference and identity of the poet's past and present can be mapped onto its movement and expressed through the form of the stanza which has separated, organized, and articulated these features.

The Stanza of Tennyson's Elegy; or, The Grieving Poet and the Burden of the Past

While the transformative function of Tennyson's elegy is never again stated with the clarity achieved in Section V, the theme of self-transformation returns frequently throughout the poem, albeit under different aspects. Whether the poet is describing his own pain-laden life which "slowly forms the firmer mind" (XVIII.18), or the moods which allow him to "out of words a comfort win" (XX.10), or the inner imperative to "lull with song an aching heart" (XXXVIII.15), the poet's engagement with such topics as self-development and self-consolation all refer back to the poet's own operation enacted in and through the elegy itself. Its announcement at the outset of the poem is especially felicitous because the poet, in the first phrase of mourning, is consumed by a desire for absolute intransigence—he will remain unmoved in love and grief alike. The separated and contiguous couplets of the *In Memoriam* stanza provide an invaluable poetic image of this desired immobility. The anticipation of the final rhyme-word of the stanza gives the inner couplet the aura of an aside, a digression in which an addition or an alternative to the main line of thought can be elaborated.[34] Yet, the concluding line of Tennyson's stanza closes the parenthesis which its first line opens, rendering any potential progression illusory; while the middle lines may sustain the sonic parentheses of the separated rhyme-sound, the poet nevertheless always ends where he begins, and the variation that the stanza's b-rhyme incorporates is, in effect, shown only to have held—to

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[34] Consider, for example, one of the earliest-written stanzas of the poem:

> Fair ship, that from the Italian shore
>   Sailest the placid ocean-plains
>   With my lost Arthur's loved remains,
> Spread thy full wings, and waft him o'er (IX.1-4)

use the repeated phrase from Sections XIV and XVI— "the touch of change," the

transient appearance of transformation.[35]

However, the more the poem insists upon stasis, the more it and the poet both

grow, because this iterated insistence is the means by which the "doubtful gleam of

solace" (XXXVII.8) that lives in the songs that the poet "love[s] to sing" (XXXVII.7)

creeps into each. Because the *In Memoriam* stanza neutralizes the forward-moving

impulse of two stanzaic forms which it resembles—the heroic couplet and balladic

quatrain—it is, as Ricks affirms, "especially suited to turning round rather than going

forward." As Denise Gigante and Seamus Perry have observed, the *In Memoriam* stanza

is one half of a Petrarchan octave.[36] By using that part of the Petrarchan sonnet which is

itself mirrored within the octave, Tennyson seems to trap himself in a pattern of

compulsive repetition: his stanzas seem always to approach a promised threshold of

resolution, but each stanza which could complete the sonnet's octave is only just another

beginning or a premature ending. Read as a repeated series of Petrarchan quatrains, the

formal curvature of the *In Memoriam* stanza gives the effect of a dream-like loop which

never completes itself. Alternatively, following Shatto and Shaw in reading the stanza as

an outer couplet enclosing an inner couplet, the stanza could also resemble the final

resolution of the Shakespearian sonnet, but with its final couplet walled within another—

a point within a point, a pause within a pause. Tennyson's verse form seems to be the

product of a poet trying to resist the in-built forward force of forms traditionally

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[35] See XIV.17 and XVI.6.

[36] See Denise Gigante, "Forming Desire: On the Eponymous *In Memoriam* Stanza *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53, no. 4 (March, 1999), 485-487, 494-497 and Perry, *Alfred Tennyson*, 136.

associated with progress: ballads, verse-narratives, and sonnet sequences. And yet, the

constant turning and returning of the *In Memoriam* stanza produces the curvilinear

motion peculiar to the poem—a motion which recalls the "operatively curved space in

which actions return to affect the actor" described by Peter Sloterdijk.[37] Each of

Tennyson's attempts to arrive at stasis only produces another stanza, each stanza building

up a lyric section, and each section forming an integral part of the emerging elegiac

sequence itself.[38] The real ingenuity of the *In Memoriam* stanza is that it makes global

progression a consequence of its local resistance to it, thus turning the elegy's early

refusal of consolation into the means by which it is achieved.

This counterintuitive means of progress which is mirrored in the poem's stanzaic

form illustrates Tennyson's most obvious debt to Dante, whose epic advances through a

similar process. The journey of Dante's pilgrim, who can ascend to Paradise only by

descending through Hell, is emblematically enacted in the epic's *terza rima* in that the

"lower" central rhyme-word of the *aba* stanza becomes the means of its forward motion

as it rises into the place of the a-rhyme in the following stanza.[39] Although Tennyson

deploys precisely this substitution in Section LXXXV when the line, "My old affection of

the tomb," moves from the enclosed couplet of the nineteenth stanza into the outer

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[37] Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life: On Anthropotechnics*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Malden: Polity P, 2013), 110.

[38] See Sarah Gates' reading of spiraling shape of the *In Memoriam* stanza, "Poetics, Metaphysics, Genre: The Stanza Form of 'In Memoriam'," *Victorian Poetry* 37, no. 4 (Winter, 1999), 510-515.

[39] For a penetrating account of the peculiar features and felicities of Dante's stanza, see Michael D. Hurley, "Interpreting Dante's *Terza Rima*," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 41, no. 3 (June, 2005), 320-331.

couplet of the twentieth stanza, this exceptional instance proves the general rule that

Tennyson's elegiac form inverts the forward movement of *terza rima*: whereas the

middle rhyme of Dante's stanza promises a new beginning beyond itself, the immediate

repetition of the b-rhyme at the center of the stanza indicates, in Tennyson, a stasis, an

arrest of any incipient progression which the return of the initial a-rhyme confirms. The

chiastic structure of this stanza's crossed pair of rhymes can thus be read as a figure of

reflection, and the physical reflections in bodies of water that appear throughout the poem

are all images of the characteristic mental activity enacted within the stanza: for instance,

the "mirrored masts" (IX.9) of Hallam's returning ship, the influences on the poem which

speckle it like light "that breaks about the dappled pools," (LIX.4) or, most importantly,

the "reflex of a human face" that would appear on the imagined "depths of death"

(CVIII.12,11). But the stanza's crossed rhymes are also a figure of cancellation: without

either a celestial or infernal guide who would help him "scale the heaven's highest

height,/ Or dive below the wells of Death," the poet continually circles back to the only

realm within which he may find solace: "I'll rather take what fruit may be/ Of sorrow

under human skies" (CVIII .7-8, 13-14).

Tennyson, then, transposes Dante's *Comedy* from the divine to the human, but

retains two important features of the *Comedy* in this transposition: its theodician purpose

and its tripartite structure. Tennyson himself called the poem a "kind of *Divina

Commedia*,"[40] and his characterization of the poem as "half a sin" in the elegy's first self-

reflexive section sets the stage for his retrospective estimation of the "wandering cries" in

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[40] Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son* (London: Macmillan,
1906), 255.

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the Prologue—those verses which, the poet says, "seem'd my sin" even as he composed them. This telling alignment of "poetry" and "error" points towards the poet's ultimate operative strategy which will be discussed at the end of this chapter; for now, it will suffice to note that, in order to perform the theodicy that the elegy requires—to craft a system in which belief in God can be held in tandem with the evil of Hallam's loss—the poem itself will eventually be recognized as the sin that needs to be redeemed.

In Memoriam's more significant (and less obvious) debt to Dante is structural. Tennyson's friend Aubrey de Vere once suggested that, since his spiritual epic of mourning passed from unmitigated sorrow to gradual consolation, the poet might supplement *In Memoriam* with a third part, "a Paradiso of triumph and joy"; Tennyson, however, bristled at the recommendation, replying, "I have written what I have felt and known; and I will never write anything else."[41] While Tennyson's answer affirms his fidelity to his own experience, its obliquity to de Vere's direct suggestion is significant as it does not actually concede the desirability of a Paradiso. Indeed, Tennyson might well have responded to de Vere that the third section he desired was already present in the poem. A major part of Tennyson's revision of Dante's *Divine Comedy* into a terrestrial "Way of the Soul" is to preserve and adapt Dante's three temporal modalities to his own epic journey: infernal stasis, purgatorial change, and paradisiacal contemplation all find their place in *In Memoriam*. But they do not unfold sequentially as three discrete zones of spiritual progress through which the pilgrim passes; instead, Tennyson moves dramatically between all three of these internal modes in the course of his elegy as if these analogues of paradise, purgatory, and hell were overlaid on top of one another. The

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[41] *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son*, 245.

purgation of the poet is found in the slow interstitial shifts in mood that Tennyson

achieves as he moves between his initial states of unchanging sorrow and his

disinterested speculations about science and the natural world. Thus, in *In Memoriam*, as

in Dante, paradise is the place of discourse, and the meditative sequences contain what

"triumph and joy" are possible within the elegy.

Spiritual Rock: *In Memoriam*'s Meditations on Nature

The poem's sections on science and nature are exemplary instances of the spiritual

exercises through which the poet works to alter his own perception of the world. These

parts of the poem have often been read as important meeting points between 19th-century

literature and science: the poet's interests in astronomy, geology, and evolution in

general—and the influence of the works of Lyell, Darwin, and Chambers in particular—

have been frequently noted. The presence of this sustained engagement with science *in an*

elegy for Hallam, however, has presented something of a challenge for critics. But when

the discoveries of Tennyson's contemporaries are put within the elegy's larger operative

context, their purpose becomes less curious in that they offer Tennyson an occasion for

alteration and change. The disorienting and diminishing discoveries of the 19th-century

offered Tennyson the same correctives that were employed in the meditations on nature

found in ancient philosophy. According to Hadot, ancient philosophical schools such as

the Stoics distinguished between "philosophical discourse, and philosophy itself," the

latter being an "effective, concrete, lived exercise." So too did these philosophical

practitioners distinguish between logic, ethics and physics and "the practice of logic, of

ethics, and of physics." Physics, for example:

is not the theory of physics but lived physics, that is, a certain attitude toward the cosmos. This lived physics consists, first of all, in seeing things such as they are—not from an anthropological and egoistical point of view, but from the perspective of the cosmos and nature.[42]

The de-centering required by this philosophical perspective resembles the internal shifts that the discoveries of the nineteenth-century were producing. Tennyson, however, was not a passive agent of these upheavals and, instead of resisting or contesting them, he incorporates them into *In Memoriam* precisely because they serve the ends of his elegy. They further the work of exercises like the one mentioned in the previous section in which the poet identifies with natural objects such as the yew tree in Section II. This motive is stated even more clearly in Section III when the poet, listening to nature's pitiless voice, runs together new astronomical theories about the movement, genesis, and ultimate fate of heavenly bodies:

> 'The stars,' she whispers, 'blindly run;
> A web is wov'n across the sky;
> From out waste places comes a cry,
> And murmurs from the dying sun (III.5-8)

Other exercises in the same vein, which occur later in the poem are more explicit, as when the poet subverts the anthropocentric view of nature by superimposing the discoveries of geology over his own perspective in Sections XXV and CXXIII; but the presence of these exercises in the second and third sections of *In Memoriam* is especially significant as they shed light on the curious allusion with which Tennyson opens his elegy:

> I held it truth, with him who sings
> To one clear harp in divers tones,
> That men may rise on stepping-stones

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[42] *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, 94.

Of their dead selves to higher things (I.1-4)

Commenting on this opening in his son's *Memoir*, Tennyson recalled: "I believe I alluded to Goethe," citing a putative quotation from the German poet—"from changes to higher changes."[43] The obscurity of the allusion and the still-unidentified reference of the poet have made alternatives—such as St. Augustine or perhaps the Psalmist—seem plausible.[44] The poem's opening spiritual exercises which focus on his perception of nature, however, confirm the aptness of Tennyson's identification and Goethe's propriety as a patron of the poem. In *The Present Alone is our Happiness*, a book of interviews which takes its title from *Faust*, Hadot remarks: "this practice of physics as a spiritual exercise has in fact always existed in the history of philosophy. Goethe is a perfect example of this, for all his naturalist studies are always tied to a certain existential experience. It is a physics, but one that has spiritual value."[45]

The poet's initial invocation of Goethe and the tradition of Stoic spiritual exercises both help to explain the poem's most famous (and famously bleak) meditations on nature in Sections LV and LVI. This pair of poems dramatizes a stunning askesis through which the poet strips himself of the consolations which he has weakly sought in nature. In the first poem, the fleeting lives of individual creatures and the survival of

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[43] *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by his Son*, 747.

[44] On St. Augustine as a possible influence on this section, see Mays, "*In Memoriam*: An Aspect of Form," 41. On the aptness of Tennyson's own invocation of Goethe see Elaine Jordan, "Tennyson's 'In Memoriam'—An Echo of Goethe," *Notes and Queries* 15 (November, 1968), 414-15, wherein she identifies other, more plausible allusions to the German poet while noting that "there is a considerable general influence from Goethe on the ideas of the poem," 415.

[45] *The Present Alone is our Happiness*, 95.

species are employed in a two-fold contrast: of the scales of singular and the plural, and of the perspectives of personal providence and impersonal nature. But even these antinomies, which are reconciled uneasily by the wavering poet—who stretches "lame hands of faith and "faintly trust[s] the larger hope" (LV.20)—fly apart at the beginning on the next poem, which begins with Nature, "red in tooth and claw/...shriek[ing"] against" the creed of "Creation's…law" (LVI.15-16):

> "So careful of the type?" but no.
>   From scarpèd cliff and quarried stone
>   She cries, "A thousand types are gone:
> I care for nothing, all shall go." (LVI.1-4)

This chastening, pessimistic view of nature is of a piece with the poem's calmer opening exercises which it both parallels and completes. In Section VI, the poet answers the suggestion that he reconcile himself to the truth that "'Loss is common to the race'—" (VI.2) by launching into a rapid survey of sad vignettes where the demise of an absent loved one is ironically juxtaposed to the blessing or imminent expectation of that loved one, a catalogue which explains the initial reply he gives to his friend:

> That loss is common would not make
>   My own less bitter, rather more:
>   Too common! Never morning wore
> To evening, but some heart did break (VI.5-8)

Yet the poet, nevertheless, realizes that his paralysis in the face of the particularity of Hallam's loss must somehow establish a relationship with the general sorrow that that loss represents. His initial exercise is a profusion of analogues, a first step away from the singularity of his own loss. This movement to the plural number is eventually synthesized with nature's affirmation of her total indifference in Section II which anticipates her

rather more trenchant statement of the same indifference in LVI, placing any attachment

to any particular under the sign of condemnation: "all shall go."

The poet's strategy here can be glimpsed by examining how the word "all" is

echoed at the very end of the poem. In the final six lyric sections of the poem (CXXVI-

CXXXI) only one does not use the word in the last or penultimate lines, and that

exception, Section CXXX, follows after and substantiates the poet's synthetic marriage

of part and whole in the previous section where he resolves, within his "dream of good,"

to "mingle all the world with thee" (CXXIX.11-12). Whereas his first ascent into

generalization was through nature's total, devastating, and equalizing indifference, the

Love which the poet claims "is and was my Lord and King" (CXXVI.1) enables him, in

the last stanza of the poem proper, to make a different combination of whole and part

while still incorporating nature's eventual annihilation into this vision:

> O living will that shalt endure
>> When all that seems shall suffer shock,
>> Rise in the spiritual rock,
> Flow thro' our deeds and make them pure (CXXXI.1-4)

By describing the same annihilation through the lens of a distinction between what will

"endure" and "all that seems" and by doing so in a sliding, sibilant line, the poet

effectively rewrites an earlier moment from the end of Section LVI in which "Dragons of

the prime,/ That tare each other in their slime" (LVI.22-23) are found to make an apt pair

with man in a world devoid of natural harmony—indeed, they are "mellow music

match'd with him" (LVI.24). The disjunctive sting that is produced by this grim but

mellifluous verse is ultimately undone in the flowing verbal music of this later line—

"When all that seems shall suffer shock"—wherein the same apocalyptic vision is

eloquently reprised. This euphonic consonance of *s-* and *sh*-sounds also anticipates the repetition of the same verbal note in "spiritual" in the following line: "Rise in the spiritual rock"; but *this* line's meter requires a slight syncopation which contorts the natural scansion of the word so that its third, demisemiquaver syllable receives a full stress ("thĕ **spír** | ĭt**ú** | ăl **róck**"), a distortion appropriate for an oxymoronic phrase which itself rises out of its natural cadence to match the verse's meter. As such, it stands out as the nonce-term in the final section: the tension created by the disjunctive meter of its polysyllabic word is relaxed in the monosyllabic line which follows it, and "rock" finds a pair with "dust" in the subsequent stanza. "Dust," of course, is a significant word in an elegy: as the last natural image in the poem proper, it marks a moment of acceptance of Hallam's loss as well as the poet's own eventual death while, at the same time, attenuating the extremity of the previous exercises in Sections LV and LVI and showing that such strong remedies are no longer necessary.

The Elegy's Endings

Tennyson is careful, at the conclusion of *In Memoriam*, to echo Sections LV and LVI—answering their melancholy meditations on nature with a more hopeful vision which yet retains the same universal reach—because these stanzas precede what the poem identifies as its first conclusion. Section LVII begins by commenting on the two foregoing poems:

> Peace; come away: the song of woe
>   Is after all an earthly song:
>   Peace; come away: we do him wrong
> To sing so wildly: let us go.
>
> Come; let us go: your cheeks are pale;
>   But half my life I leave behind:

Methinks my friend is richly shrined;
But I shall pass; my work will fail. (LVII.1-8)

These muted lines mark a sharp contrast with the previous sections in which the poet "so wildly" sang; the soothing incantatory repetitions of the first stanza realize the palliative effect of his poetry's "sad mechanic exercise" announced in Section V. But, despite this pronounced change in tone, the work of Sections LV and LVI is actually continued here, especially at the end of the second stanza in which the poet thinks of the fate of himself and his poetry: "I shall pass; my work will fail." In this line, Tennyson brings the thoughts of universal desolation which he had previously combined with his general meditations on nature within the scale of human time. In doing so, he forsakes both what is beyond and within the remit of his own lifespan by thinking, firstly, of his own death and, more importantly, of the futility of that work which should outlive him. That poetry offers the artist a kind of immortality is a perennial theme, but it is one that the author of an elegy cannot ignore; indeed, this boast is, in some ways, constitutive of the very genre, since the memorializing poem is intended to be the deathless substitute for its lifeless subject. By relinquishing even this hope, Tennyson's initial conclusion of his elegy does not actually interrupt the self-chastening exercise of the foregoing stanzas on nature, but rather continues this exercise by focusing on the limitations of his own artifice. The first conclusion thus puts the poem under the sign of futility: by explicitly disavowing his elegy's extrinsic, elegiac function, he implicitly leaves the intrinsic, transformative function as its sole sustaining purpose.

The importance of the attempted-but-retracted conclusion is difficult to overstate. Although critics have divided *In Memoriam* into sections and sequences—noting the

overarching organization of anniversaries and Christmases and mapping many other subtle links between its lyrics—the elegy is, finally, a two-part poem. No drastic change marks this dividing line, and many echoes and repetitions braid the sections before and after it; yet, the transition that occurs between Sections LVII and LVIII is a definitive threshold across which the poet passes, one which allows the speaker to stand briefly outside of the undulation of *In Memoriam*'s paratactic sequence and marks a before and an after within the limits of his own poem:

> In those sad words I took farewell:
> Like echoes in sepulchral halls,
> As drop by drop the water falls
> In vaults and catacombs, they fell (LVIII.1-4)

The elegy's internal architecture of seasonal and annual cycles, in fact, rests on this crucial pivot; the poet can enfold the arc of Sections I through LVII with later lyrics and revisit these same moments only because of this decisive continuation of the poem. Not even the climax of the poem in Section XCV—in which the speaker experiences a singular moment of spiritual contact with Hallam—marks such a division: in fact, the doubt with which this Section concludes mimes the formal gesture of inauguration and closure, advance and return which constitutes each stanza of the poem. When the poet inverts this structure by reversing his first closure in Section LVII, he not only anticipates the other diachronic points of transition in his first and final lyrics of the poem where he views its totality of in similar ways, but he also establishes a dialectical logic of supersession in the spaces between the poem's sections.

If the *In Memoriam* stanza contains, within itself, an inversion of Dante's *terza rima*, the forward movement of Tennyson's source is not so much neutralized as it is

displaced into revisionary moments such as this. The enfolding of grief with words that Tennyson announces in Section V yields this larger strategy of enfolding earlier moments around later, retrospective ones. Instead of rising "on stepping-stones/…to higher things," Tennyson, as it were, outflanks his former selves, viewing them from further and further removes—a figure of non-sequential self-development which resembles the shape that the poem outlines as it revises, remembers, and concludes.

By prolonging his poetic sequence past this first conclusion, Tennyson makes the closure of the poem in Section CXXXI more definitive by drawing the parallels with its opening poems more clearly. After recuperating the word "dust" into a contrast with the enduring "spiritual rock" of the first stanza of this final lyric, the poet, as it were, sifts even the metaphorical materiality of this last oxymoron from his poem as he shifts to aural imagery. His entreaty for that "living will" to "Flow thro' our deeds and make them pure" continues:

> That we may lift from out of dust
>   A voice as unto him that hears,
>   A cry above the conquer'd years
> To one that with us works, and trust,
>
> With faith that comes of self-control,
>   The truths that never can be proved
>   Until we close with all we loved,
> And all we flow from, soul in soul (CXXXI.5-12)

In the middle stanza of this final lyric—one in which voice itself becomes the dominant image—the poet answers Section I with echoes that validate a theory that he was then unable to verify in the absence of experience. Here, the impossible "forecast [of] years" which looked past the "victor Hours" (I.5,13) to this very moment is vindicated in a rapid, retrospective glance at the "conquer'd years" that have already elapsed, as well as

those which will elapse between the past and the poet's own death. The tenet which he

held "with him who sings" (I.1) now enables him to raise "a voice as unto him that

hears," as the male pronoun first used to refer to Goethe now becomes a referent-by-

simile for God, having been the alias of Hallam for the majority of the elegy. And the

cerebral and spiritual questions of epistemology, faith, and doubt are definitely

established as the final horizon of the elegy, being the problems into which the affective

states of pain, mourning, and grief have matured.

In a sense, then, the final stanzas of the poem proper furnish it with a perfect

ending—and yet, the untitled lyric Epilogue which follows upon this conclusion disrupts

the clear symmetry of its opening and closing sections with a turn similar to the one

which follows the first conclusion ("In those sad words I took farewell"). As an

unnumbered section outside the poem proper, the Epilogue seems to stand outside of the

poem's logic of progress; however, it actually completes its curriculum of consolation

precisely by illustrating its cessation in a way which would be impossible within the

poem itself. At the outset of the Epilogue, the poet is quick to establish his temporal

distance from the period during which he composed his formative sequence, a duration

which is thrice the length of *In Memoriam*'s internal chronology of three years:

> Tho' I since then have number'd o'er
> Some thrice three years: they went and came,
> Remade the blood and changed the frame,
> And yet is love not less, but more (Epilogue.9-12)

To further emphasize his present difference, love now replaces sorrow as the fixed

internal pole which counterpoints the poet's corporeal change. This change, furthermore,

is characterized in significant terms: the lexical palette the poet uses—*remade*, *changed*,

and *frame*—is decidedly artisanal. This choice of diction as well as his deliberate use of the poem's own length as the base-unit to measure time coordinates the natural growth of the body and the artificial production of the elegy, suggesting an interdependence between these two processes of development.

What indicates this interdependence between emotional growth and poetic production most clearly, however, is the poet's disdainful attitude towards the very product of the elegy's "sad mechanic exercise":

> Regret is dead, but love is more
>> Than in the summers that are flown,
>> For I myself with these have grown
> To something greater than before;
>
> Which makes appear the songs I made
>> As echoes out of weaker times,
>> As half but idle brawling rhymes,
> The sport of random sun and shade (Epilogue.17-24)

Since the word "half" was, so to speak, branded by Section V with its triple occurrence therein, its use here in a retrospective description of the poem is an invitation to read this moment through the prism of that earlier one. Now, the poetic project in which Tennyson persevered can be belittled as "idle brawling rhymes" precisely because its justification—the use that the poet found "in measured language"—has disappeared; the consolation which it was meant to effect has been achieved. Thus is the coincidence of literary form and self-formation, asserted from the poem's outset, demonstrated most clearly in its undoing, in the repudiation of the poem itself which occurs outside of its own formal limits in the Epilogue.

By bringing the operative project of the poem to an end beyond the formal closure of Section CXXXI, the Epilogue can also move self-formation from the realm of

operation to *representation*; that is, self-formation can become a subject *in* the poem with greater clarity once it is no longer the object *of* the poem to produce. The epithalamion that the poet sings in the Epilogue ends with a vision of the embryo whose gestation will recapitulate the phylogeny of its species:

> A soul shall draw from out the vast
> And strike his being into bounds,
>
> And, moved thro' life of lower phase,
> Result in man, be born and think (Epilogue.123-126)

As a microcosm of evolutionary changes, this child will be the embodied culmination of past progress in the same way that the Epilogue itself contains the entirety of the poet's transformation in miniature. A parallel is thus established between the newly conceived child who appears at the Epilogue's end and the reconstituted lyric speaker who begins it since they are both, in their own ways, harbingers of that "one far-off divine event,/ To which the whole creation moves" (Epilogue.143-144). Yet each one can point towards this ultimate end because of the slow antecedent developments which precede them—of the human species on the one hand and the poetic sequence on the other. The final repudiation of the art that emerged from his "weaker times" confirms the premonition of the poem's final vision in Section CXXVIII: "That all, as in some piece of art,/ Is toil cöoperant to an end" (CXXVIII. 23-24). Within the poem, the perfect image of this co-operation of growth and toil is art itself; beyond it, however, the perfect image is one that rejects, supersedes, and transforms that very art.

The Prologue as Palinode

> My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who
> understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when

he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) [¶] He must surmount these propositions; then he sees the world rightly.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein[46]

But I shall pass; my work will fail.

—Tennyson (LVII.8)

In Memoriam thus culminates in a renunciation, one which is anticipated by the poem's pair of disavowed closures. The apparent cessation of the elegy at Section LVII and the formal finale of Section CXXXI are both symbolically retracted through an Epilogue that recasts both of these continuations as parts of a whole which has become, with the passage of time generating an evolving self-formation, superfluous. But even this final, retroactive retraction of the entire poem is somehow insufficient, and Tennyson furnishes the poetic sequence, which runs from Section I towards the Epilogue, with a last word at an even further remove from the poem's internal temporality. This fourth conclusion of *In Memoriam* ends the poem before its beginning; the Prologue negates the poem which it prefaces, neutralizing the narrative of progress that one would otherwise find in the sequence.

The poet's opening prayer to the "Strong Son of God" crescendos into a recantation which takes the form of a quadruple entreaty:

> Forgive what seem'd my sin in me;
>   What seem'd my worth since I began;
>   For merit lives from man to man,
> And not from man, O Lord, to thee.
>
> Forgive my grief for one removed,

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[46] *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuiness (Routledge: London, 1961), §6.54, 74.

Thy creature, whom I found so fair.
          I trust he lives in thee, and there
I find him worthier to be loved.

Forgive these wild and wandering cries,
          Confusions of a wasted youth;
          Forgive them where they fail in truth,
And in thy wisdom make me wise. (Prologue.33-44)

These prefacing petitions are significant because, while the word "sin" occurs

infrequently in the poem, almost half of its occurrences are in reference to the poem

itself. As noted above, the poet held his composition to be "half a sin" in Section V and,

in Section XLVIII, he describes his poems as being born from Sorrow, who "holds it sin

and shame to draw/ The deepest measure from the chords" (XLVIII.11-12). These

moments are anticipated in the Prologue where all that now has "seem'd…sin in me"—

his "grief for one removed" and his "wild and wandering cries"—are brought within a

prayer for their absolution. The "[c]onfusions of a wasted youth" are distilled by the

mature poet who has emerged in this very process.

Thus, the disavowals of the poem—in the Prologue, the Epilogue, and even in

sections of the poem itself—are the moments where the poet demonstrates the changes

that he has achieved by means of his work most clearly. But why include these retractions

at all—to say nothing of the elegiac sequence they disavow? Why not simply excise the

exercises which have produced that change, separating (to use one of the poem's working

titles) the formative "Fragments of an Elegy" into a smaller, coherent whole? Or, to put

this same question in the terms in which it is posed in scholarship on the poem: why does

In Memoriam have the (lack of) form that it does? One reason is that, by including the

parts of the poem which might have been selected, deleted, and arranged otherwise, and

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presenting them precisely under the figure of erasure, Tennyson prevents the creation, in the mind of his reader, of what Valéry calls that "infinitely 'unlikely' sort of author" who is "capable of writing it all straight off, spontaneously."[47] The "three years of groupings, prunings, amendments, excisions, [and] sortileges" are not expunged from the poem but constitute it as such.[48] In order to prevent the creation of that unlikely author in the reader's mind, Tennyson details his own self-creation. One could describe the operative form of *In Memoriam* as *inverted* form: the poem, which progresses through stasis and which rids itself of grief precisely by trying to sustain it, is built up from what would be excluded from an object possessing "organic unity." Hence, the more important reason that Tennyson preserves the disavowed exercises in the final form of the poem is the same reason that he perseveres in these personal exercises: they constitute the poem as such. The elegy's other working title, "The Way of the Soul," indicates more clearly that "wandering cries" are both its method and its substance.

Tennyson's way of proceeding in *In Memoriam* recalls Erasmus's definition of the trope called "transumptio" or "metalepsis" whereby "we move by stages towards what we mean to say."[49] However, in addition to being a figure for transitions through intermediate positions, metalepsis describes another kind of rhetorical strategy, too. Dietrich Bartel notes that it can also refer to the process by which "a thought can be

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[47] "Analects," trans. Stuart Gilbert, in *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, ed. Jackson Mathews, vol. 14 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 238.

[48] Valéry, "Analects," 238.

[49] "Two Books on the Twofold Copiousness of Words and Things" qtd. in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), 220.

clarified with either a preceding or a subsequent thought."[50] It is *this* sense that J. Hillis

Miller has in mind when he calls metalepsis a "preposterous figure of speech that puts the

early late and the late early."[51] Metalepsis, then, is a trope of subversion *and* inversion, of

gradual change and counterintuitive re-ordering—and each of these aspects describes *In*

Memoriam's modes of change: its slow transumption of grief over the long course of the

poem is revealed out-of-sequence in an opening overture which preemptively telegraphs

the end result of that process. The "preposterous" aspect of metalepsis is also, as

mentioned above, an apt image of *In Memoriam*'s self-effecting literary form, since this

paradoxical figure reflects the logical inversion through which writing shapes the writer,

and the poem forms the poet.

Tennyson was a poet more than usually preoccupied about the ordering of his

poetry. One of his first extant letters shows the 17-year-old poet preoccupied with the

placement of his poems in a forthcoming publication; at the end of his life, he gave

explicit instructions to print his short, valedictory lyric, "Crossing the Bar," at the

conclusion of every edition of his poetry.[52] The attention Tennyson paid to poetic form

would be reason enough to attach great importance to the Prologue and its placement in

In Memoriam, even without its operative effect. For instance, the Prologue places the

poem within a specific formal convention of medieval poetry: the palinode. Epigraphic

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[50] *Musica Poetica: Musical-rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1997), 321.

[51] *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 41.

[52] "Charles and Alfred Tennyson to J. Jackson" (Jan. 1827), *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), I:8-11; Ricks, *Tennyson*, 295.

retractions (or palinodes) sometimes appear at the end of works (*The Canterbury Tales* is a common example) or, as in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, at the beginning.[53] In addition to placing *In Memoriam* in this long literary tradition, the Prologue's palinode exhibits what Kenneth Burke calls the "temporizing of essence," a feature of works whereby the first principles and final ends of their philosophical intent are allegorically encoded in the beginnings and conclusions of their fictional constructions of time.[54] The Prologue "formalizes" the poem's ultimate values, placing the doubts that will be expressed in the poem in the larger context of prefatory prayer and ordering the poet's grief over Hallam's loss within a hierarchy through which he finds him "worthier to be loved." The Prologue's act of ordering also represents a point of contact between the function of form identified by Burke and the self-operative reading developed here, because the organization represented *In Memoriam*'s ordering is not simply philosophical. Since the intellectual stratification which Burke finds in arrangements of narrative time can also be read as enacting an accompanying ethical formation, the delineating labor that the artist performs on a body of work to produce that philosophical structure can be taken as an index of the work which that labor exacts from the artist, especially in a poem such as *In Memoriam* which announces its self-operative purpose so explicitly. In fact, the singular use to which Tennyson puts his life-shaping poetry makes the term of art that a linguist might use to describe the placement of *In Memoriam*'s Prologue especially relevant. The

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[53] This latter sequence of poems has received attention from Tennyson scholars, but the strong similarities between the Prologue of *In Memoriam* and the sonnet which begins the *Canzoniere* have yet to be fully explored. See *Canzoniere: Selected Poems*, trans. Anthony Mortimer (London: Penguin, 2002).

[54] See *A Grammar of Motives* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969), 430-440.

technical name for the "addition of a letter or syllable to the beginning of a word" is "prosthesis"[55]—literally a "placing before."

The Touch of Change: Imagining Hallam

> What find I in the highest place,
>   But mine own phantom chanting hymns?
>   And on the depths of death there swims
> The reflex of a human face. (CVIII.9-12)

The prosthetic function of the poem's form—whereby the metaleptic reordering of the poem represents a simultaneous reordering of the self—brings the final, most characteristic, and most important spiritual exercise that the poet performs in his elegy into view. While *In Memoriam* is built up from a series of meditations, identifications, and productive disavowals, the great task of Tennyson's poem is imaging Arthur Henry Hallam as he was, and may be now, and as he might have been. The mourning poet is just as likely to make, within his lyrics, a space to elaborate a memory of Hallam as he is to speculate on his possible present state. Moreover, when he imagines Hallam's unrealized achievements in the poem's counterfactual mode, he brings those same "glorious insufficiencies" into a liminal existence not only so that they might be known to the world, if only by their absence, but also so that their elaboration can become the means of his own gradual reconstitution.

      To the Greek practice described by Foucault of keeping a commonplace book in order "to capture the already-said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and

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[55] "prosthesis, n.". OED Online. June 2016. Oxford UP. http://www.oed.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/view/Entry/153069?redirectedFrom=prosthesis (accessed September 04, 2016).

for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self," Tennyson adds the

spiritual exercise of bringing the Hallam who might have been before the world and

himself.[56] An operative reading thus elucidates the poem's central relationship and

explains why, as Paul Verlaine complained, "when [Tennyson] should have been broken-

hearted, [he instead] had many reminiscences."[57] By gathering together the memories of

his lost friend, Tennyson represents the significant effects that Hallam had already had on

him—from his early incisive review of his poetry, to his practical encouragement and

advancement of his friend's career, to the continuing friendship and emotional stability

which, as a future brother-in-law, he seemed to promise. However, the counterfactual

imaginative exercises of *In Memoriam* make Hallam's potential achievements just as

crucial to the poet's life. This imaginative animation of the counterfactual Hallam makes

the reconstituted poet one of the real effects of the lost Hallam's non-existent works—but

it also makes *In Memoriam* itself the ultimate source of this reconstitution.

 Viewed from a certain angle, the relationship that the poem contrives to establish

between Hallam and Tennyson is not unlike the agonistic one which Harold Bloom has

described between a strong precursor and a young poet. Tennyson imaginatively

elaborates Hallam's impossible future so that he can feel its effects within his own poem

and respond with the same revisionary ratios that Bloom describes. In turning the absent

Hallam into an overwhelming presence through his poetic meditations, Tennyson

attempts to transmute the poverty that Freud used to characterize the melancholic ego

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[56] "Self Writing," in *The Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 210-211.

[57] Qtd in W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies: The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. III, ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), 261.

into the psychic wound of a latecomer, transforming the sad effect of his loss into a spur for poetic creation. But because the works of Hallam by which the poet would be so wounded are the product of his own imagination, the poet yearns for a proximity which would conceal this fact. Hence, the poet's exhortation that Hallam's spirit "[d]escend, and touch, and enter" (XCIII.13) his own and that his own, again, be "wound, and whirl'd" (XCV.37) in his; Hallam's absence from the world creates a space within the poet that he can fill through the prosthesis of his own poetic form.

Seeking Hallam, the poet finds himself; but, insofar as he convincingly recasts himself as the product of Hallam's influence, Tennyson is able to recuperate what would otherwise be the limiting return, the "reflex of" his own "human face." Hallam's work within the poem's feedback loop is illustrated especially clearly in the poem's climactic moment of contact with him in Section XCV, one which is mediated by Hallam's own written work. The elegy which begins with an affirmation of the "use of measured language" attains a crescendo through the parallel "mechanic exercises" of reading the "noble letters of the dead":

> And strangely on the silence broke
> The silent-speaking words, and strange
> Was love's dumb cry defying change
> To test his worth; and strangely spoke
>
> The faith, the vigour, bold to dwell
> On doubts that drive the coward back,
> And keen thro' wordy snares to track
> Suggestion to her inmost cell.
>
> So word by word, and line by line,
> The dead man touch'd me from the past,
> And all at once it seem'd at last
> The living soul was flash'd on mine (XCV.25-36)

The otherness of Hallam is a quality stressed by the poet frequently in the elegy, but it becomes a special point of emphasis in the first stanza quoted above, as the word "strange" and its cognates appear in every line but one. Yet, the singularity and strangeness of this moment—the very one in which Tennyson experiences the poem's most dramatically transformative touch—is, finally, difficult to distinguish from the rest of his elegy. This is not to say that similar states of transport are suffused throughout the poem; the speaker here claims to have been taken through the

> …empyreal heights of thought,
> And came on that which is, and caught
> The deep pulsations of the world,
>
> Aeonian music measuring out
> The steps of Time—the shocks of Chance—
> The blows of Death. At length my trance
> Was cancell'd, stricken thro' with doubt. (XCV.38-44)

Yet the vision that the poet here attributes solely to a singular, spiritual visitation is belied by the rest of the elegy. Through its varied and frequent speculations on the afterlife, on the geological pre-history of the world, and on sudden tragic losses similar to Hallam's death, *In Memoriam* consciously takes up, throughout the poem, the subjects here identified as the special province of Section XCV's vision. Indeed, the "steps of Time" are precisely what comes into view through the scope of Tennyson's multi-year meditation. Even the poet's self-cancellation—"Vague words!" (XCV.45)—is entirely characteristic of the poem. The distinction between Hallam's letters and Tennyson's poem is further blurred when the former are described within the latter, since the elegy has taken up the topic of doubt rather boldly and has tracked suggestion with no little vigor; indeed, Tennyson's entire project has been to reach his dead friend "word by word,

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and line by line," and to receive the touch of change through that contact. Thus, Section XCV is less a specific description of a moment of spiritual communion than it is a general description of Tennyson's poetic exercise, a kind of magnificent inversion of the account that the poet gives of his own practice—a "sad, mechanic exercise"—in Section V.

But to locate a resemblance to Tennyson's own elegy in his description of the letters of Hallam which lead to the poem's climax is simply to reiterate that Tennyson's poem has a formative function. He shrouds the ascent of Section XCV behind the limitations of language:

> …how hard to frame
> In matter-moulded forms of speech,
> Or ev'n for intellect to reach
> Thro' memory that which I became (XCV.45-48)

And yet, Tennyson's entire elegy is a testament to the power of "matter-moulded forms of speech," not simply to represent what he then became, but to become something else by means of that power. In Section V, this power is directly attributed to the elegy and the exercises which it contains; in Section XCV, this same power is displaced and attributed to Hallam which is why the poet can dwell on it at such length. By presenting his trance as the effect of Hallam's language, Tennyson conceals the self-formative project of *In Memoriam* in the power of his friend, leaving him free to describe the effect of his own poem and further its ultimate, theraputic aim: to furnish his friend with a suitable offering and, by means of that very offering, to turn his own survival into a kind of tribute to Hallam.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The aim of this chapter has been to show that *In Memoriam* is best understood as a series of spiritual exercises and that the formative function of its various lyrics explains the curious form of the elegy as a whole. The operative function of its form—imagined as a kind of scaffolding around the partial, emergent self which it produces—accounts for the poem's departures from elegiac conventions. This approach also sheds light on Tennyson's provisional names for *In Memoriam*: he could refer to his growing sequence of poems as a "Way of the Soul," because they led him circuitously to the consolation they were intended to effect, and as the "Fragments of an Elegy," because they constituted a whole, not when taken together by themselves, but when considered in tandem with the poet whom they complete; the youthful "confusions" are the meeting point between poetic art and partial life which is its special function to produce.[58] The touch of change that the shapes the poet is his constant contact with formative forces which guide the poem's composition. This contact is sundered by a Prologue through which the division between life and art is reestablished through a repudiation which demonstrates the elegy's operative form with especial clarity. Thus does final, opening separation of *In Memoriam* close the long parenthesis that was opened when, as Tennyson puts it in Section LXXXV:

> …on mine ear this message falls,
> That in Vienna's fatal walls
> God's finger touch'd him, and he slept. (LXXXV.18-20)

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[58] See Ricks, *Tennyson*, 201-202.

"The Wreck of the Deutschland" and the Birth of the Poet:
Hopkins' Performative Literary Form

…dost thou touch me afresh?
Óver agáin I féel thy fínger and fínd thée.
—Gerard Manley Hopkins[1]

The last thing one discovers in composing a work is what to put first.
—Blaise Pascal[2]

"I must tell you," writes Hopkins to Robert Bridges in 1878, "I am sorry you never read

the Deutschland again."[3] Bridges' resistance to his friend's dense and difficult poem had

been immediate, intense, and enduring: following his first encounter with it in 1877, he

assures Hopkins that he would "not for any money read [the] poem again" (*CW*, 1:282).

Even when he eventually brings it into print more than forty years later, Bridges

characterizes the ode as "a great dragon folded in the gate" of Hopkins' works—a phrase

which has since become something of a critical commonplace.[4] And not without reason:

Hopkins admits to his frustrated friend that his poem "needs study and is obscure" and

allows, with telling litotes, that he was "not over-desirous that the meaning of all should

be quite clear" (*CW*, 1:295). Nearly a century of divergent commentary on the poem has

confirmed Hopkins' understatement while validating Bridges' experience—described in

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[1] *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Norman H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 128, ll. 7-8; cited parenthetically hereafter as *Poetical*. Quotations from "The Wreck of the Deutschland" will be cited from this edition by stanza and line number.

[2] *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 177.

[3] *Correspondence 1852-1881*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips, vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Lesley Higgins and Michael Suarez, S. J. eds. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006-), 295; cited parenthetically hereafter as *CW*.

[4] *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, now First Published*, ed. Robert Bridges (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918), 106n.

his notes to the ode—of being "shamefully worsted" by the dragon "in a brave frontal assault" (106n).

Some scholars have taken Bridges' advice (which is modeled on Hopkins' own advice to him) "to circumvent [the poem] and attack [it] later in the rear" in both literal and figurative senses. That is, some readings of "The Wreck" approach it not only from oblique points of entry, but from unconventional critical perspectives.[5] In the 1960s, for example, Elisabeth Schneider suggested that a miracle is represented in the ode, arguing that its obscure 28th stanza contains the involuted account of a divine vision granted to the five drowned nuns that the poem commemorates.[6] Revisiting the issue some twenty years later in his Martin D'Arcy Lectures, Norman H. MacKenzie gave voice to the current critical consensus that the poem contains no such vision—nor a miracle of any kind.[7] Yet, as Lesley Higgins put it in a recent reappraisal, Schneider still "persuaded two generations of Hopkins critics to read [Stanza 28] miraculously."[8]

Bridges' advice (and Schneider's example) notwithstanding, most critics have preferred to engage with the more obvious themes of the ode, exploring its theodicean

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[5] In the 1877 letter to Bridges addressing his difficulties with the poem which is quoted above, Hopkins writes: "If it is obscure do not bother yourself with the meaning but pay attention to the best and most intelligible stanzas, as the two last of each part and the narrative of the wreck" (*CW*, 1:282). For a reading of the poem guided by this suggestion, see Hilda Hollis, "Advice Not Taken: Attacking Hopkins' Dragon Through Stanza Sixteen," *VP* 36:1 (1998), 47-57.

[6] Elizabeth W. Schneider, *The Dragon in the Gate: Studies in the Poetry of G. M. Hopkins* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1968), 26-32.

[7] Norman H. MacKenzie, *Excursions in Hopkins* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's UP, 2008), 293. The lectures on which this book is based were delivered at Oxford in 1988.

[8] "Reckoning up the Ellipses in Hopkins's Poetry," *The Hopkins Quarterly* 40: 3-4 (Summer-Fall 2013), 89n23.

theology, its biographical resonances, and its peculiar literary form. This last topic is one of the most frequently addressed issues in Hopkins scholarship, and many commentaries have considered the relation of the poem's two uneven parts in great detail. To take a recent example, Imogen Forbes-Macphail has explored the mathematical ratios of the unevenly divided ode, drawing on calculus to clarify its bifurcated form: "the two halves of the poem," she argues, "are held in an integral/differential relationship with each other," with "Part the First" displaying "God's nature in the abstract" and "Part the Second" "describ[ing] God's presence manifested or 'integrated' into the real world."[9] Dennis Sobolov, for his part, takes a rather different critical approach, reading Hopkins' oeuvre through the lens of "semiotic phenomenology," yet his conclusion is not dissimilar: the strategic division between abstraction and integration that Forbes-Macphail finds in the form of the poem Sobolov sees within the poet himself. His engagement with "The Wreck" thus forms the final chapter of *The Split World of Gerard Manley Hopkins* because, on Sobolov's reading, it showcases a symptomatic gap that runs throughout all of Hopkins' work between the faith he professed and his own lived experience.[10]

Like the suggestion that Bridges offers in his note to the "The Wreck," these antinomies—between theory and practice, between faith and experience—have their origin in Hopkins, too. His letters and journals are replete with worries about wasting time on poetry, and his early concerns about the incompatibility of verse-writing with his

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[9] Imogen Forbes-Macphail, "'Cinquefoil Token': Infinitesimal Calculus and 'The Wreck of the Deutschland,'" *The Hopkins Quarterly* 41:1-2 (Winter-Spring 2014), 46, 47.

[10] Dennis Sobolov, *The Split World of Gerard Manley Hopkins: An Essay in Semiotic Phenomenology* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 2011), 303-324.

religious life led to the period of "elected silence" during which he abandoned poetic composition altogether. [11] But, while the tension that Hopkins and his later critics perceive between his vocation to the priesthood and his calling as a poet can clearly be felt throughout his work, it is not actually so clear that this tension animates "The Wreck of the Deutschland," the first poem that Hopkins wrote in the Society of Jesus, under obedience, and for the English Jesuits' own periodical. This poem, with its striking two-part form, is actually the sole product of the explicit alignment of Hopkins' two vocations at the dramatic beginning of his mature poetic career. This alignment, in turn, created a very different kind of pressure from those that previous critics have explored, for what became countervailing concerns later life in Hopkins' life here fuse into single, formative force. The Jesuit author of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" would not have seen the poem written to honor the nuns drowned in their flight from persecution as only—or even mainly—an artistic project, but one that was memorial, pastoral, evangelical, and perhaps

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[11] Hopkins' burning of his undergraduate poetry is referred to in his journals as the "slaughter of the innocents," *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House, completed by Graham Storey (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959) 126; see also Appendix V, 537-539. However, as John McDermott notes, when Hopkins destroys his early poetry, "he burns only poems of which [Robert Bridges] has copies and keeps back corrected versions of poems not yet sent to him," *A Hopkins Chronology* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1997), 32—a detail that has led some critics to correct the false impression which could be gleaned from Hopkins' dramatic description. What Hopkins calls his "slaughter of the innocents" is thus described by Robert Martin as "more decimation than extermination," *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (New York: Putnam's, 1991), 174 and, in a phrase quoted by Randall McLeod, as the "burning of the duplicates," "Gerard Hopkins and the Shapes of his Sonnets", *Voice, Text, Hypertext: Emerging Practices in Textual Studies*, ed. Raimonda Modiano, Leroy F. Searle and Peter Shillingsburg (Seattle: U of Washington P, 2004), 291n46. These necessary corrections, however, should not obscure the *symbolic* import of Hopkins' act—an act through which the poet voluntarily enters into an "Elected Silence" (*Poetical* 89, l. 1). See John Robinson, *In Extremity: A Study of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978), 11.

even effective—an aspect of Hopkins' poetry that has yet to be fully examined, even in studies of his poetic performative utterances.[12] Thus guided by both the content and the form of the poem, and building on analyses of the poet's performative speech acts, this chapter moves beyond readings of "The Wreck" that discover in it only overt tensions or contentious secrets to arrive at an interpretation of the transformative work of the poem itself. The first section argues that while Schneider's earlier, miraculous reading misses the mark, it does so only by degrees, for the poem is, in fact, the account of a miracle—just not the contested one which she purported to discover. The real miracle of the poem is the transforming affective touch that Hopkins calls to mind in its first stanza, but which he actually receives in the midst of its composition, and which he describes again (and for the first time) in Stanza 18. The second section then shows how this miraculous experience impels Hopkins' poetic innovation. The transformed poet reshapes his ode to communicate the import of this miracle; the poem's miraculous content calls forth its peculiar two-part form. Late-conceived but pre-positioned, "Part the First" emerges in the process of the poem's very creation and owes its (slightly deceptive) name and prominent place to the poet's desire to demonstrate the connection between the wreck of the *Deutschland* and "The Wreck of the Deutschland." Yet the self-reflexive development of the poem is only possible—and comprehensible—in light of the changes its writing effects in Hopkins himself. A final section argues that the form of "The Wreck" is coeval with the miracle that it occasions, a constitutive relationship that depends on the poetic

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[12] See, for example, Kinereth Meyer and Rachel Salmon Deshen's chapter on "The Wreck of the Deutschland" in *Reading the Underthought: Jewish Hermeneutics and Christian Poetry of Hopkins and Eliot* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic U of America P, 2010), 118-149. Meyer and Salmon's analysis engages extensively with J. Hillis Miller's work on speech acts in Hopkins' poetry which will be taken up below.

self-creation that Hopkins enacts, employing what Hillis Miller calls the

"dangerous…secular magic" of Hopkins' performative speech acts. Transformed by

God's touch, Hopkins responds to the miracle he experiences within the poem with a set

of performative speech acts through which he publically recreates himself as a poet.

The Gift of Tears

Since neither rough drafts nor even an autograph of "The Wreck of the Deutschland"

remain, a genetic reading of the ode's evolution is impossible. The only extant copy of

the poem is a transcription in Bridges' hand to which Hopkins made minor revisions;

thus, apart from a few, final alterations, there is no creative genesis to trace. [13] The lone

clue about the poem's development is given by Hopkins in an 1877 letter to Bridges

wherein he mentions that the verses of the 12th stanza of "The Wreck" were "the first

written after 10 years' interval of silence" (*CW*, 1:280). While this might seem like a

rather minor detail, Hopkins' identification of his own beginning is significant because it

offers a place from which to develop an hypothesis about the poem's emerging structure

and enlarging subject. The 12th stanza and the five which follow it contain the most

straightforward narrative sequence in the ode, and are full of factual details gleaned from

contemporary newspaper accounts of the *Deutschland*'s wreck. In certain places, such as

Stanza 16, the poem follows these published reports with conspicuous precision.[14]

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[13] See MacKenzie's description of the MSS. in *Poetical*, 316 and his comments and notes
to the photo-reproductions of the ode in *The Later Poetic Manuscripts of Gerard Manley
Hopkins, in Facsimile*, ed. Norman H. MacKenzie (New York: Garland, 1991), 4, 17, 32-
67.

[14] For selections from accounts of the *Deutschland*'s wrecking in the London *Times*, see
Norman Weyland, S.J., "The Historical Basis of *The Wreck of the Deutschland* and *The

However, at the climax of Hopkins' initial narrative sequence, the story of the wreck

breaks off and the poet relates his own reaction to the events he has been recounting:

> Ah, touched in your bower of bone
> Are you! turned for an exquisite smart,
> Have you! make words break from me here all alone,
> Do you!—móther of béing in me, héart.
> O unteachably after evil, but uttering truth,
> Why, tears! is it? tears; such a melting, a madrigal start!
> Never-eldering revel and river of youth,
> What can it be, this glee? the good you have there of your own? (18:137-144)

The first four lines of this stanza—with their striking triple exclamation preceding the

appearance of the long deferred addressee, the poet's "heart"—enact the expansion, on

the level of form, that they also constitute on the poem's narrative plane: in these lines

that symbolically exceed their own boundaries, the poet's experience becomes

incorporated into his own poem.

Most critical readings do not emphasize the importance of this stanza—let alone

take it as a stunning personal turn. Instead, the stanza is typically read as little more than

an emotional interjection or an affected aside. Yet there is ample internal and external

evidence for reading Stanza 18 as revealing something crucially important about both the

poem and the poet. For example, after Hopkins repeats, within his narrative, the widely

reported words of one of the nuns ("O Christ, Christ, come quickly!") in Stanza 24, he

later describes the interior touch which prompts this call in the same terms he employs to

recount his own experience in Stanza 18: in Stanza 31, the tall nun feels a touch from

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Providence's "Finger" (31.246) which makes an implicit request of her heart ("the bréast

of the/Maiden" (31.246-247)) that she then obeys by uttering her call to Christ; and, in

the same way, the poet's "heart" in Stanza 18 is "touched in [its] bower of bone" with a

request (to which he had already acceded when he "did say yes" (2.9)) as the very words

of his poem "break from [him]." (18.139). Not only is Hopkins' own affect thus taken as

a model for what the nun herself experienced, but it is also explicitly linked with the

production of the ode itself; in Stanza 18, the scene of writing becomes a locus within the

poem, as the deferred words of the nun precipitate the production of Hopkins' poem.

 The importance of Stanza 18 is further confirmed by the fact that Hopkins

connects his own emotion with the poem's composition in his correspondence. In

October of 1878, Hopkins answered the question of his friend, R. W. Dixon—"You ask,

do I write verse myself"—by briefly recounting how he returned to poetry after his period

of self-imposed silence: "when in the winter of '75 the Deutschland was wrecked in the

mouth of the Thames…I was affected by the account and happening to say so to my

rector he said that he wished someone would write a poem on the subject. On this hint I

set to work" (*CW*, 1:317). In another letter touching on the ode's genesis, the same

conspicuous emphasis on his own affect appears. Writing to his mother only two weeks

after the shipwreck, Hopkins tells her: "I am writing something on this wreck, which may

perhaps appear but it depends on how I am speeded. It made a deep impression on me,

more than any other wreck or accident I ever read of" (*CW*, 1:248). The poet's strong

emotion is also implicitly acknowledged in the aforementioned letter to Bridges in which

Hopkins defends the ode, and the personal material that it includes, insisting that "what

refers to myself […] is all strictly and literally true and did all occur; nothing is added for

poetical padding" (*CW*, 1:282). Taken together, these remarks show that not only were the tears the poet describes within the poem quite real, but that their connection with it was somehow crucial.

The journalistic accounts of the *Deutschland*'s wrecking were, of course, written to provoke just such lachrymose responses. Yet the "event" of Stanza 18 is not just one sensitive reader's overwrought reaction to sensationalistic news stories. Instead, the spontaneous affective response described in Stanza 18 is something that Hopkins would have understood as the "gift of tears," a phenomenon with a long history in Christian spirituality and one which is especially important in the Jesuit tradition and in the life of Saint Ignatius himself.[15] In *The Graces of Interior Prayer*, Augustine Poulain—a fellow Jesuit and contemporary of Hopkins—describes this experience: "It is said that a person has the gift of tears when certain pious thoughts cause him to weep often and abundantly, and when this facility can only be attributed to the divine action. This has been the case with many saints."[16]

Poulain's definition is offered in a chapter entitled, "Revelations and visions (continued). Course to be followed in our judgments with regard to them" and, in it, he outlines the principles for discerning the authenticity of such gifts, noting that, "[t]ears

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[15] See George E. Ganss S.J., ed. *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works* (New York: Paulist P, 1991), 437n5. For comparative religious perspectives on the phenomenon, see *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, ed. Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley (Princeton: Princeton UP), 2005; on the "gift of tears" see especially the contributions of Apostolos-Cappadona, Ware, and Patton in this volume.

[16] *The Graces of Interior Prayer: A Treatise on Mystical Theology*, trans. Leonard L. Yorke-Smith (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1912), 378. Poulain also notes that the "mystic state does not produce [tears] necessarily," and that St. Teresa of Avila, for instance, only speaks of them "in connection with very sublime contemplations," 169.

may, in fact, come from other causes than the divine action…Much more frequently they may be the result…of an over-sensitive nature."[17] However, it is unlikely that Hopkins would have confused the tears occasioned by the composition of his poem with a merely emotional response precisely because he had already felt moved in this way by the accounts of the shipwreck before he began writing his ode. In fact, since Hopkins would not have presumed to attribute this gift to any personal merit, he would have, instead, received it with a view to the importance of the poetic task at hand. In making this connection, he would have been supported by Saint Ignatius' clear comments on the subject in *The Spiritual Exercises*. In a section headed, "Rules for the Discernment of Spirits," Ignatius enumerates different types of spiritual consolations, one being when the soul "sheds tears, moving it to the love of its Lord, whether it be from grief for its sins, or for the Passion of Christ our Lord, or *for other things expressly ordained to His service and praise*."[18] Because his ode was only undertaken with his rector's consent, what the poet describes in Stanza 18 would likely have been interpreted by him as an example of what Ignatius elsewhere identifies as those tears "flowing from the love of the divine persons" themselves.[19] The emotional reaction precipitated by the call of the tall nun would, in other words, have been understood by Hopkins as a spiritual event of singular privilege, one visited upon him during his obedient act of writing an ode in honor of the

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[17] See 169, 349; see also 378.

[18] Qtd. in *Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Christopher Devlin, S.J. (London: Oxford UP, 1959), 158, my emphasis.

[19] *Monumenta Ignatiana*, vol. II, *Epistolae et Instructiones* (Madrid: Gabriel Lopez del Horno, 1904), 233-237, qtd. in William W. Meissner, S.J., *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 294.

five drowned and exiled nuns.[20]

Long before Schneider concluded that "The Wreck" was ruined by "unacceptably abnormal emotion," critics had struggled to explain the poet's affective profusion in Stanza 18. For instance, in her early commentary, Elsie Duncan-Jones suggests that the poem suffers from a certain emotional exaggeration, as Hopkins tries "to make himself believe that his feelings on the subject under consideration were more intense than was actually the case."[21] And an understated, *soto voce* acknowledgement of this point might even be discerned in the concession Hopkins makes to Bridges in his letter to him immediately preceding the one quoted at the outset of this essay: "[t]he Deutschland," he writes, "would be more *generally* interesting if there were more wreck and less discourse" (*CW* I:292, my emphasis)—if, that is, the poem were more general and less lyric, more public and less private. Yet the supposedly superior narrative section of "The Wreck" actually *precedes* the crucial moment depicted in Stanza 18 in which the poem's central event occurs. It is likely, then, that Hopkins is here making a conciliatory gesture to an unsympathetic reader who had already expressed a vehement dislike for the poem. A more accurate estimation of the narrative stanzas of "The Wreck" is to be found in the poet's later letter to Dixon wherein Hopkins says that, when he began the poem, his "hand was out at first" (*CW* I:317). If this is a reference to the poet's initial narrative section, then the poem symbolically rights itself in the 18th stanza, in and through his

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[20] Hopkins affirms the importance of the connection between his poetic output and obedience to his superiors in a 1879 letter to Bridges: "When I say that I do not mean to publish I speak the truth" but then adds: "If some one in authority knew of my having some poems printable and suggested my doing it I [should] not refuse" (*CW*, 1:333).

[21] Elsie E. Phare, *The Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Cambridge UP, 1933), 109.

physical and spiritual experience of tears.

On this reading, Stanza 18 is nothing less than a watershed in Hopkins' life, a moment of divine consolation, poetic inspiration, and vocational transformational. This reading, incidentally, while contesting the critical tradition exemplified by Schneider, nevertheless confirms her accurate interpretation of the poem's tone. "The Wreck" does, indeed, depict what she calls "a miracle with profound consequences to come" which is also its "central event"; yet there is no "discrepancy between [his] heightened emotion and its represented cause" because the poet's emotion is itself the very miracle that his poem depicts.[22]

The Form of "The Wreck"

It may seem counterintuitive to place so much emphasize on a single stanza of a long and complex poem but, the more this stanza is studied, the more difficult it becomes to overstate its import. As MacKenzie observes, "Stanza 18 seems to me to relate the most important outcome of the wreck," adding that, "[d]ecades of studying this poem closely have led me to what may seem a paradoxical conclusion: the most important voice we hear rising above the hubbub of winds and water is not that of the tall nun, but of the self-abasing poet."[23] The only thing to add to his conclusion is that the distinction between these two voices is ultimately tenuous. Although the tall nun's actual words only appear

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[22] Schneider, *The Dragon in the Gate*, 40.

[23] *Excursions in Hopkins*, 255. MacKenzie's reading is in accord with J. Hillis Miller's sense that a "new experience of grace occurs within the poem itself and is identical with the writing of it," *The Linguistic Moment: From Wordsworth to Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 255.

in Stanza 24, they are, in a certain sense, repeated *within* the poet's confession in Stanza 18 which they precipitate.[24] As it crosses the double distance of space and time to reach the composing poet in the lyric present, the tall nun's call simultaneously deforms and reforms the ode, shaping and reshaping the poet in a parallel way. Thus, instead of concealing what seems to be an ostensible shift in his poem's focus, Hopkins, in fact, *emphasizes* the connection between her call and his eventual poetic calling quite explicitly: the stanza wherein the nun's words are finally repeated actually begins with the poet, in his final explicit appearance in the poem in Stanza 24, in which the poet's location and the nun's quotation are dramatically collocated. And, unlike his first appearance in the poem, which takes the form of an unpremeditated interruption, the poet's second moment of self-reference occurs within the poetic structure of the Wreck-stanza, in a deliberate juxtaposition of place.[25] This careful scrutiny of the ode's formal

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[24] After noting the preponderance of repeated language across the two parts of the poem, Helen Vendler concludes that these "lexical resemblances are too great to be accidental: we must believe that Hopkins felt the two experiences [which are related in each part] to be somehow the same experience," "The Wreck of the Deutschland" in *The Authentic Cadence*: *Centennial Essays on Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Anthony Mortimer (Fribourg, Switzerland: Fribourg UP, 1992), 38. Miller makes a related point in his discussion of the ode's formal repetitions: "The key to the overall structure of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' is given in Stanza 18. There the poet describes his tears when he reads of the death of the nuns…The poet's tears are a madrigal echo or rhyme of the nun's suffering, that is, an echo of the same melody on a different pitch, as in the basic musical structure of a Renaissance madrigal, canon, or round," *Linguistic Moment*, 254.

[25] The selection of this stanza's third rhyme-word seems to be governed by the requirement of "quickly," the last word of the nun's reported cry, while a general direction ("west") and specific place-name ("Wales") anchor the other rhymes of the stanza through the identification the poet's position at the outset, (24.191, 184, 185). Thus, in addition to being temporally aligned in the same past moment, the poet and the tall nun are, then, connected through the very rhyme-words of the stanza. The unassuming poet, moreover, is on "a pastoral forehead" (24.185)—a conspicuous adjective which recalls the traditional arc of an epic poet's career. Hopkins, here, styles himself as a sort of silent shepherd who—to return to his earlier vocation-poem—has

arrangement given in this section will not only confirm the crucial importance of this stanza, but will also explain its central placement; Stanza 18 is, in fact, the key to explicating the poem's striking two-part form.

The focus of "Part the Second" is telegraphed by its internal structure. Leaving aside, for the moment, Stanza 11—the stanza which Hopkins eventually added as a proem—as well as the poem's pivotal 18th stanza, the structure of "Part the Second" could be construed as follows: anticipated by five stanzas of proleptic preparation and followed by five stanzas of fraught interpretation, the nun's cry ("O Christ, Christ, come quickly!") appears at the center of "Part the Second" in Stanza 24. This eleven-stanza center (Stanzas 19-29) is flanked, on the one side, by the six-stanzas sequence of this part's initial narrative (Stanzas 12-17) and, on the other, by the crescendo of the poem's six-stanza conclusion (Stanzas 30-35). In other words, excluding Stanza 18 and "Part the First"—the stanzas that contain almost all of the autobiographical material of the ode—as well as the introductory 11th Stanza, "The Wreck" would be elegantly organized with perfect symmetry around the centerpiece of the nun's reported words.[26] But while the nun's cry is certainly the centerpiece of "Part the Second," Stanza 24 is not the structural middle of the ode as a whole. Instead, the full 35-stanza poem makes Stanza 18—the stanza of the poet's personal, emotional response—its formal and symbolic center, with exactly 17 stanzas falling on its either side. The internal structure of "Part the Second" and the global structure of the entire poem, then, reflect two different—and competing—

been "[piped]…to pastures still" by his own "Elected Silence" (*Poetical* 89, l. 1). When the nun's call eventually reaches him, however, he will put aside this pastoral silence and take up the Miltonic task of theodicy.

[26] The arrangement of "Part the Second" could thus be visualized: [1]-6-[1]-5-1-5-6.

conceptions of what constitutes its real focus: the former, centered on the nun and her confession, is true to the title of the poem and its overt intention; the latter, in contrast, foregrounds the poet and his experience of tears.

Even though Stanza 18 is enshrined at the center of Hopkins' two-part ode—and occupies this position only because of "Part the First"—critical interpretations of the ode's structure have not focused on this stanza, nor on its connection with the poem's lyric preface. With the exception of conceptual studies like Forbes-Macphail's, most investigations of the poem's form instead track the repetition of images between its two parts, arguing that the ode achieves its elusive unity through such imagistic echoes. [27]

The most compelling critical project in this vein remains Todd K. Bender's analysis in his 1966 monograph. In a chapter entitled, "The non-logical structure of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland': Hopkins and Pindar," Bender develops a parallel between the poet's practice of imagistic repetition in "The Wreck" and Pindar's, whose odal form he employs. Bender's basis for this comparison is a letter Hopkins wrote seven years after he completed "The Wreck" wherein he makes a sketch of an intended study of Greek poetry. In addition to what he calls the "overthought"—that is, the obvious literal events of the poetry—Hopkins suggests that Greek verse also contains a concurrent "underthought" threaded through its narratives, an imagistic palate "conveyed chiefly in

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[27] For valuable readings in this vein, see John E. Keating, The Wreck of the Deutschland: *An Essay and Commentary*, Research Series 6 (Kent, OH: Kent State U Bulletin, 1963), 47-50, Todd K. Bender, "The non-logical structure of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland': Hopkins and Pindar" in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Classical Background and Critical Reception of His Work* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1966), 71-96, and Andrew Sean Davidson, "Reading 'the unshapeable shock night': Symbolic Action and The Wreck of G.M. Hopkins," *The Hopkins Quarterly* 29:1-2 (Winter-Spring 2002), 31-52; see especially the encyclopedic index of images given in Davidson's appendix.

the choice of metaphors…not necessarily having any connection with the subject in hand but usually having a connection and suggested by some circumstance of the scene or of the story" (*CW* II:564). Bender argues that, in "The Wreck of the Deutschland," Hopkins uses just such a single, underthought image to unify his own Pindaric ode: if one assumes that Hopkins composed "The Wreck" with "the underthought in mind that water manifests at once God's power and mercy, the problems in the structure of the poem are resolved."[28] Yet, even as Bender's analysis helps to resolve some of the "problems of the structure of the poem," the question raised by that problematic structure *itself* remains: water may, indeed, be one of the underthought images which flow through its two parts— but why does the poet produce a two-part poem at all? While Bender's reading—and others like it—resolves some of the problems raised by the two-part structure of the poem, the puzzle of the structure itself remains; that is, accounts of "The Wreck" that demonstrate the connections between its two parts often fail to consider why the poem has this dual-structure in the first place.

Helen Vendler's essay on "The Wreck" is invaluable in this regard because it is one of the few studies that brings the crucial but often-overlooked detail about the poem's composition to bear on this puzzle: "As we know, Hopkins wrote the narrative portion of the poem first…After establishing his narrative, Hopkins then used the key words from his narrative to write his short lyrical overture."[29] Commenting on this counter-intuitive

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[28] *The Classical Background*, 94.

[29] "The Wreck of the Deutschland," 38. Meyer and Salmon also note that "Hopkins wrote 'Part the Second' of 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' before 'Part the First,'" a fact which renders "both its sequence and its cause-and-effect relationships…convoluted and reversible," 130.

compositional practice, Vendler speculates about what would have precipitated such a personal turn: "[Hopkins] could not have devised this tactic without a startling moment in which he realized that in retelling the story of the tall nun […] he had revealed to himself the core of his own inner story" (38-39). However, even though she rightly surmises that the "poem as we have it is…presented backwards in terms of its own generation" (39), and that a single startling moment is the occasion for the poet's pivot, Vendler stops short of locating this revelatory turn within the poem itself.

But when "Part the First" is read as a lyric prolegomenon prompted by the event of Stanza 18, Vendler's analysis of its lexical coherence and other studies focusing on the ode's imagistic echoes can be expanded because the repetitions of words and images they analyze can be explained. For example, the water imagery that Bender tracks across the poem's two parts does not simply unify an ode which is inexplicably and asymmetrically split. Rather, the images employed in "Part the First" serve a specific purpose: they prime the reader to interpret "Part the Second" correctly. Hopkins repeats the language and echoes the images from the wreck-stanzas precisely so that, when they eventually recur in the subsequent narrative of the *Deutschland*'s disaster, they will have already been encountered as vehicles of the Divine. Consider, for example, the very first verses of the poem:

> Thou mastering me
> God! giver of breath and bread;
> Wórld's stránd, swáy of the séa;
> Lord of living and dead; (1.1-4)

This series of addresses begins with a sort of Homeric epithet ("mastering me/ God!"), then hails the Deity who is both the Creator of *Genesis* and the Provider petitioned in the

Pater Noster ("giver of breath and bread"), and concludes with an invocation of the eschatological Judge who will be invoked again at the poem's end ("Lord of living and dead"; see 28.223). Yet in the middle of these titles, the reader finds an appellation which must, at first, simply be passed over: "Wórld's stránd, swáy of the séa." At most, one might glean from this paired title that God is being lauded as the ruler of the created world. But the motivation for this odd double address is actually found in the subsequent disaster-narrative that it anticipates, since both the "séa" and a "stránd" of sand are the physical causes of *Deutschland*'s foundering. Before they are encountered in that context, however, sea and sand first appear as titles of God Himself. The reader, therefore, will eventually have to wrestle with the tension created by this identification: that the God who is both the "Wórld's stránd" and the "swáy of the séa" is also, somehow, in the "smother of sand" (14.107) and the "searomp" (17.132) which cause the *Deutschland*'s ruin. "Part the First," in other words, adds a paradoxical double-valence to the images which the reader will subsequently encounter in the already-written wreck-narrative.

Examples of this process could be multiplied. The rope suspending the would-be rescuer in Stanza 16 is anticipated in the taut thread of Apostolic Grace in Stanza 5, an image which casts Hopkins as a mountain climber, "roped" from above by "Chríst's gíft" (5.30, 32).[30] The ship which "Hurl[s] the Haven" of Bremen "behind" (13.98) as it unknowingly heads towards the fatal storm echoes the movement of the poet who, with the "hurdle of Hell behind" him, nevertheless still flies toward the "frown of His face" (3.18, 17). And the poet's heart, with its "midriff astrain with leaning of, laced with fire of stress" (2.16), is recalled when the *Deutschland*'s midriff beats "the bank down with

[30] On the mountaineering image in this stanza, see MacKenzie, 271.

her bows and the ride of her keel" (14.109). The poet's use of these images from the

wreck-narrative in "Part the First" ensures that, in their initial appearance, the physical

agents of the *Deutschland*'s wrecking are connotatively marked as, if not positive, then at

least productive forces. Through Hopkins' proleptic orchestration, the reader will

eventually find the same elements which once served to shape the poet spiritually in the

ode's initial sequence physically wrecking the *Deutschland* in the North Sea. The poet's

autobiography in "Part the First" thus freights the images of the subsequent disaster-

narrative with figural significance: when the literal sea and sand eventually appear in

"Part the Second," they echo these antecedent spiritual referents. And, as they do, the

reader is meant to discern the Divine hidden within them.[31]

The addition of a figural double-valence to the images of "Part the Second"

produces another, more important effect as well. In addition to making the wreck-

narrative resonate with theodicean tones, the poet's proleptic use of the images from

"Part the Second" in "Part the First" enables the profound alteration produced by the

poem's very composition to be read beneath the wreck-narrative itself. In other words,

because the images from the wreck-narrative have *already* been employed in the poem's

opening autobiographical sequence, a subtle recapitulation of that personal narrative is

overlaid on top of the very stanzas from which its images were initially taken. Through

the deformation of the *Deutschland*, the formation of the poet can be read; beneath the

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[31] Miller also notices this proleptic layering: "It is no accident that the poet's experience of grace in the first part of the poem is described in terms of figures of fire, sand, and water. They anticipate the elements literally present in the lightning, sandbar, and ocean waves of the shipwreck," *The Linguistic Moment: From Wordsworth to Stevens* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985), 251. This double valence accords with Vendler's judgement that "'[p]ied' or two-part beauty was, for Hopkins, *the* definitive beauty," *The Breaking of Style: Hopkins, Heaney, Graham* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995), 11.

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surface of the ship's wrecking in Stanzas 12-17, the creation of the poet can be intuited simultaneously—an imagistic underthought which becomes explicit in Stanza 18, but which is already forecast in "Part the First." [32]

The arduous formation of the poet that will occur beneath the narrative of the wreck-stanzas is anticipated by the artisanal metaphors of God's creative action that open and close "Part the First." The ode begins with a juxtaposition of the poet's making and simultaneous near-destruction precisely because he will be (and, indeed, already has been) violently but silently remade into a poet through the experience of writing the narrative section of "The Wreck." By the end of "Part the First," this initial juxtaposition of God's contradictory activity becomes transmuted into the outright paradoxes of Stanza 9: "Beyónd sáying swéet, past télling of tóngue,/ Thou art lightning and love, I found it, a winter and warm" (9.69-70). These creative and destructive aspects of God's interaction with mankind are brought together again in the opening image of Stanza 10; the God who had previously "fástened" and "bóund" the poet's "bónes" and "flésh" in Stanza 1 is here called on to "forge" His will in every man "With an anvil-ding/ And with fire" (1.5, 10.74-75). The lyric sequence with which Hopkins prefaces his ode makes it evident to the reader that, through the moving experience of writing the wreck-narrative, Hopkins' voluntary vow of poetic silence is undone as he is recreated as a poet—while being "álmost únmade" (1.6) through the same process. Thus, while the narrative stanzas of "Part the Second" ostensibly tell the story of the *Deutschland*'s wrecking, the addition of

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[32] The term "underthought" is coined in Hopkins' letter to his friend Alexander Baillie, *Correspondence 1882-1889*, ed. R. K. R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips, vol. 2 of *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 564. Sobolov glosses this "most famous and most obscure" term as designating a "motif or an idea that is not manifested explicitly, but revealed in the choice of diction and imagery," 217n40.

the frame of "Part the First" allows them to communicate what happened to the poet while they were being written as well. "Part the First," therefore, moves Stanza 18 into its medial position as the keystone of the ode because the poet's initial personal overture is precisely what provides the necessary interpretive framework for this crucial, now-central stanza.

This reading of "Part the First" also confirms Vendler's account of the lexical connections made across the poem's two parts from which she constructs an implicit "co-plot," suggested by its conspicuous verbal repetitions. Since the stories of both the tall nun and the poet can be told with the same language, Vendler suggests that a sort of "base" narrative is adumbrated thereby.[33] This narrative, however, is not merely sketched: just as the pivotal moment which she infers from the poem's form is actually present in the ode itself in Stanza 18, so too is the foundation for this implied co-plot itself present in the poem, taking the form of Hopkins' miniaturized retelling of the Passion-narrative in Stanzas 7 and 8. This poetic *ur*-plot of the nun's and the poet's co-plot—appropriately positioned between each of their narratives—culminates in the torrent of grace which bursts from Christ's kenotic self-sacrifice on the Cross, an action which is the narrative, poetic, and theological archetype of both the poet's confession in Stanza 18 and the tall nun's confession in Stanza 24.

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[33] Vendler construes the poem's implicit shared narrative as follows: "'When, at the night that closes *day*, one's *heart* is over-*master*ed by the sense of God's just wrath incurred by one's mortal sin, and of the hell that awaits sinners after *death*, one escapes one's terror and gains hope of *heaven* by *word*ing, with one's *breath*, the power of the *love* of that redeeming *Christ* who *rides* through time.' Something like this, in terms of Hopkins' central vocabulary, is the co-plot of both halves of the ode," "The Wreck of the Deutschland" in *The Authentic Cadence: Centennial Essays on Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 42.

This interpretation of the poem also confirms those readings of "The Wreck" which stress Hopkins' fidelity to the canons of classical rhetoric.[34] "Part the First" is, indeed, an *exordium*, an opening address in which the audience is prepared for what will be said.[35] Yet the first step of rhetorical composition—*inventio*, the "finding and selection of the pertinent material for a particular subject"[36]—is not actually completed until Stanza 18, wherein Hopkins discovers that his own life is part of the "pertinent material" of his ode. In fact, the rhetorical preparation of the reader in "Part the First"— the result of the poet's *dispositio* or "arrangement…of the material resulting from the first step"[37]—is enacted precisely so that his heart's outburst of verse in Stanza 18 will not only echo with the rending of Christ's heart which occurs across Stanzas 7 and 8, but will also prefigure the tall nun's confession in Stanza 24.

"Part the First" also identifies the Agent of the action who is concealed, in Stanza 18, by the passive voice employed in the poet's striking triple address of his heart (18.137-140). The kenotic grace from Christ's Passion which "rídes tíme like ríding a

[34] See, for instance, Michael H. Bright, "The Homiletic Structure of *The Wreck of the Deutschland*," *Renascence* 25:2 (Winter 1973), 95-102; James Finn Cotter, "Rhetoric and Poetic in Hopkins" in *Rereading Hopkins: Selected New Essays*, ed. Francis L. Fennell, in *English Literary Studies* (Victoria: U of Victoria P, 1996), 143-156; Franco Marucci, *The Fine Delight that Fathers Thought: Rhetoric and Medievalism in Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Washington: The Catholic UP, 1994), 48-71, 228-249; and Fredric W. Schlatter, S.J., "Hopkins on the Art of Newman's Prose," *The Hopkins Quarterly* 35:3-4 (Summer-Fall 2008), 75-110. Schlatter's reconstruction of Hopkins' understanding of the compositional principles of both poetry and prose, and their relation to classical rhetoric, is especially illuminating.

[35] James Finn Cotter, "Rhetoric and Poetic in Hopkins," 145.

[36] "Rhetoric and Poetic in Hopkins," 145.

[37] "Rhetoric and Poetic in Hopkins," 145.

ríver," (6.47) and which flowed through the mouth of the nun during her ordeal, finally finds the poet's heart, the "móther of béing" in his "bower of bone" as it unleashes his tears, that "never-eldering revel and river of youth" (18:140, 137, 143). When it does, the reader cannot but recall the first stanza of the ode which refers to this same divine touch. The personal context of the poet's conversion and vocational call, the theological context of Christ's sacrifice, and the immediate, historical context of the *Deutschland*'s wrecking are the necessary frames for the poetic confession which is kindled by this touch—a touch located both at the front and at the center of Hopkins' ode.

There is, therefore, no little irony in Bridges' characterization of Hopkins' ode as "a great dragon folded in the gate" of his poetry for, at the very gate of this formidable dragon is a formative exercise designed to create within the reader the necessary conditions for the poem's reception.[38] The poem's difficult language and elliptical syntax are imposing, but these initial impediments are counterbalanced by the careful arrangement of the poem's content, an arrangement through which it orchestrates its own interpretation. From its rhetorical conditioning of the reader in "Part the First," to the initial narrative stanzas of "Part the Second"—which are themselves recast as the means of the poet's creation—to the announcement and interpretation of the nun's confession which follows thereafter (and flows therefrom), the literary form of the ode is arranged to emphasize the altering touch of the miracle in Stanza 18.

Speech Acts and Self-Creation

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[38] "Part the First" could thus, perhaps, be read as what Joshua Landy calls a "formative fiction"; see his *How to Do Things with Fictions* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012), 8-11.

Hopkins himself wryly affirms the formative power of his ode when he rebuffs Bridges' suggestion that he alter the poem to make it more palatable to contemporary tastes, employing the loaded image of conversion as he writes: "I cannot think of altering anything. Why [should] I? I do not write for the public. You are my public and I hope to convert you" (*CW* I:282). Hopkins knew, as Coleridge wrote of Wordsworth, that "every great and original writer…must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished" and "teach the art by which he is to be seen,"[39] and he goes on, in a later letter, to dismiss Bridges' initial reaction to his ode as simply the first stages of an incomplete process of aesthetic education:

> when a new thing, such as my ventures in the Deutschland are, is presented us our first criticisms are not our truest, best, most homefelt, or most lasting but what comes easiest on the instant...The Deutschland on her first run worked very much and unsettled you...if you had let your thoughts cast themselves they could have been clearer in themselves and more to my tastes too. (*CW* I:295)

Hopkins was sure that, given time, "The Wreck" would have ultimately effected in Bridges a conversion to its novel poetic features—an individual conversion of taste which would have resembled the national conversion of creed which the poem predicts so confidently in its final stanzas. Nor was this faith in his poem misplaced: the ode which Bridges detested so strongly eventually enacted the alteration which Hopkins describes— an alteration to which he could not initially submit, but which his own publication of the poem in 1918 quietly affirms.[40] Though the reader's conversion could be slow—as slow

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[39] William Wordsworth to Lady Beaumont, 21 May 1807, in *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Middle Years*, ed. Ernest de Sélincourt, 2nd edn., rev. Mary Moorman and Alan G. Hill, vol. I (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969), 150.

[40] The embarrassed Introduction and apologetic notes which appear in Bridges' first edition of Hopkins' poetry belie the pains taken in his life-long custody of his friend's poetry—a care, surprisingly, which was coeval with the very dismissals quoted at the

as Saint Augustine's it may be—the "swéet skíll" (10.78) of the poem's rhetoric has no other aim.

Yet, in addition to the Augustinian "língering óut" of rhetorical change, there is also Paul's "crásh" (10.78, 77): the radical moment of instantaneous alteration which is announced within the poem, the transformative miracle of which Hopkins' formative ode is itself the remainder. From its rhetorical conditioning of the reader in "Part the First," to the initial narrative stanzas of "Part the Second" which this conditioning recasts as a prelude to the poet's confession, to the announcement and interpretation of the nun's confession which follows thereafter, the entire ode is formally arrayed around the miraculous moment of Stanza 18. The poem, as it were, exfoliates outward from the center of this touch at the center of the poem, calling the poet's own history into its design while drawing the nun's confession into a personal (and parallel) framework. It remains only to consider, in this final section, a last pair of paradoxes directly: that the poem changes the poet from within, and that the ode ultimately becomes an event in Hopkins' own life.

Hopkins alludes in passing to the experience of Stanza 18 in his later theological reflection, "On Personality, Grace and Free Will." At the end of this essay, he distinguishes, within the impulse of the assisting grace that God grants to the free will, three separate activities, the last of which is the activity of elevation,

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outset of this article. As MacKenzie puts it in the Introduction to his facsimile edition of Hopkins' poetry: "Bridges about 1878 demonstrated his faith in Hopkins's future as a copious poet by setting aside for his autographs a thick album of hand-made paper," and even "copied in an artistic hand most of the autographs into a second smaller book…with the intention of lending it around to those most likely to recognize the originality and genius of Hopkins's verse," *Later Poetic Manuscripts*, 3.

which lifts the receiver from one cleave of being to another and to a vital act in Christ: this is truly God's finger touching the very vein of personality, which nothing else can reach and man can respond to by…bare acknowledgment only, the counter stress which God alone can feel ('*subito probas eum*'), the aspiration in answer to his inspiration. Of this I have written above and somewhere else long ago.[41]

Humphry House's suggestion that Hopkins' final, off-hand gesture to something written "somewhere else and long ago" "may refer to the *Wreck of the Deutschland*" is confirmed, not only by the obvious lexical resonances of this passage with the poem, but also by those which are obliquely echoed in Hopkins' casual but meaningful citation of the Latin text of *The Book of Job*.[42] The verses out of which Hopkins draws a fragmentary mnemonic *incipit* contain a pair of questions which Job poses to God: "What is a man that thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost thou set thy heart upon him? Thou visitest him early in the morning, and thou provest him suddenly [*subito probas illum*]" (Job 7: 14-15).[43] Hopkins' specific reference to God's sudden, fresh, proving touch—"the counter stress which God alone can feel"—as well as the means by which it is accomplished ("God's finger") amount to a disarticulated quotation of the last lines of the ode's opening stanza: "Does thou touch me afresh?/ Óver agáin I féel thy fínger and fínd thée" (1.7-8).[44]

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[41] *Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 158.

[42] *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. Humphry House (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1959), 418.

[43] *The Vulgate Bible, Volume III: The Poetical Books: Douay-Rheims Translation*, ed. Swift Edgar, with Angela M. Kinney, Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library 8 (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), 27, 26.

[44] The last line of the first stanza might also contain an allusion which would have been meaningful to Hopkins' Jesuit readers. In the Introduction to his edition of the writings of Saint Ignatius, Ganss recounts that when the "First Sketch of the Institute of the Society

Yet, with few exceptions, critics have not followed House in finding an allusion to "The Wreck" in these reflections, perhaps because discussions of this theological passage have stressed the contingency and the dependency of the recipient of God's "elevating grace" at the expense of the radical transformation which this notion also implies.[45] In "The Creation of the Self in Gerard Manley Hopkins," for example—the first of his critical essays on the poet—J. Hillis Miller characterizes this aspiration "of man towards God," not as a moment of profound change, but as merely the "tiny corner [which] is left for man's free will," a precarious point of contact which depends both "on God's continual gift of fresh grace" to the soul as well as "on man's continual 'saying Yes' to God."[46]

Miller's most recent reengagement with Hopkins, however, preserves the structure—but alters the emphasis—of this earlier account by proposing a new paradigm for reading Hopkins' language. In his chapter on the poet in *Topographies*, which incorporates the analysis of his earlier essay, "Naming and Doing: Speech Acts in Hopkins," Miller develops the hypothesis that Hopkins' poetry is not simply descriptive, but performative. After quoting from a pair of letters wherein Hopkins expresses concern that writing poetry could, as he puts it to Bridges, "interfere with [his] state and

of Jesus" was read to Pope Paul III, he remarked: "The finger of God is here," *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, 45. My thanks to Joaquin Kuhn for drawing this to my attention.

[45] See, however, Jerome Bump, "'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and the Dynamic Sublime," *ELH* 41:1 (Spring 1974), 128, and James Finn Cotter, *Inscape: The Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 1972), 28, who do connect this passage with the last verse of the first stanza of "The Wreck."

[46] "The Creation of the Self in Gerard Manley Hopkins," *ELH* 22:4 (December 1955), 317-318.

vocation," Miller considers why Hopkins might have thought so: "Hopkins may have

been anxious about his great gifts and clear calling as a poet" precisely because he feared

"that his poetry might really be performatively efficacious. Far from being trivially

descriptive, his poetry might work, might make something happen...If that were the case,

his poetry might be a species of dangerous and secular magic."[47] But no sooner does

Miller propose this reading than he greatly circumscribes the possible occurrences of

performatives in Hopkins' poetry. Although his essay concludes with a searching analysis

of the performative nature of Hopkins' poetic ejaculations, utterances, and sighs, Miller

nevertheless holds—in terms that recall his first engagement with the poet—that "man's

'least sighs' of correspondence to God's grace" cannot truly be performatives because,

among other things, they "do not independently make anything happen. Man's saying

yeses are heard only by God. They do not have the public quality requisite for a true

performative" (160).

Yet all the criteria of a "true performative" seem to be present in the 18th stanza

of "The Wreck," even—and especially—this requisite "public quality." Although "words

break" from a poet who is "all alone," Hopkins' striking gesture of self-address to his

own heart already attenuates his solitude because this construction places him, as it were,

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[47] Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995), 154. See also "Naming and Doing: Speech Acts in Hopkins's Poems," *Religion and Literature* 22:2–3 (Summer-Autumn 1990), 173-191, and his related observations in *The Linguistic Moment*, 244. Miller's hypothesis also accords with the powerful reactions which were reported by Hopkins' first readers. Happening upon several of his poems, R. W. Dixon, writes: "I have read them many times with the greatest admiration: in the power of forcibly ^& delicately^ giving the essence of things in nature, & of carrying one out of one's self with healing, these poems are unmatched," and adds that, "The Deutschland is enormously powerful," *CW*, 1:383. For a study of this dimension of Hopkins' poetry in a theological context, see Francis X. McAloon, S.J., *The Language of Poetry as a Form of Prayer: the Theo-Poetic Aesthetics of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen P, 2008).

outside of himself, as a witness—along with the reader—to his own poetic confession. Moreover, the specific readers whom Hopkins calls to co-witness his heart's confession were not just the small cadre of correspondents to which he sent his subsequent poems; instead, the audience imagined for "The Wreck" was Hopkins' fellow English Jesuits and other readers of *The Month*. Even though the poem would have appeared under the pseudonym "Brân Maenefa"—Welsh for "Crow of Maenefa," a mountain near St. Beuno's College—the publication of the poem would have guaranteed the "public quality" of the speech act.[48] Furthermore, although no specific formula is associated with the tradition of the "gift of tears," the *donum lacrimarum* is a conventional consolation which would have been easily recognized by Hopkins' Jesuit readership.

But the most important condition of the "true performative" which is fulfilled in Stanza 18 is the poet's ignorance of the meaning of his poetic confession—an ignorance on which his radical transformation actually depends. Miller notes that a "true performative…is a contingent act in the human and social world that makes something happen…though it can never be known for sure beforehand exactly what that something will be," and it is precisely this asymmetry between the power of Hopkins' performative language and the knowledge of its meaning which he himself affirms.[49] In the space of

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[48] On the pseudonym Hopkins uses for this and two other poems, see MacKenzie, *Poetical*, 353n and 353-354n7, and Norman White, "Hopkins as the Crow of Maenefa," *The Hopkins Quarterly* 23:3-4 (Summer-Fall 1996),113-120.

[49] *Topographies*, 157. This asymmetrical relationship between the power of a speech act and its meaning illustrates Miller's congruence with Paul de Man; see his chapter on de Man's account of performatives in *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001), 140-154. Similarly, Miller's related conclusion in *Topographies* that "Hopkins's poems are not lawful. They make their own laws," 168 illustrates his engagement with Jacques Derrida's critiques of (and contributions to) speech act theory; see *Speech Acts in Literature*, 63-139.

four words, the poet's gift of tears is announced not with calm, surefooted certainty, but rather with an exclamation which is then followed by a question: "Why, tears! is it?" (18.142). So too, at the end of the stanza, Hopkins wonders at his own heart's meaning: "What can it be, this glee? the good you have there of your own?" (18.144). While his incredulity does not diminish his conviction about the import of his tears, Hopkins' hesitant and uncertain announcement of his own miraculous experience nevertheless reveals the final—and closely related—condition of the "true performative," contingency: performative utterances can fail, and they often do.

With this set of criteria, one can determine the specific performatives that are attempted in Stanza 18 in particular and "The Wreck" in general. The central stanza of the poem marks the public discovery and announcement of a private and conventional consolation. Although the "gift of tears" has been given to the anonymous Jesuit author of the ode—and for reasons that are obscure even to himself—its miraculous character is as certain as its cause: his tears flow from both the *Deutschland*'s foundering and the nuns' drowning, and impel the poem's composition. The speech act accomplished in this stanza enables the performative that is enacted through the form of the entire poem, which is recast as an interpretation of the meaning of the poet's experience. The clearest statement of the poet's own interpretation is found in the final crescendo of his ode, in the prayer that Hopkins makes to the nun on behalf of "rare-dear Britain": "Our Kíng back, Oh, upon Énglish sóuls!" (35.276, 278). This prayer measures the distance between Hopkins' initial conception of the ode and what it becomes in its conclusion: his rector's off-hand remark that "someone would write a poem on the subject" of the shipwreck has ultimately led to a confident petition, in the virtual presence of the poet's fellow Jesuits,

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for England's return to Roman Catholicism; the hesitant chronicler of the narrative

stanzas has becomes an epic poet of divine action. Furthermore, the register that Hopkins

reaches at the end of "The Wreck" seems to be supported by something in excess of pious

Christian hope: his voice is imbued with a triumphant confidence in an imminent event

which he would not need to wait long to see. While Hopkins's ode on the *Deutschland*

obviously did not herald a Catholic renaissance in England, the performative prayer

offered in its final stanzas completes the interpretation of Stanza 18 by opening itself to

precisely this possibility of radical change on a national scale.

That such a dramatic, world-historical event could be connected with the poem he

composed in response to the *Deutschland*'s wrecking would certainly have made trial of

Hopkins' personal humility as well as his sense that "[b]rilliancy [did] not suit" the

Jesuits (*CW*, 1:503). But it would not have tried his faith; indeed, the thought that he had

received "the gift of tears" simply for the sake of an aesthetic enterprise would have

seemed far more incredible. Moreover, the significant year of the shipwreck would have

given Hopkins further confidence in the national import of his poem. In addition to the

liturgical calendar—which is acknowledged in both the dedication and the 30th stanza of

the ode—Hopkins would have seen the *Deutschland*'s foundering in the winter of 1875

with a view to the 25th anniversary of the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy. On the

occasion of the restoration in 1850, John Henry Cardinal Newman preached his famous

sermon, "The Second Spring," an oration which, as Michael D. Moore has shown, had a

discernible impact on Hopkins.[50] Moore also notes that Hopkins shared Newman's

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[50] Michael D. Moore, "Newman and the 'Second Spring' of Hopkins's Poetry," *The Hopkins Quarterly* 6 (1979), 119-137.

"preoccupation with the providential drama implicit in personal, national, and cosmic events" (120).[51] In "The Second Spring," the country's most famous convert invited his listeners not only to hope for the very mass reversion to Catholicism that Hopkins envisions at the end of "The Wreck," but he also touches on the means by which England's return to the Church would be achieved: "as that suffering of the Martyrs is not yet recompensed, so, perchance, it is not yet exhausted. Something, for what we know, remains to be undergone, to complete the necessary sacrifice."[52] If Hopkins had linked the December deaths of the nuns on the *Deutschland* with the necessary sacrifice that "remain[ed] to be undergone" before the end of England's Anglican "winter," it would explain the prophetic prayer of the ode's final stanzas.[53] It would also explain certain

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[51] Moore further notes that Hopkins' and Newman's shared belief in this providential drama at work in world history is the "thesis upon which the argument" of "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is based, 120.

[52] John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*, ed. James Tolhurst (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 2007), 179.

[53] While scholars have read "The Wreck of the Deutschland" in connection with Hopkins's other poems written in honor of female martyrs—see, for example, Francis Noel Lees, "'The strong spur, live and lancing': The Motive of Martyrdom in *The Wreck*" in *Readings of* The Wreck: *Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Gerard Manley Hopkins'* The Wreck of the Deutschland, ed. Peter Milward, S.J. and Raymond Schoder, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola UP, 1976), 42-51—it must nevertheless be noted that Hopkins would likely have scrupled about conferring such a title on the five Franciscan nuns drowned in the *Deutschland*'s wreck. Since the five nuns are not actually put to death for their faith, the poet, in his dedication, is careful to identify them only as "exiles by the Falk Laws" (*Poetical* 119), who were, in the words of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, "faithful in their confession until the end of their lives," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s. v. "Confessor," last modified July 17, 2013, http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04215a.htm. Nichols makes exactly this point in his commentary: "Of course, for one to be acknowledged a martyr the Church must find that one died through testifying to a truth of faith or morals. The Franciscans on the *Deutschland* did no such thing. But the tall nun, whom Hopkins treats as their representative, died confessing her faith nonetheless, and the poet regards them, then, as auxiliaries to the *martyrum candidatus exercitus*, 'white-robed army of martyrs'," *Hopkins: Theologian's Poet*, 199.

features of the poems written concurrently with it that were explicitly connected with the anniversary of the hierarchy's restoration. In addition to the short English lyric marking the 25th anniversary of Bishop Thomas Brown's episcopacy, "The Silver Jubilee," Hopkins wrote two related poems for the same occasion in Latin and Welsh—the latter of which was signed with the same pseudonym under which "The Wreck" was to have appeared in *The Month*. Yet praise for Bishop Brown's actual anniversary, in all three poems, seems ancillary to the momentous event of the restoration that makes Brown's anniversary possible. In a passage from the Latin poem—from an opening sequence that the poet was obliged to discard because readers found it "unintelligible" (*Poetical*, 351)—the poet speaks darkly of "additional signs" that supplement natural order which, nevertheless, go unperceived. Tellingly, the last such sign which indicates the significance of the "circling year" is the poem itself, which turns the Bishop's anniversary into "a red-letter day" (351); the poem in itself, in other words, serves to articulate nature's implicit theological message.

But because the events anticipated in Newman's sermons and the final stanzas of the "The Wreck" did not follow thereafter, the poem's interpretation of its own "event"— an event encompassing both the nun's death, the poet's tears, and the poem itself— appears, retroactively, to be a performative failure. Although the announcement of the poet's tears in Stanza 18 would have successfully created a new fact "in the human and social world" of the English Jesuits, the import that Hopkins fixes to this fact is what J. L. Austin terms a "misfire," one revealing that its author lacked the prophetic office which

he might have thought his experience of the "gift of tears" had conferred. [54, 55]

Commenting on "The Wreck" in 1881, on the occasion of his sending Bridges another poem on a shipwreck, Hopkins writes: "I think the best lines in the <u>Deutschland</u> are better than the best in the other ["The Loss of the Eurydice"]. One may be biased in favour of one's firstborn though. There are some immaturities in it I should never be guilty of now" (*CW*, 1:424). Of these "immaturities," the poet says no more; but the fact that the "Eurydice" lacks the ambitious scale —and the personal character—of "The Wreck," and ends only with a prayer for the souls lost at sea instead of the nation as a whole, would have indicated to Bridges which "immaturities" in the first poem were corrected with the second.

And yet, in and through the poem's apparent misfires, a different performative succeeds: that of Hopkins' own self-creation as a poet. Out of the poem's failed prophetic illocutions emerge the successful perlocution of poetic self-constitution, an auto-genesis achieved by Hopkins' own poem.[56] The implicit formative process at work within the narrative stanzas of the ode is completed only with the poet's embrace and ratification of

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[54] See J. L. Austin, "Lecture II" in *How to do Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1975), 15-25. In this lecture, Austin notes that since certain speech acts depend on the speaker's authority to perform them, an unqualified speaker who lacks that authority may say the right words but does not actually perform a true speech act thereby.

[55] For a reading connecting "The Wreck" with the genre of the prophet's "commissioning narrative," see John J. Glavin, "'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and 'Lycidas': ubique naufragium est," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22:4 (1980), 526-529.

[56] According to Austin, an "illocution" is "the performance of an act in saying something as opposed to performance of an act of saying something," *How to do Things with Words*, 100-101. Perlocutionary acts, in contrast, "produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons," 101.

God's calling through his public re-creation as the poet of *Deutschland*'s wrecking.[57]

Thus, if, as Robert Boyle has argued, Hopkins becomes embarrassed by the youthful, ardent hopes embodied in "The Wreck" and reflects on them bitterly in his late sonnet, "The Shepherd's Brow," this subsequent embarrassment does not undo the performative act which is accomplished in his ode—that self-addressing speech act through which Hopkins becomes a poet, the exhalation of the inspiration given in and through God's transforming touch.[58] Even though he describes himself, in his late letters and poems, as an artistic "eunuch," "The Wreck" remained, for Hopkins, his "firstborn"; though he calls himself a "lonely began," there was still, necessarily, a beginning, a starting place, a promised poetic calling that Hopkins felt that he never fulfilled—but which "The Wreck of the Deutschland," nonetheless, inaugurated.[59] Indeed, if Boyle is right to read a retrospective on "The Wreck" in one of Hopkins' late sonnets, then perhaps his last sonnet, "To R.B.," contains a more favorable reflection on the dramatic beginning of his artistic career. The sexual imagery of this sonnet's octave is congruent with Hopkins'

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[57] J. Hillis Miller's impression that a "new experience of grace occurs within the poem itself and is identical with the writing of it," *The Linguistic Moment*, 255, confirms the reading put forward by Michael Sprinker in *A Counterpoint of Dissonance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990). But, although it identifies "The Wreck" as a "poem about the birth of the poet," 100—and even affirms that "[t]hose commentators who have labeled the poem autobiographical do not go far enough," 4—Sprinker's reading of the poem ultimately rests on the very distinction between "the empirical, historical self" and Hopkins' "poetic identity," 4, which is precisely what the ode undoes.

[58] "'Man Jack the Man Is': The Wreck from the Perspective of 'The Shepherd's Brow,'" in *Readings of The Wreck: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Gerard Manley Hopkins'* The Wreck of the Deutschland, ed. Peter Milward, S.J. and Raymond Schoder, S.J. (Chicago: Loyola UP, 1976), 111-114.

[59] For Hopkins self-description as a "lonely began," see *Poetical*, 181 and for "time's eunuch," see *Poetical*, 201 and *CW*, 2:744; for his characterization of "The Wreck" as his "firstborn," see *CW*, 1:424.

other late self-descriptions. But, crucially, the frustrated eunuch of the present becomes a remembering "widow" of the past (*Poetical*, 204, l.6), the impotent, sterile male becomes a forlorn but fruitful mother, wedded to a departed spouse, the Psyche to an absconded Cupid. The momentary inspiration which occurred in writing "The Wreck" was, indeed, "quenchèd faster than it came," (l. 3) but its arrival permanently changed the poet, leaving him with an unshakable conviction about the poem's ultimate source—in addition, of course, to the "immortal song" (l. 4) itself.

<center>*   *   *</center>

The performative dimension of Hopkins' poetry leads to a paradox: Hopkins' central poetic speech acts in Stanza 18 are themselves what truly constitute his own creation as a poet. Through this apparent paradox, however, the manifest paradoxes of the poem can be resolved. A purely formal reading of the poem would founder on a series of lacunae, as the ode insistently points its reader towards its author's biography and life. Yet a so-called "biographical reading" of the poem would misinterpret its very cues, as the crucial event in Hopkins' life to which the poem refers does not actually lie outside of it. The biographical material to which the form directs its reader is, instead, contained within the poem itself, in the affective touch located both at the front and at the center of the ode— an intertwining of content and form enabled by the performative acts at the ode's transformative center.[60]

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[60] This self-referential structure could perhaps be called the final paradox of the ode since, even though Hopkins is *at* the center of the poem, he himself is not its actual center. Instead, within his own heart, he discovers a presence which is, in the Augustinian idiom, *interior intimo suo*, more inward than his most inward part. This is the presence

Just as Tennyson's elegy is a poem in search of a concept of form, "The Wreck of the Deutschland" is a phenomenon in search of a theory. This chapter has employed close reading to elucidate the poet's proleptic strategies and speech act theory to parse his poetic performatives; and it cites evidence from relevant theological, historical, and personal material as well. But, when applied to "The Wreck," the traditional tools of literary study—of formal analysis and contextual scrutiny—reveal their own limits, because the distinction between work and author they take for granted is put into question by the very internal process that they demonstrate. The self-formation that Hopkins achieves through "The Wreck" thus illustrates the need for a theoretical account which would describe it, one which sees the poem as a locus of change and emphasizes the agency of form in the life of its author. For, although most methods insist on their separation, in "The Wreck of the Deutschland," form is both a literary text and a lived context, a pattern and a process, the object of analysis as well as a shaping, situating, constitutive force. In the following chapter, this unity will become even more all-encompassing: Walter Pater employs the same self-shaping power of literary form that Hopkins harnesses less dramatically but more comprehensively over the course of his career as a writer.

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affirmed in the last line of the ode's first stanza, with Hopkins' feeling of God's finger finding, in the poet, Himself: "Óver agáin I féel thy fínger and find thee." Critics might, therefore, consider whether, despite its heuristic utility, the term "autobiography" should be set aside in connection with "The Wreck," for even when he attempts to narrate his own history, Hopkins' poetic confession accomplishes the same de-centering that Jean-Luc Marion observes in Augustine; see *In the Self's Place: The Approach of Saint Augustine*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2012), 43-45.

Aestheticism's Ascetic: Walter Pater and the Writing Life

Introduction: Rebel or Pussycat?

> The human soul and its limits, the range of inner human experiences reached so far, the heights, depths, and distances of these experiences, the whole history of the soul *so far* and its as yet unexhausted possibilities: that is the predestined hunting ground for a born psychologist and lover of the "great hunt."
>
> —Friedrich Nietzsche[1]

At the outset of a late chapter in *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche imagines a lament going up from "women and artists"—two groups that supposedly share an instinctive prejudice: "'Oh, this dreadful science…it always gets to the *bottom* of things! [*sie kommt immer dahinter!*]'"[2] Even though both recoil from science and its probing discoveries, neither one actually knows what these discoveries entail, or of what they actually consist. On Nietzsche's acerbic analogy, women and artists know as much about science as "blind men about colors"[3]—an assertion which, even for the writer who famously philosophized with a hammer, seems rather blunt. His ventriloquized outcry, however, is to his purpose: the feminine and artistic types offended by the science which always, according to another translation, "gets underneath"[4] are later synthesized (ironically enough) in the cerebral man of science himself, that eponymous figure appearing in a subsequent section of this chapter, entitled, "We Scholars." This unexpected alignment is due to the latter's

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[1] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Beyond Good and Evil," in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1966), 249.

[2] "Beyond Good and Evil," 311. See Nietzsche, *Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* VI.2, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968), 204.

[3] "Beyond Good and Evil," 311.

[4] See Arthur C. Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 53.

unassuming outward form: while women and artists are at least scandalized by science, the scholars who make such discoveries are oblivious to their own disruptive power. Women, artists, and scholars are, thus, all unfavorably compared to the genius, in contrast to whom "the scholar, the scientific average man, always rather resembles an old maid…Indeed," adds Nietzsche, "one even concedes to both, to the scholars and to old maids, as it were by way of a compensation, that they are respectable."[5]

When *Beyond Good and Evil* appeared in 1886, Walter Pater was already a respectable scholar, living in Oxford with his sisters, enjoying a modest (but burgeoning) literary reputation for such creative efforts as his recently published first novel, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Though he had made a scandalous debut in 1873 with *The Renaissance*, Pater thereafter became a compendium of the very types which Nietzsche denigrates: an effeminate scholar-artist who was "only an instrument, let us say a *mirror* […] accustomed to submitting to whatever wants to be known, lacking any other pleasure than that provided by knowledge."[6] Nor can one miss, in the astringent description of the scholar which follows in Nietzsche's text, a figure who *does* bear a certain resemblance to Pater:

> The objective man is an instrument, a precious, easily damaged and tarnished measuring instrument and reflecting apparatus […] he is not an end, […] a conclusion—and even less a beginning, a begetting and first cause, something solid, powerful and based firmly on itself that wants to be master: but rather only a delicate, empty, elegant, flexible mold which has first to wait for some content and substance so as "to form" itself by it—as a rule a man without substance or content, a "selfless" man.[7]

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[5] "Beyond Good and Evil," 315.

[6] "Beyond Good and Evil," 317.

[7] Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 116.

In other words, the "objective" scholar, paradoxically, possesses nothing objective himself, and is, instead, simply a "delicate, empty, elegant, [and] flexible mold" for the foreign forms which shape him. Thus does Nietzsche remark: "[w]hatever still remains to him of his 'own person' seems to him accidental, often capricious, more often disturbing: so completely has he become a passage and reflection of forms and events not his own."[8]

A great irony, however, is latent in this slighting characterization. According to Nietzsche, this kind of scholar must be devoid of both content and willfulness—yet the English critic whom he so strongly resembles actually accomplished the very task that Nietzsche reserves only for the genius himself: the task of *creat[ing] values.*[9] Walter Pater, that placid late-Victorian man of letters, is now readily acknowledged as both a "conclusion" and a "first cause," a high-water mark of the period's verbal art, as well as one of the architects of Aestheticism, that *avant-garde* of the 20th century's *avant-garde*. Pater specialists from Buckler to Monsman, modernism scholars from Menand to Saunders, and critics-at-large from Poirier to Kermode all affirm that, in Pater's writings, something new appears in English letters, a mode in which manner is quietly elevated over matter, style over substance, and form over content.[10] Arch-Victorian and proto-

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[8] *Beyond Good and Evil*, 115.

[9] *Beyond Good and Evil*, 123.

[10] See William E. Buckler, *Walter Pater: The Critic as Artist of Ideas*, Gerald Monsman, *Walter Pater's Art of Autobiography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), Louis Menand, *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Max Saunders, *Self Impression: Life-Writing, Autobiografiction, and the Forms of Modern Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), "The Pater of Joyce and Eliot," in *Addressing Frank Kermode: Essays in Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. Margaret Tudeau-Clayton and Martin Warner (London: Macmillan, 1991), Frank Kermode, *The Romantic Image* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957).

modernist, Pater not only anticipates those Nietzschean "philosophers of the future" who will "let themselves be called critics" because "they will...be experimenters," but he even fulfills the rare requirement identified in an aphorism in *The Will to Power*: "One is an artist at the cost of regarding that which all non-artists call 'form' as content, as 'the matter itself.'"[11]

There may be no contradiction in Pater's dual-status as the pinnacle of his own age and the progenitor of the next—but how can he be, at once, both a scholarly old maid and a Nietzschean artist-philosopher? How can he be, to use Phillip Toynbee's epithets, both "rebel" and "pussycat"?[12] Even leaving aside the putative disappearance of his radical intellectual agenda in the aftermath of *The Renaissance*, the question persists because Pater's mode of life, in each phase of his career, was identical. As one of his first biographers affirms, "Pater regarded his Oxford life primarily as a life of quiet literary study": "The morning, he used to say, was the time for creation, the afternoon for correction. His habits were absolutely regular."[13] Nor can this question of the relationship between Pater's personal life and literary output be dismissed as extraneous, for modes of life, in each phase of his career, are his focus: the relationship between work and life is precisely what his critical and creative writing—in every period—brings into clear view. Indeed, even before 1878 when he inaugurates (and simultaneously theorizes) the primary vehicle of his subsequent literary output with his first "imaginary portrait"—that

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[11] "Beyond Good and Evil," trans. Kaufman, 134; *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), 433 [§ 818].

[12] "Rebel into Pussycat," *The Observer*, 16 August 1970, 21.

[13] A. C. Benson, *Walter Pater* (London: Macmillan, 1926), 23, 19.

paradoxical form of "fictional biography" wherein real historical milieux are distilled through the personal lives, abstract thoughts, and creative enterprises of non-existent subjects—Pater's critical writing already anticipates this innovation. The "imaginary portrait" is that hybrid of scholarship and art to which all of Pater's writing constantly aspires.

With each imaginary portrait, Pater creates explanatory contexts for the artwork of each epoch that he considers by recreating each epoch in and through his own peculiar artistic mode. By exploring, beneath the fixed form of accepted history, an invented space wherein part and whole, contingency and necessity, and personal style and public taste can circulate freely, he shows how the characteristic innovations of each age were possible—but how was Pater's *own* art possible? A paradox seems to lurk within Pater's proprietary form, an expectation which it always creates, but never explicitly fulfills: that of the imaginary *self*-portrait, the fictional *auto*biography of the artist himself. With each new exploration of life and work—sketches in the spirit of Vasari and Diogenes Laertes, but liberated from even their gentle constraints to historical fact—an unwritten writer's life is implied. In every imaginary portrait, the silhouette of the author himself remains beyond the frame, the impossible (yet necessary) picture which Pater never draws, but which all of his portraits, nevertheless, suggest: the image of a Victorian antiquarian of exquisite sensitivity and erudition, a scholar with a penchant for the marginal and the obscure, a lover of rare art and—to borrow a phrase—strange souls.[14]

The argument of this chapter will, in due course, fill in this darkly adumbrated

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[14] See Dennis Donoghue's biography, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995).

silhouette; yet it will do so, not by using Pater's own imaginative method, nor any of those employed by his best modern interpreters—that is, of intellectual bibliography (Inman), literary biography (Donoghue), or psychoanalytic criticism (Bloom, Monsman).[15] Rather, the argument advanced in this chapter—as paradoxical as it is tautological—is that *Pater's art is already his own portrait*: his writings are, at once and in themselves, the very same personal acts which, in his created portraits of invented subjects, he constantly juxtaposes. If, in Pater's *own* work, this same kind of contrast cannot be made, it is because the peculiar feature of his art is that literary output and personal life have come together to such an extent that the very stratifications which he presents throughout his oeuvre are, in his own case, impossible. Pater's imaginary portraits are, for him, an anthology of the imaginative acts of his Bergsonian *moi profound*: deliberate, creative events in their actual author's life. The form of his work, then, only *seems* to supersede its content, but it is actually identical with it; life and work, in Pater's writing, do not admit a distinction.

A remark put into the mouth of Wilde's representative artist in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—a remark, amusingly, addressed to the novel's own stand-in for Pater himself—may be taken as an epitome of this argument: "every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter."[16] Like many of Wilde's dicta, the

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[15] Billie Andrew Inman, *Walter Pater's Reading: A Bibliography of his Library Borrowings and Literary References*, 2 vol., (New York: Garland, 1990), Harold Bloom, "Introduction," Walter Pater, *Selected Writings of Walter Pater*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), Gerald Monsman, *Walter Pater's Art of Autobiography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

[16] *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. III, "The Picture of Dorian Gray: The 1890 and 1891 Texts," ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 7.

import (and critical acumen) of this formulation is too easily overlooked; this, in fact, is one of the keenest readings of Pater's characteristic genre, anticipating Joseph Brodsky's—more general but equally acute—observation that "a writer's biography is in his twists of language."[17] In Pater's case, his real biography is—to return to the Nietzschean idiom—the "range of inner human experiences" which are reached in the tangential, fictional figures on which he trains his focus: "the heights, depths, and distances of these experiences" constituting, for him, both "the whole history of the soul *so far* and its as yet unexhausted possibilities."[18] Thus does Nietzsche's "great hunt" for culture become, in Pater, a relentless drive toward *self*-culture insofar as he lived out, through his writing, "forms and events not his own."[19]

"Life is change, to cease to change is to cease to live."[20] James Anthony Froude's motto which appears in his novel, *The Nemesis of Faith*, echoed throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century; and the maxim is exemplified through the poets which constitute the focus of the first part of this study. Pater, too, no less than Tennyson and Hopkins, effects a self-formation through his literary form. Indeed, more than any other author considered in this dissertation, Pater lived through his work. But *un*like these other authors, Pater alone does not truly change; his work is neither a vehicle for consolation (Tennyson), nor a means of transformation (Hopkins), nor—as will be shown in the last chapter—an arena for critical, self-altering representation (Wilde). Instead, Pater only

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[17] Joseph Brodsky, *Less Than One* (NY: Penguin Books, 1986), 3.

[18] "Beyond Good and Evil," trans. Kaufman, 249

[19] *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Hollingdale, 115.

[20] *The Nemesis of Faith; Shadows of the Clouds* (New York: Garland, 1975), 34.

develops: the coordinates of his personal and intense self-cultivation, clear from the very outset of his work, guide a career—and a life—of exfoliation, elaboration, and growth. His, then, was—to employ Henri Focillon's phrase—a "life of forms," and it is no accident that the title of an art historian's account of its epochs should also be the perfect designation for Pater's own artistic form of life.[21]

I.   Aesthetic Criticism

Content and Its Discontents: Pater's Crystal Type

> "anyhow, my poems, whether well or badly done, always say something"
> Here we have the principle and origin of an infinity of horrors.
> "Well or badly"—what indifference! "Something"— what presumption!
>
> —Paul Valéry[22]

Though there are no radical changes to track across Pater's career, his debut reveals, as it were, the accelerated—but not instantaneous—genesis of his unique form of writing. In two early papers delivered to small audiences at Oxford in 1864, one can observe the content of his philosophical underpinnings being metabolized into the proprietary Paterian mode that they will ultimately assume.

Two weeks after being elected a Fellow of Brasenose College, Pater read a paper to the Old Mortality—a lively essay society taking its name from Walter Scott's novel of the same name. While the text of the paper itself has not survived, its content can be inferred from one audience member's reminiscences—as well as from the stiff reaction

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[21] Henri Focillon, *Life of Forms in Art* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1942).

[22] "Analects," trans. Stuart Gilbert, in *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, ed. Jackson Mathews, vol. 14 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 107.

which it provoked. In his diary, R. S. Brooke, a Corpus Christi undergraduate of a rather

pious turn of mind, describes Pater's debut with a hostility which was, evidently, not

peculiar to him alone:

> Pater's essay this evening was one of the most thoroughly infidel
> productions it has ever been our pain to listen to. The writer in fact made
> no secret of his ideas. He advocated "self-culture" upon eminently selfish
> principles, and for what to us appeared, a most unsatisfactory end. To sit
> in one's study all [day?] and contemplate the beautiful is not a useful even
> if it is an agreeable occupation; but if it were both useful and agreeable, it
> would hardly be worth while to spend so much trouble upon what may at
> any time be wrested from you. If a future existence is to be disbelieved the
> motto "Let us eat and drink for to-morrow we die," is infinitely
> preferable.[23]

Brooke, who was scheduled to read an essay to the Society the following week, took that

opportunity to respond to the most execrable aspect of Pater's presentation, mentioned in

passing at the end of the passage above. In a subsequent diary entry, he recalls how, with

his own paper, he attempted "to shew the absurdity of that belief put prominently forward

by W. H. Pater on Feb. 20th, 'that a future state is impracticable'"; the substance of both

his reply—and Pater's own position as it appeared to Brooke—is then given:

> He talks of "Subjective Immortality" as something different from
> Annihilation…This apparently subtle distinction means no more than that
> all men undergo Annihilation, but that in some cases they leave friends
> behind them, in other cases they do not. Therefore to talk of "Subjective
> Immortality" is simply to talk nonsense.[24]

Given Brooke's specific (and repeated) reference to the "Subjective Immortality"

that the self-cultivating scholar will attain through his work, as well as the general

popularity of German idealism among intellectually heterodox Oxford figures like Pater,

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[23] Qtd. in Gerald Monsman, *Oxford University's Old Mortality Society* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1968), 84, braces in original.

[24] *Oxford University's Old Mortality Society*, 85-86.

Gerald Monsman concludes that the content of Pater's paper was most likely drawn from Johann Gottlieb Fichte, whose popular writings would have been known to Pater since 1860.[25] Fichte's thought would have provided Pater with a firm support for his emerging personal creed, offering him an implicit defense of "sit[ting] in one's study" and contemplat[ing] the beautiful" which was justified neither by the traditional appeals to social utility or to spiritual perfection—nor even to the universal objectivity of truth.[26] Using Fichte, Pater could found his initial defense of self-culture on contingency, personality, and proclivity: the scholar develops himself for the sake of the authorial afterlife which his work might one day find in later, sympathetic readers. Monsman is, therefore, quite right to characterize Pater's initial self-sketch of the scholar as an image of "Fichte's Ideal Student."[27]

But, despite the impeccable philosophical pedigree of his inaugural address, a flaw runs through Pater's defense of this ideal student and the concomitant program of

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[25] See Billie Andrew Inman, *Walter Pater's Reading: A Bibliography of his Library Borrowings and Literary References*, 1:14-19.

[26] Fichte's philosophy would have appealed to Pater for several reasons; in such works as "The Vocation of the Scholar" and "the Vocation of Man," Pater would have found a robust defense of self-development as well as an account of the "subjective immortality" through a posterity of future teachers and readers, which caused such consternation to listeners like Brooke. In addition to these congenial doctrines, Pater would have also found, in Fichte, a skeptical unmooring of both the inner self and the outer world of the same kind which he himself would later articulate so memorably in his Conclusion to *The Renaissance*, and a philosophy that was entirely dependent on its compatibility with one's own personality. As Fichte puts it, in an often-quoted summation of this last point: "What sort of philosophy one chooses depends, therefore, on what sort of man one is; for a philosophical system is not a dead piece of furniture that we can reject or accept as we wish; it is rather a thing animated by the soul of the person who holds it," qtd. in Inman, *Walter Pater's Reading*, 1:19.

[27] "Pater, Hopkins, and Fichte's Ideal Student," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 70 (1971): 365-76.

self-culture it implies: precisely its status as a defense. Pater's presentation may have been a powerful *exhortation*, but it was not yet an *embodiment* of self-development. Put differently, the content of Pater's defense differed from its form; as Brooke recalls: "He *advocated* 'self-culture'"—but then he *only* advocated it. This problematic division is reflected in Pater's own argument: the internal structure of his defense is itself not autotelic—that is, self-development is justified only by the "subjective immortality" to which he appeals, but it is, therefore, not yet pursued for its own sake. And, because, as Brooke puts it, "[t]he writer…made no secret of his ideas," Pater's principles were open to contradiction and attack. Like Fichte before him, Pater was accused of being an atheistic intellectual iconoclast, and his debut became enough of a scandal to produce a break-away essay society, the Hexameron, of which the Balliol undergraduate (and Pater's future tutee), Gerard M. Hopkins, was a founding member.[28]

Yet this opening, polemical *faux pas* proved to be a kind of *felix culpa*, as the Old Mortals' hostile response to Pater's first paper seems to have precipitated, in him, an intellectual breakthrough. In his next address to the society in July of the same year, Pater made his controversial philosophy consubstantial with its mode of presentation, thus achieving a rigorous incorporation of content and form—a combination which would become the signature feature of his writing thereafter. Pater's new approach is already indicated in the title of this address: "Diaphaneitè," a Greek imperative, unattested in any Classical source, which may be rendered, "be transparent!"[29] Although an exhortation

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[28] "Pater, Hopkins, and Fichte's Ideal Student," 369.

[29] *Miscellaneous Studies: A Series of Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1920). On the etymology of this essay's title, see Anne Varty, "The Crystal Man: A Study of 'Diaphaneitè" in *Pater in the 1990s*, ed. Laurel Brake and Ian Small (Greensboro: ELT

remains, it is now all but inscrutable, this call to transparency being made in language which is almost completely opaque. The implicit challenge laid down by Pater's title is, therefore, not simply the overt command which it makes; it is, rather, the more subtle directive *to become the person who could hear it*. Whereas self-culture and self-development were explicitly advocated in Pater's first address, they become, now, the submerged prerequisites for receiving the very message which his second address offers. In place of an *exhortation* to self-culture, in other words, Pater delivers a lecture which requires it.

This crucial interplay between Pater's difficult message and the implicit labor of listening to it is suffused throughout "Diaphaneitè." Richard Dellamora is certainly right to sense, in the essay's opening, a perfunctory nod to an uninspired prompt from the Old Mortals—he speculates it was something in a Carlylean vein: "Which one of three types...might best provide the model of a hero for contemporary life?"[30]—and Pater's brief but telling gesture to "[t]he saint, the artist, even the speculative thinker," is, indeed, a clear signal that he declines the very terms of the question he was meant to answer.[31] In his address, Pater proposes, instead, a fourth type, that of a "clear crystal nature" which "crosses rather than follows the main current of the world's life."[32] More important, though, than this character's foreignness to the world's accepted forms—its place in "the

Press, 1991), 258n2, and Gerald Monsman, *Oxford University's Old Mortality Society*, 101.

[30] Richard Dellamora, *Masculine Desire: The Sexual Politics of Victorian Aestheticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 62.

[31] "Diaphaneitè," 247.

[32] "Diaphaneitè," 248.

blanks between contrasted types"[33]—is its unbridgeable distance from all forms of effort, labor, and growth. Unlike the artist, the intellectual, or the saint, the "crystal type" does not develop or perfect itself; rather, it embodies a perfection unattainable by *any* kind of work. The crystal type is, thus, a kind of anti-type, not only of the ones proposed to Pater by the Old Mortals, but of the self-developing critic himself. Yet even though it is impossible to become such a crystal type, one *can* become the kind of critic who sees and appreciates these almost invisible, spectral gems of human nature—precisely through careful self-cultivation and sustained aesthetic attention.

Admittedly, the figures valorized in "Diaphaneitè" are not obscure in absolute terms—Pater's prototypes of transparency, after all, include Dante's Beatrice, Raphael, and Goethe.[34] These famous figures, however, are offered to Pater's audience precisely as exemplars of a new kind of character: as the otherwise unnoticed inflection points in the history of art, the early portents of incipient aesthetic movements who perfectly embody, in advance, the spirits of the ages they, in their persons, announce. The canonical figures adduced to elaborate this new type thus require the entire canons of the artistic epochs they anticipate to be present in the critic who sees them as their preemptive recapitulations. To accept Pater's idiosyncratic history is, therefore, to accede to the work of assimilation, recognition, and appreciation which it entails: one must, indeed, become a kind of "ideal student" of the Middle Ages, of the Renaissance and Reformation, and of German Romanticism to detect them, whole and entire, in their early, diaphanous forerunners. If, for Pater, the history of the world of art is (with apologies to Carlyle) the

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[33] "Diaphaneitè," 248.

[34] "Diaphaneitè," 247, 253, 254.

biography of invisible women and men, such a history appears only as an epiphenomenon to those who have already accepted Pater's implicit invitation to cultivate themselves accordingly.

Thus are the injunctions of Pater's earlier address subsumed within the form of its elliptical, allusive sequel; and thus does the hostile reception which greeted his initial address produce, in Pater's writing, this innovative, protective paradox: a mode of writing which announces—and, at some level, enacts—the very program of formation required to encounter its content correctly. Through the modulation of his earlier, hortatory mode, Pater does, indeed, produce what Anne Varty characterizes as a manifesto[35]—but it is one which makes nothing manifest: it shows only what may be seen through, a transparent character invisible to everyone except those who have made themselves capable of appreciating the aesthetic totality that these ethereal, liminal figures contain. As Pater's polemic migrates from content to form, his difficult style becomes the means by which his listener may encounter the subjects that he extols.

"Diaphaneitè," therefore, invites its audience to follow the critic beyond the "main current of the world's life" and reach, through his highly-wrought prose, that perspective from which even the famous figures in that main current become effulgent silhouettes, refined to a "fine edge of light."[36] And, as this implicit invitation reaches the audience of Pater's posterity—those witnesses of the "Subjective Immortality" imagined by the critic in his first address—it allows this, the first text of Pater's maturity, to be seen—and seen through—from the same peripheral perspective: as a kind of "crystal

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[35] "The Crystal Man: A Study of 'Diaphaneitè," *Pater in the 1990s*, 258n2.

[36] "Diaphaneitè," 248.

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type," a diaphanous embodiment, not only of the Aestheticism with which Pater will later be associated, but of his own artistic and intellectual career. Indeed, "Diaphaneitè" anticipates the elision of culture and self-culture announced in *The Renaissance* wherein criticism *itself* blends transparently into art—and art, in the same way, becomes indistinguishable from the criticism through which it appears.

The Renaissance, Aesthetic Criticism, and the Eclipse of the Work of Art

> I was the world in which I walked, and what I saw
> Or heard or felt came not but from myself;
> —Wallace Stevens[37]

Pater's collection of essays published in 1873 under the title, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, was unlike any art criticism to that point. As Laurel Brake notes, the disparate genres of "history, criticism, biography, [and] portraiture" were therein combined into a new synthesis[38]—one that depended, above all, on the new style of writing which emerges in Pater's second address to the Old Mortals, that style through which his earlier polemical energy becomes sublimated into an idiosyncratic historiography of art. In the series of studies which Pater eventually collected in *The Renaissance* that began appearing in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1869—the very first publications, incidentally, brought out under his own name—Pater seems to pursue the program of self-cultivation that he announced in his first address, and does so in the

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[37] "Tea at the Palaz of Hoon" in *Collected Poetry and Prose* (New York: Library of America, 1997), 51, ll. 10-11.

[38] "Pater, Walter Horatio (1839–1894)," Laurel Brake in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eee ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2006, http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21525 (accessed September 4, 2016).

manner he inaugurated in his second. And yet curiously, the hortatory mode that Pater appears to repudiate after the scandal of his debut at the Old Mortality Society seems to return in the Conclusion of *The Renaissance*, that infamous epilogue which would ultimately become better known than any of the volume's individual studies (and which, according to Monsman, may even date from the crucial early years of Pater's career[39]).

However, the very text in which Pater appears to abandon his project of self-cultivation in order to recommend it to his readers is, in fact, the text wherein that very program reaches its apex. Pater's afterword—flashing with the radical thoughts and memorable phrases that exasperated his contemporaries and excited his future followers—illustrates an incorporation of form and content no less rigorous than the one achieved in "Diaphaneitè." If Pater's unorthodox verve seems to return in the Conclusion to *The Renaissance*, it does so, not because the author is proselytizing his radical aesthetic, but precisely because he is aestheticizing the very form of the polemic as he turns it towards himself; his apparent admonitions to uninhibited experience are really dramatic enactments of self-culture. While Pater seems to preach a life of pure pleasure, the fulfillment of the hedonism he advocates is, paradoxically, found only in the pleasure of the act of writing itself. Although later aesthetes would find, in Pater's Conclusion, the lineaments of a theory of life, the Conclusion contains not a theory, but rather a *practice* of life. [40]

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[39] "Pater, Hopkins, and Fichte's Ideal Student," 373.

[40] Pater's artistic practice could be compared with Janet Lyon's account of the artistic manifestos of nineteenth-century France. According to Lyon, a manifesto like Jean Moréas' on behalf of Symbolism does not "vitiate the form's political charge. On the contrary, the manifesto's appearance in the aesthetic form was precisely of a piece with the revolutionary...attempt to repoliticize art," *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*

The real theoretical innovations of *The Renaissance* are, instead, contained in its Preface, wherein Pater articulates the principles of what he calls "aesthetic criticism." At the very outset of the Preface, Pater famously inverts Matthew Arnold's desideratum for criticism, turning his motto, "To see the object as in itself it really is," from an injunction to objectivity into an invitation to subjective self-reflection: "in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly."[41] This modulation of Arnold's critical tenet is typically read as a contraction, a skeptical subversion which diminishes criticism's pretension to reaching the outside world while, at the same time, committing the critic to a kind of solipsistic impressionism. Yet Pater's move away from fact to what he will call, in a later essay, "the sense of fact" actually has just the opposite effect on the power and the purview of the critical act: by redrawing the "line between fact and something quite different from external fact," the capacity of criticism is not attenuated,

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(Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999), 80. Pater's own practice resembles the one Lyon describes, even though his project of autotelic self-culture marks a turn away from any end beyond itself. The very anti-political stance of Pater's art could thus be read in terms of the context it declines. Lyon cites Peter Bürger's *The Theory of the Avant-Garde* which describes the manifesto as an "intervention in the organization of cultural practices," 80; this disruption of practices by means of a text which is *itself* a cultural practice finds its complement in Pater's artistic practice which disrupts other extant cultural practices precisely through a tacit and invisible rupture through which the author is separated from those practices through his own.

[41] *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), *xix*. On the relationship between *The Renaissance* and Arnold's criticism, see Wendell V. Harris, "Arnold, Pater, Wilde, and the Object as in Themselves They See It," *SEL* 11. 4 (Autumn, 1971): 733-747.

but amplified.[42] For as art becomes tantamount to its power to give aesthetic impressions, the critic's *own* power is enhanced. Since all appearance is necessarily subjective, criticism cannot aim to be simply descriptive; yet for this very reason, criticism can now aspire to the status of "repetition"—that is, a description of art, in Pater's writing, now differs from its object only in degree, and not in kind. In other words, by weakening the border between criticism and creation in the Preface, Pater announces his clear intention to transpose the artworks which he will consider in *The Renaissance* into the very medium through which they will seem to be simply described.

Thus does "aesthetic criticism," in Pater's hands, become the continuation of art by other means; it is—to paraphrase Coleridge—a repetition, in the writing of the critic, of the artist's act of creation. Although, throughout the Preface, he refers to the aesthetic sensations of an artwork as the "original facts" and the "primary data" which the critic is obliged merely to "disengage," "mark," and "define," this analytic vocabulary actually conceals the performative power on which Pater's critical project is really premised.[43] The "aesthetic critic" aims to recreate, in his writing, the impressions he first received *from* them through his subsequent stylization *of* them, thereby making them available to his reader as well. Even as Pater's theory affirms the singularity of any subjective aesthetic encounter, his own critical practice attempts to make that experience available in a public, general way, inaugurating an endless chain of individual responses—a series of meditations which strongly resembles the afterlife of "Subjective Immortality" which

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[42] See "Style" in *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style* (London: Macmillan, 1898), 8. For an exposition of the intellectual stakes that motivate this maneuver, see the penetrating discussion of this passage in Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 43-51.

[43] See *The Renaissance, xix-xxii.*

Fichte imagined for the scholar.

This "communicative" aspect of Pater's criticism, however, is only one of the innovations of the Preface. Its other—and closely related—innovation expands the scope of criticism *beyond* art. Indications of the expansion are interspersed throughout the Preface; for instance, when Pater outlines "[t]he objects with which aesthetic criticism deals" he first lists "music" and "poetry," but then also adds "artistic and accomplished forms of human life."[44] Similarly, after listing these objects, he asserts that the critic must always ask: "What is this song or picture, [or] *this engaging personality presented in life or in a book*, to ME? What effect does it really produce […]? […and how] is my [own] nature modified by its presence, and under its influence?"[45] In other words, by conceptualizing art wholly in terms of its affective potential, Pater ensures that the *sphere* of "aesthetic criticism" must be expanded to encompass *all* objects which possess such an impression-giving power, including human personality itself. But—as evidenced in the passage above—no sooner does the scope of criticism grow to encompass human personality than does the critic's *own* personality become, not only included within criticism's range, but in some sense, the aesthetic object *par excellence*—that paradoxical "subjective object" which is the horizon of every aesthetic experience.

An aesthetic *criticism* which is not ancillary to art, but which has the power to reproduce, within itself, an artwork's subjective effects; and an aesthetic *attitude* which takes, as its object, *any* object, including human personality in all of its manifestations— this is what the criticism announced in Pater's Preface seeks to achieve. It would be a

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[44] *The Renaissance*, xix.

[45] *The Renaissance*, xx.

great mistake to dissociate this pair of innovations—to separate Pater's style of criticism from its capacious and unorthodox remit.[46] But, from Pater's own time onward, both hostile and sympathetic commentators alike have done just that, splitting his aestheticism into an unformed attitude of artistic living on the one hand, and on the other, a style of criticism which is impressionistic, untechnical, and imprecise. On this reading, Pater's writing inevitably becomes merely the product of the attitude he espoused. Yet not only is the connection between Pater's two innovations essential, but the nature of the relationship between Pater's attitude and its putative critical "product" is just the reverse: the critic's transformative encounter with an "engaging personality…in life or in a book" depends, not on an anterior aesthetic attitude, but on the precise—if subjective—question, "what is it to ME"? And *this* question, in turn, entails the sort of self-elaboration that only occurs through the critical act itself, that creative, articulate act which D. H. Lawrence would later call the "struggle for verbal consciousness."[47] Thus, the attitude of attention and the verbal realization *of* that attention in writing are, indeed, interrelated (and interdependent) moments in the same intellectual event; but, crucially, writing actually *precedes and produces* the attitude on which it only seems to depend.

When the causal, derivative relationship between these two innovations is correctly construed, a surprising corollary emerges: writing—the true meeting-point of

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[46] Indeed, Pater himself emphasizes this connection when brings both of these innovations together, asserting that: "The aesthetic critic […] regards all the objects with which he has to do, all works of art, and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar or unique kind," *The Renaissance, xx*.

[47] "Foreword to *Women in Love*" reprinted in *Women in Love*, ed. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 486.

Pater's attitude and action—is not just a self-contained arena of aesthetic sensation; rather, it turns into a closed circuit of self-realization. Pater's brand of "aesthetic criticism" creates a kind of feedback loop, wherein the critic's discriminating encounter with impressions outside of himself amplifies his *own* distinctiveness and, through this act, his personality is both affected and refined; as the critic recreates beautiful personalities through his writing, he necessarily forms his own. Put another way, Pater's celebrated style is not "representational," mimetic of the prior personality which it simply embodies. Instead, whatever aspects of Pater's "style" or "personality" appear on the page are coeval with the writing in which they are embodied, and through which they are transmitted. On this conception of the critical enterprise, writing itself becomes the vital medium of personality's development, the vehicle through which style and self alike are realized, modified, and formed. Though the rich and varied content of the individual studies of *The Renaissance* might seem to sit uneasily with such a hermetic, self-reflexive reading, nevertheless, the theory which Pater develops in the Preface seems to require it, turning as it does on a notion of writing which makes, not the perception, but the *criticism* of art the paramount aesthetic experience.

The Autotelic *Renaissance*, or the Function of Criticism in the Present Moment

> Be regular and orderly in your life…so that you may be violent and original in your work.
> —Gustave Flaubert[48]

It is only in this (admittedly counterintuitive) context that the most notorious phrases from the infamous Conclusion of *The Renaissance* should be read. When Pater affirms that, for philosophy, "[n]ot the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end"; and

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[48] Letter to Gertrude Tennant (December 25, 1876), qtd. in *Madam Bovary*, trans. Adam Thorpe (London: Vintage, 2011), *xv*.

when he declares that: "A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life," the autotelic attitude he valorizes can be read—surprisingly but appropriately—as the affirmation, not simply of "experience itself" in the abstract, but of the particular experience of writing those very words.[49] The sensation, in fact, which Pater is affirming in this famously "hedonistic" afterword *is really the sensation of writing itself*. There is no outside to the aestheticist's text; and the "sensual" life of appreciated impressions which the Conclusion defends is the very one implied in the production of Pater's work. It might seem initially deflating to reduce Pater's thrilling invocations of pleasure as pertaining only—or even obliquely—to Roland Barthes' "pleasure of the text"; yet Pater's own logic seems all but inescapable. When he impresses on his reader the question: "How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?," his implicit call to concentrated attention cannot, by definition, ever *exclude* the seemingly mundane task of criticism's composition; rather, it is through such acts of sustained attention that the mundane is itself transfigured into a meaningful experience.[50] Indeed, if "success in life" is "to burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, [and] to maintain this ecstasy," then failure in life would be to let this ecstasy be extinguished simply because the critic takes pen in hand.

The call of the Preface to elaborate one's subjective impressions of art, therefore, does not lead to a life of lazy contemplation in which the passive, unproductive critic

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[49] *The Renaissance*, 188.

[50] *The Renaissance*, 188. See Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang), 1976.

marinates in his own memories of art; nor does it necessitate an itinerary of relentless aesthetic consumption, a sort of endless grand tour. It leads, instead, to the program implied in the Conclusion: to a life of intellectual labor whereby past impressions of art are realized in the present moment of life through the present tense of language—it leads, in other words, to a life not unlike Nietzsche's: a life of Spartan, austere, and single-minded production.[51] In a memoir, one of Pater's friends recalled that: "Before opening a book, he used to [ask] himself, 'Is this book likely to assist me in my great aim in life?' If the answer was 'No,' he would put the book aside, no matter how tempted he might be to read it."[52] Nor is this same existential intensity absent from extant accounts of Pater's own writing process. After his death, Edmund Gosse described his painstaking method of composition: Pater, he recalled, would begin writing "on ruled paper, leaving each alternate line blank…[I]n the blank alternate line, he would at leisure insert fresh descriptive or parenthetical clauses, other adjectives, more exquisitely related adverbs, until the space was filled."[53] Surprisingly, Gosse adds that the process would then be

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[51] See Curtis Cate's telling account of the philosopher's typical work-day: "Nietzsche would get up every morning when the faintly dawning sky was still grey, and, after washing himself with cold water from the pitcher and china basin in his bedroom and drinking some warm milk, he would, when not felled by headaches and vomiting, work uninterruptedly until eleven in the morning. He then went for a brisk, two-hour walk through the nearby forest…stopping every now and then to jot down his latest thoughts in the notebook he always carried with him…After luncheon, usually dressed in a long and somewhat threadbare brown jacket, and armed as usual with notebook, pencil, and a large grey-green parasol to shade his eyes, he would stride off again on an even longer walk…Returning 'home' between four and five o'clock, he would immediately get back to work…until, worn out, he snuffed out the candle and went to bed around 11 p.m.," *Friedrich Nietzsche* (Woodstock, NY: Overlook Press, 2005), 451.

[52] Thomas Wright, *The Life of Walter Pater*, 2 vols. (London: Everett, 1907), 2:142.

[53] Gosse, "Walter Pater," *Critical Kit-Kats* (London, Heinemann, 1896), 262-64, qtd. in Edward Thomas, *Walter Pater: A Critical Study* (London: Martin Secker, 1913), 145.

repeated: "sheet by sheet, Pater [would] copy out the whole—as before, on alternate lines of copy-book pages; [and] this revise was treated in the same way—corrected, enlarged, interleaved, as it were, with minuter shades of feeling and more elaborate apparatus of parenthesis."[54] In light of this account, Pater's reported remark to a former student—that he "[never published] anything until [he had] written it out seven times"—rings true.[55]

The rigor of Pater's writing life—its tortuous production of endless drafts—leads to the most paradoxical conclusion about the Conclusion: that the very text, so vehemently denounced as an Epicurean paean to pleasure, necessarily entails a regular, rhythmic life of almost monastic asceticism. Although Pater's denunciation of habit in the Conclusion is clear—"In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits"[56]—the purification of perception enacted through Pater's own prose is achieved only through exercises of defamiliarization which are themselves habitual. In place of the bad habits of perceptual sloth and inattention, the Conclusion encourages, through the very exercises of its own language, the formation of a specific, salutary counter-habit: the practice of "concentration upon the present moment" which is both the cornerstone of Stoic doctrine as well as the central theme of that perennial philosophy (whose history has recently been traced by Pierre Hadot) which considers the art of living to be the philosophical project *par excellence*.[57]

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[54] Gosse qtd. in Thomas, *Walter Pater: A Critical Study*, 145.

[55] See Gerald Monsman, *Walter Pater* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1977), 145.

[56] *The Renaissance*, 189.

[57] See Pierre Hadot, "'Only the Present Is Our Happiness': The Value of the Present Instant in Goethe and in Ancient Philosophy," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual*

Thus *The Renaissance*, a book which itself grows out of such a concentrated attention on the present, culminates, in the Conclusion, with exercises that aim to cultivate this attentive attitude in the reader—and confirm it in its author. A specific example of such an exercise will make this clear. When Pater turns, at the outset of the Conclusion, to "our physical life" in order to demonstrate the inconstancy that is constantly discovered by modern thought, he asks his reader to "[f]ix upon [physical life] in one of its more exquisite intervals, the moment, for instance, of delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat." Pater then proceeds to pare the world down to its material components, reducing mind to matter only. Yet could not a similar sort of vivisection be performed on Pater's own opening gesture? For, as Gabriel Roberts has acutely inquired, what act is actually imagined in the "delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat"? "[W]hat," Roberts wonders, "is recoiling from what—water from flood, physical life from water, the disembodied speaker from water, or something else entirely?"[58] Although this sentence is, as Heather Love points out, a curious but characteristic example of "agentless action" in Pater, it is also a still more curious example of *actionless* action.[59] The euphony of the sentence occludes its own opacity: it is not just "description without place," but a description devoid of description. An assembly of ornamental, evocative but ultimately incompatible elements, this sentence is

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Exercises from Socrates to Foucault, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 217-237.

[58] Gabriel Roberts, "'Analysis leaves off': The Use and Abuse of Philosophy in Walter Pater's Renaissance," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 36 (2008), 424.

[59] Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 58.

a lapidary account of an impossible activity which is really performed only *in*—and only *by*—language. The "exquisite interval" to which Pater directs his reader is, therefore, not an imagined or remembered experience of "delicious recoil" at all; rather, it is the experience of reading the sentence itself.

This strange self-referential sentence, placed at the beginning of Pater's concluding meditation exemplifies that second kind of poetic "clearness" which Hopkins recommends to Robert Bridges: "either the meaning [is] to be felt without effort as fast as one reads or else, if dark at first reading, when once made out *to explode*."[60] In this case, however, Pater's opaque sentence, "when once made out," implodes upon itself, instead—and yet it does so by design. In the subsequent paragraph of the Conclusion—in a passage beginning with a sentence linked with this earlier one through its conspicuous repetition of the word "flood"—Pater writes:

> At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflexion begins to play upon these objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like some trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions—colour, odour, texture—in the mind of the observer.[61]

The process of disintegration imagined here is precisely the one which occurs when Pater's own lyrical gambits are exposed to the scrutiny of "reflexion": their "cohesive force," itself achieved by a kind of magic, is likewise "suspended like some trick of

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[60] Hopkins to Robert Bridges (9 Oct. 1879), *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, Lesley Higgins and Michael Suarez, S.J. eds., vol. I, "Correspondence 1852-1881," ed. R. K. R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 367.

[61] *The Renaissance*, 187.

magic," reverting back into the linguistic components of which they are comprised. But what is "dissipated under… [the] influence" of reflection, is not the "solidity with which language invests" objects in the world, but the solidity of the world that they seem to reach, the putative referential content of language's sonorous signs. The exercises of the Conclusion leave its reader, not in a wordless aphasia of "unstable, flickering, [and] inconsistent" impressions, but precisely in the sentence's present tense, prone to both the problems—and the pleasures—which it proffers.[62]

What, then, remains at the end of the Conclusion? Angela Leighton, in a comment a propos Pater's debt to Heraclitus—who, of course, furnishes the Conclusion with its epigraph—concludes that, in Pater, "[n]othing is permanent; not even the sentence itself, which tries to hold a meaning to account but in fact lets it go."[63] It is true that Pater's sentences—to recall what William James wrote of Whitman—are "things mostly without subject or verb, a succession of interjections on an immense scale."[64] Yet although they seem to cede any hold on firm meaning in their interminable profusion of parentheses, modifications, and refinements, something is nevertheless firmly impressed on the reader through the circuitous course of their ever-slackening grasp: namely, an overwhelming awareness of the present moment. This sense of the present is conveyed by the very byzantine sentence structure which critics like Leighton see as miming the disintegration of the self and the world. These critics, however, misconstrue the *tone* of such structures.

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[62] *The Renaissance*, 187.

[63] *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 89.

[64] "On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings" in *William James: The Essential Writings*, ed. Bruce W. Wilshire (Albany: SUNY Press), 333.

Like the identity of referents in these sentences, or the subjects of their verbs, which are sometimes long deferred, sometimes abruptly discovered, sometimes recalled only distantly, buried as they are under the welter-weight of lengthy descriptions or elaborate asides, the present moment is, in the experience of reading Pater, now lost, now recovered, now firmly held, but always, either under the aspect of presence or absence, inescapable.[65] In short, the sentence, in Pater, is an expressive interval of time, an irreducible complex of the content it contains and the experience which its reception entails; it refocuses the reader on the pulse of the present precisely through the strategic diffusions, dilations, and concentrations of attention that it constantly enacts. If such sentences sometimes leave the reader without any meaning to grasp, the meaning that is conveyed through this very vacancy is, paradoxically, the moment's ever-present fullness. Thus, as the fugitive evanescence of life looms up in the Conclusion through Pater's urgent calls to constant attention, the only content contained in the form of Pater's prose emerges: in the wake of meaning, the present endures.

What remains, then, through the *askesis* of Pater's first book's final exercise is precisely the "moment." The word itself resonates throughout the Conclusion—itself so famous for its parsimony and eloquence—appearing conspicuously both at the outset of

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[65] Compare this autotelic function of Pater's sentences with Andrew Goldstone's remarks on the asceticism of Henry James's late style: "The asceticism of this 'new' aestheticism…redirects the search for the privileged artistic realm from the decadent lifestyle to the Jamesian late style itself, the wonderful impressions made available by the delayed specification of referents and the pleasurable cognitive puzzles created by James's intense pressure on the English-language systems of prononimal reference, verbal mood, and syntactic subordination," *Fictions of Autonomy: Modernism from Wilde to de Man* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013), 51. See also Joshua Landy on the formative function of Proust's sentences, *Philosophy as Fiction: Self, Deception, and Knowledge in Proust* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), 136-140.

its opening mental exercise, and echoing as the penultimate word of Pater's plaintive exhortation to live intensely within the moment while the moment itself endures:

> Well! we are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve…we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among "the children of this world," in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time...Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.[66]

The verbal energy of Pater's peroration mounts as its end approaches and, as it does, the slogan of future aesthetes yields to a final, striking substitution: the very interval in which "art for art's sake" is realized, the transient moment, pitched to its "highest quality," and savored "simply for the moment's sake," supplants art itself, taking its place in aestheticism's famous formula. At the conclusion of the Conclusion, art becomes just the most expedient means of enriching the "counted number of pulses…given to us of a variegated, dramatic life," and Pater's aesthetic criticism of art attempts to assimilate and reproduce its sensations for this reason only.

Although Hopkins had a fondness for obscure words and oblique meanings, his definition of the word "sake" was not entirely idiosyncratic: "sake," according to him, refers to "the being a thing has outside itself," such as "a voice by its echo, a face by its reflection, a body by its shadow, a man by his name, fame, or memory."[67] Yet to hear, within "art for art's sake," the corollary, "art for *its effects*," would seem to diminish the

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[66] *The Renaissance*, 190.

[67] Hopkins to Bridges (26 May, 1879), "Correspondence 1852-1881," 359.

centrality of the very art which *The Renaissance* exalts, which is thereby reduced to the status of an operative instrument, merely a means to an end. There is, however, no such denigration here because, for Pater, the self is *also* an effect: "a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself," a "continual vanishing away, [a] strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving."[68] Paradoxically, the autotelic structure of aesthetic criticism is not compromised, but, rather, accomplished at the end of the Conclusion when it is anchored in the ephemeral moment; since art and the self alike both lack "selves," in any strict sense, the one cannot be appreciated nor can the other be cultivated "for themselves" alone. However, *precisely because* Pater's is a world of second-order effects without prime movers or firm objects, any actions done for "the sake of the moment" would be, by definition, the closest approximation of that otherwise elusive condition of being performed "for themselves." Thus, "art for *its effect in the moment*" creates a simulacrum of selfhood—the only one possible for Pater—as art and the self mutually constitute each other through their results. While art, in the last analysis, is not an autonomous, isolated monad, it can become, through the living critic, the vital part of a self-effecting circuit in a constant state of collapse. Through this very collapse, the critic is returned to a present moment which is both richer and fuller for the art which lives again through it—and in which it also lives.

II.   Imaginary Portraits

The *Ars Poetica* of Aesthetic Criticism: *Marius the Epicurean*

> The writer is a person who is able to work in a language
> while standing outside language, who has the gift of
> indirect speaking.

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[68] *The Renaissance*, 188.

—Mikhail Bakhtin[69]

The Renaissance brings Pater's literary career to an early crossroads: the very achievement, in his first book, of the formative, effective writing practice, which is theorized in its Preface and perfected in its Conclusion, leaves him in search of an obvious form in which to employ it thereafter. The choice Pater faced was, emphatically, not between critical and creative production—modes which are never firmly separated in his work. Pater's, rather, was a choice not of style but of scale: a choice between the epic and the essay, the sequence and the cycle, the historical panorama and the imaginary portrait. While he initially attempts to proceed even further along the ambitious trajectory indicated by his first book with *Marius the Epicurean*, *Gaston de Latour*, and a third novel, to be set in 18th-century England—a trio of historical fictions which would be segments in the grand arc of an intended trilogy—Pater gradually gravitates away from this project and turns, instead, towards a minor mode; and, in doing so, he creates the hybrid genre that he dubbed the imaginary portrait. The remainder of this chapter will examine the birth of both modes which follow in the aftermath of *The Renaissance*, beginning with his only completed novel, and the unfinished epic project of which it was to have been a part.

After removing his scandalous coda in the second edition of *The Renaissance* in 1878, Pater reinstated the Conclusion in the third edition of 1888, adding, in an apologetic, explanatory footnote: "I have dealt more fully in *Marius the Epicurean* with

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[69] *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern McGee (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986), 110.

the thoughts suggested by it."[70] However, any enthralled reader of *The Renaissance* could hardly have been immediately gratified upon opening the novel Pater published in 1885. Unlike Pater's first work, in which the author's syncretic conception of the Renaissance was traced through examples drawn from early medieval France to the German Enlightenment, Pater's novel follows the career of a single, sensitive protagonist in Marcus Aurelius's Rome, and focuses on the inner world of that character; true to its sub-title, the novel is a searching exploration of Marius's "sensations and ideas." Yet *Marius the Epicurean*, in fact, *can* be a read as a capacious, historical study similar to *The Renaissance*, because it, too, presents its reader with the representative religion, literature, culture, and philosophy of its age. In immersive sequences similar to the individual studies of Pater's first book, the reader is guided through the art and thought of second-century Rome—but, importantly, the encounter is now indirect. Pater's Roman continuation of *The Renaissance* is focalized through the mind of its young protagonist— a mind which is, in turn, mediated by its urbane, contemporary narrator. The addition of this double frame might *seem* like a rather unimportant literary conceit, one which simply moves Pater from history proper to historical fiction, and from direct diagesis to mediated mimesis. Yet although this addition might seem slight, its consequences are profound for, in the character of Marius, the reader of *The Renaissance* is, in a certain sense, fictionalized; he finds himself represented in the novel through the proxy of the protagonist so that the *effect* of the very material presented in the novel can *itself* be represented.[71]

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[70] *The Renaissance*, 186n.

[71] Wilde's use of this technique will be explored in the following chapter.

An example will serve to illustrate this process concretely. Like *The Renaissance*, the pace of Pater's novel is measured out by long sequences of inset episodes, episodes in which the experiences of the protagonist are identical with those of the reader, and where the focalizing frame of Marius slips quietly out of view. In the first part of the novel, in a chapter entitled, "The Golden Book," an enthralled Marius is found reading Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*. The chapter begins with the narrator's unhurried description of the episodes in this book, but he suddenly interrupts himself and segues into a 20-page translation of one of those very episodes.[72] Thereafter, the next chapter simply picks up the thread of the narrator's thoughts as if this sequence had been just another one of his many asides; but the focus of the narration is now turned towards the *effects of* Marius's reading of Apuleius—an experience, of course, which the reader has *himself* just undergone. In other words, the reader now finds in Marius an image of his own experience, and the responses that the narrator describes can be read against the backdrop of his own.[73]

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[72] *Marius the Epicurean*, ed. Gerald Monsman (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2008), 43-60.

[73] Although T. S. Eliot dismissed the form of Pater's novel as simply "a number of fresh starts," it is likely that this series of starts is Pater's modern adaptation of the ancient form of the "mixed form," or prosimetrum, wherein verse and prose are interspersed. Interestingly, the ancients assumed that this shifting, trans-forming mode sought to effect corresponding changes in its reader—changes of precisely the kind that one experiences in the mimetic (and observes in the representational) modes of the novel itself. For Eliot's remark on the structure of the novel, see "Arnold and Pater" in *Selected Essays*, new ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), 356; for an historical overview of the prosimetrum, see Jan Ziolkowski, "The Prosimetrum in the Classical Tradition," in *Prosimetrum: Crosscultural Perspectives on Narrative in Prose and Verse*, ed. Joseph Harris and Karl Reichl (Suffolk and Rochester: D.S. Brewer, 1997); on the reader-altering, or protreptic, function of the prosimetrum, see Eleanor Johnson, *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2013), 10-18.

While, at other times in the novel, Marius plays the role of a "participant observer" through which cultural events—such as his witness of a clandestine Christian liturgy—may be both focalized and defamiliarized, most of the novel's set-pieces are aural or textual, which means that the reader's experience can, as it were, "coincide" with the main character's.[74] Thus, the long Stoic discourse of Marcus Aurelius in Chapter 12 and the equally expansive satirical dialogue with Lucian in Chapter 24 can "happen" to the reader as much as they do to Marius. In these passages, presentation and representation intersect in precisely the same way as they do in Pater's earlier, critical work. Afterwards, however, these interludes of intersection break down, and the Paterian monad of self-formation is replaced by a dyad of representation; and, when the poles of affective power and aesthetic reception are thus differentiated within the space of the novel, the reader steps outside of these shaping sequences to observe the effects that they produce on their ideal receiver. Marius, in other words, is a mutable mirror of the novel's own formative processes, reflecting to the reader the very changes that Pater's own novel attempts to produce. Through the fictional frame of the novel's protagonist, the very forces at work in Pater's self-formative writing come into view. Pater's novel, therefore, is a kind of *ars poetica* of his own style, one which allows for the representation of his self-effecting art: it is a *Bildungsroman* or formation-novel which depicts the very formation that it also enacts.

This self-reflexive feature of the novel explains why the event which constitutes its "climax" is an anti-climactic non-event. In the third part of the novel, as Marius is

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[74] On this anthropological aspect of Marius, see Sebastian LeCourt, "'To surrender himself, in perfectly liberal inquiry': Walter Pater, Many-Sidedness, and the Conversion Novel," *Victorian Studies* 53:2 (2011), 231-53.

delayed on a journey and sits alone in a garden, he experiences a moment of profound,

internal exaltation:

> In this peculiar and privileged hour, his body […] so entirely *possessed* by him—nay! By some mysterious intimacy, actually his very self—was yet determined by a vast system of material influences external to it, a thousand combining elements from earth and sky…Its powers of apprehension were but susceptibilities to influence. Its perfection of capacity might be said to lie in this, that it surrendered itself impassively, like a leaf on the wind, to the motions of the great stream of material energies outside itself. Might not the intellectual being also, which was still more intimately himself, after that analogy of the bodily life, be but a moment, an impulse or series of impulses, belonging to an intellectual system without him, diffusing itself through all time and place—that great stream of spiritual energy, of which his own imperfect thoughts, yesterday or to-day, were the remote, and therefore imperfect, pulsations?[75]

As critics have not failed to note, this momentary epiphany recalls similar moments in

Pater's Romantic antecedents and anticipates, as well, the many modernists who, under

Pater's own influence, will continue this tradition. Yet in place of the imagery of light

and the language of benediction which mark comparable epiphantic sequences—in

Wordsworth's Great Ode, for example, or in Yeats' "Vacillation"[76]—Pater's protagonist

discovers no inner power emerging from the shadows of universal mutability, material

necessity, and personal annihilation. Marius's moment of epiphany, instead, is produced,

precisely, by an awareness *of his own mind's external determination*: his is a vision of his

own fixity within an "intellectual or spiritual system," and his triumphant response, a

"passive surrender."

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[75] *Marius the Epicurean*, 204.

[76] See William Wordsworth, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," in *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800-1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1983), 276ff, ll. 153-157 and W. B. Yeats, "Vacillation," *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume 1: The Poems*, rev. and ed. Richard J. Finneran (New York: Scribner, 1997), 255, ll. 35-44.

What Marius attains in this moment is an awareness that his subjectivity is tantamount to his capacity to perceive and his ability to be intellectually shaped—in other words, he dimly perceives his status as a developing mind, being formed by its own age. If, throughout the novel, the reader often adopts the perspective of Marius in order to be exposed to the protagonist's same formative experiences, Marius, in this "peculiar and privileged hour," seems to move in the reverse direction, achieving a vision of himself similar to that of his reader's vision of him. It is no exaggeration to say that Marius's vision here is an almost authorial one through which he becomes the reader of his own book. And Pater, in fact, seems keen to invite precisely this comparison. The scene containing the passage quoted above is framed by the following opening gesture:

> [Marius] sat down in one of those olive-gardens, and, all within him and around him turning still to reverie, the course of his own life hitherto seemed to retire from him into some other world, distinct from the point at which he was not placed to watch it …*Through a dreamy land he could see himself moving, as if in another life, detached from the present, and like another person*, through all his fortunes and misfortunes, passing from point to point, weeping, delighted, escaping from various dangers.[77]

Marius's awareness of his own contingent position within a flux of external, shaping forces, then—and his maximal receptivity *to* those forces—is possible precisely because he glimpses the conditions of that very awareness as he sees himself, so to speak, from the outside.[78] While the perspective of the "first person"—and the concomitant illusion of personal freedom which it produces—usually makes such an awareness impossible, at the climax of the novel, Marius actually becomes just such an observer of himself. Nor is the

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[77] *Marius the Epicurean*, 202, my emphasis.

[78] For an instructive discussion of the importance of "conditions" in Pater's thought and writing, see Leighton, *On Form*, 85-88.

reader left in any doubt about the crucial importance of this revelation; the paragraph after the end of Marius's reverie begins with a summation which incorporates the novel's subtitle in a formulation which conflates subjectivity and perception—a conflation, moreover, which Marius himself would now no longer dispute: "Himself—his sensations and ideas—never fell again precisely into focus as on that day, yet he was the richer by its experience."

That this story of a young Roman's "sensations and ideas" should reach its apex here, in a moment of self-awareness and passive surrender, would seem to sit uneasily with the infamous injunctions to intensity that echo throughout the Conclusion to *The Renaissance*—yet in fact, this moment is really the perfection of the attitude that these injunctions seek to instill. Indeed, this attitude is what makes Marius a kind of "crystal type" of his century's Roman culture, as well as a living prefiguration of the age to come—and Marius's perplexing conversion and martyrdom, which both ensue in the final part of the novel, should be read as the result of the diaphanous perfection of his nature. At the end of the novel, Marius turns himself so completely into a communicative image both of his current age whose influence he accepts, as well as of the coming one which he anticipates, that his own personality becomes a microcosm for the transition between them. Thus, if the Christianity that Marius embodies with his final "witnessing" is one devoid of doctrine—a religion of attitudes, aspirations, and practices—this is because its content has already been translated and absorbed into the form of Marius's own life, a fact which explains why his pivotal "conversion scene" here in the garden so strongly resembles the one recounted in the *Confessions* of another educated Christian, St. Augustine. In Marius's case, however, no child's voice needs to command him to

"Take!" and "Read!" because the crucial book that would confirm his gradual transformation is not at his elbow: instead, the book in question—the very one which is also in the hands of its reader—is, by Marius, *already* being read.

From Panoramas to Portraits: *Gaston de Latour* and the Unwritten Paterian Epic

> Such as the life is, such is the form.
> —S. T. Coleridge[79]

With *Marius the Epicurean*, Pater not only continues the project he inaugurated with *The Renaissance*, but also produces a representation of his own self-transforming style, a novelistic image of his own creative process. Yet *Marius* is also a tacit acknowledgment that the perfect epitome of its author's process cannot actually be culled from history. Like the anachronistic crystal types described in "Diaphaneitè," the contemporary embodiment of what Hazlitt termed the "spirit of the age" must *itself* be out of time—that is to say, the image of an age exists nowhere within it, since the crystallization of its social forces and cultural products must itself be the created, interpretative product of a later observer.[80] By employing the conceit of a fictional witness, Pater moves beyond even the pretense of history proper, despite the fact that this conceit is what enables him to capture the individual periods of his focus faithfully. The truest history is, therefore, the most feigned; the perfect "Contemporary Portrait" must be an *imaginary* portrait. But Pater's—initially tentative—turn away from history, a turn indicated by his willingness to invent the perfect emblematic characters for the historical periods about which he wishes

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[79] *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare: A Selection*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Athlone Press, 1989), 53.

[80] William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age, Or, Contemporary Portraits* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

to write, is only one of three innovations which are peculiar to the fictional form that he brings into being in 1878 when he produces "The Child in the House," his first such portrait: the other two crucial features of this genre—which will be examined, in this section, in turn—are, first, the decidedly personal *scale* of these portraits and, second, the inherently personal *nature* of each of these fictional exercises—both of which are "personal," in a sense to be defined.

In the letter to the editor of the magazine in which "The Child in the House" was published, Pater identified the conflicting characteristics which this new mode reconciles: "I call the M.S. a portrait, and mean readers, as they might do on seeing a portrait, to begin speculating—what came of him?"[81] The imaginary portrait, therefore, is, on the one hand, suggestive but episodic, a fragmentary glimpse which piques an interest it never fully satisfies. On the other hand, however, Pater notes that this first piece— entitled "Imaginary Portrait/1"—is both "complete in itself" but also "the first part of a series."[82] Taken together, then, these vignettes may form a larger whole, yet the nature of that whole is the enigma on which Pater's most ambitious series of projected portraits ultimately founders. Pater's intention to make *Marius* the first chapter in a sort of Hegelian history of the religious phases of the mind stalled in its second, unfinished installment, *Gaston de Latour*—a novel which Pater described during its composition as

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[81] To George Grove (17 April 1878), *Letters of Walter Pater*, ed. Lawrence Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 48.

[82] *Letters of Walter Pater*, 48. On the original title of the portrait, see Lene Østermark-Johansen's "Introduction" in *Walter Pater: Imaginary Portraits* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2014), 17-18.

"a sort of *Marius* in France, in the 16th Century."[83] Yet the teleological, end-oriented arc of this epic—through which Pater hoped, as he had in *Marius*, to discover the conditions for a new "religious phase possible for the modern mind"[84] by means of the delineation of its previous ones—was in tension (not to say conflict) with Pater's autotelic form of writing, as well as with his own partial, hesitant, and tentative turn of mind. Although Pater never formally abandoned his trilogy, and remained working on *Gaston* until his untimely death, this triptych of spiritual progress would have been impossible to complete because the very mode of Pater's writing was incompatible with the tripartite, teleological project in which it was being employed.

The disjointed episodes that make up the latter half of *Gaston de Latour* dramatize the centrifugal energy of Pater's writing—the same centrifugal energy which made *The Renaissance* a success by dilating the scope of the period according to its author's idiosyncratic vision—undoing the superinduced structure of this medial chapter of his projected epic. While Gaston initially progresses in a Marius-like journey from his monastery to Montaigne's cottage, his intellectual progress is arrested as he becomes lost among the intrigues and infamies of Renaissance Paris, an errancy which is mirrored all too perfectly by the novel, as the narrator admits at the outset of its final extant chapter: "The foreground of life, its sins, its beauty and sorrow, the spectacular contrasts of the incidents, the actors from which one could not take one's eyes:—the reader, it is hoped, can still see Gaston through the admiration and distress."[85] Yet the reader *cannot* see

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[83] To William Canton (22 January [1892]), *Letters of Walter Pater*, 126.

[84] To Violet Paget (22 July [1883]), *Letters of Walter Pater*, 52.

[85] *Gaston de Latour*, ed. Gerald Monsman (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1995), 128.

Gaston, and is unable to do so precisely because the protagonist, who is repeatedly identified as "a creature of the eye," disappears behind the lurid, sordid spectacles which supersede the education-plot of the novel's first half. Like Marius, Gaston, too, attains the condition of a reader of his own story; but, in this case, there is no formative model which either of them can emulate or observe. Gaston, in other words, becomes a *mere* reader, a disembodied, spectral presence, presiding over scenes by which he is not changed, and in which he is not involved. The rhythm wherein formative sequences and the fictional representation of their effects were alternated, that rhythm which provided *Marius* with both its structure and the content of its climax, becomes, in what would have been the middle of its sequel, a montage of the vanities of Paris over which both Gaston's and the reader's disembodied eyes pass voyeuristically, without full immersion or firm separation.

Even if the masque of Parisian immorality which Gaston watches along with the reader was, indeed, part of a Paterian version of the *Purgatorio*—the atoning plateau of his trilogy in which his formative project pauses in a kind of visual limbo—no final canticle could have completed this terrestrial comedy, for there is no pilgrim whose progress actually continues across its three parts: the only pilgrim is progress itself. Pater's intended epic of spiritual development, in other words, lacks a soul; or rather— and precisely—it lacks its *author's* soul. As a prolegomenon to a possible religious phase of the modern mind, Pater's trilogy envisions history, not from the all-important present moment, but from an end-point which the triptych itself anticipates, but which, in fact, does not exist. Marius, Gaston, and the English protagonist of the intended third volume are, therefore, prototypes of an unknown final type; they bear a "family resemblance"

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with each other only through the features of a sibling who remains unborn. The volumes

of Pater's trilogy are, then, prequels of a sort of spiritual science fiction, preludes to a

vision of a future which is not yet real.

The epic shape which Pater envisions for the large-scale portraits that followed

Marius, and the impersonal nature of these portraits, thus conflict with their author's

characteristic style, an incongruity which could be articulated in terms of Coleridge's

distinction between mechanic and organic form:

> The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a
> predetermined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the
> material—as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish
> it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate;
> it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its
> development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form.
> Such as the life is, such is the form.[86]

Although the metaphorical opposition which structures Coleridge's distinction is a

contrast of the animate and the inanimate, this antithesis actually belies a common

conceptual root, for the word "organic," as noted in the first chapter, derives from the

Greek word for "tool." Coleridge's distinction, then, depends on the *orientation* of the

shaping tool which in-forms a given material: if a preconceived form is imposed from

without, the conforming content simply responds to the pressure of an external force.

Organic form, in contrast, emerges when the content, so to speak, forms itself, when an

internal "organ" or tool "shapes as it develops itself from within."

Thus, to say that, in aspiring to create an epic structure for his fictional studies,

Pater's imaginary portraits thereby become "impersonal" is to say that they become mere

content to be subordinated to an arbitrary shape, rather than emerging from a need within

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[86] *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare*, 53.

its author's own internal, imaginative drama. But, while it might seem that this distinction between "personal" and "impersonal" portraits depends only on the arbitrary whim of the critic, the quality in question can, in fact, be defined with some specificity by way of comparison with Nietzsche's philosophical method—a method Roberto Alejandro has recently described with the term "historiobiography"—that is, a "mode of philosophizing […that] allows Nietzsche to view all human history as if it runs through his own life and thoughts."[87] This "mode of awareness"—which according to Alejandro, "seems to be a trademark of philosophical paradigms that flourished in the nineteenth century"—enables Nietzsche to create myths which "make sense of his world." Alejandro also notes that, in these myths, "Nietzsche is both the narrator and the actor; he is the scribe of his own drama. To him, his philosophy is much more than personal memoir or confession."[88] Nor is it a coincidence that the alignment of narrator and actor which Alejandro notices in Nietzsche recalls the pivotal moment in *Marius the Epicurean* wherein the protagonist glimpses his own status within the story—and Pater, in the same moment, finds an image of his own creative method. Instead, this symmetry emerges because, for Nietzsche and Pater alike, writing has the power to transpose its author in the work itself, accomplishing thereby a kind of metaleptic crossing which turns writing into a tool through which life itself can be formed.

The mode of writing, inaugurated in "Diaphaneitè" and developed in *The Renaissance* into a fully-fledged critical mode, finds its perfect form in Pater's "minor"

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[87] Roberto Alejandro, *Nietzsche and the Drama of Historiobiography* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 2-3.

[88] *Nietzsche and the Drama of Historiobiography*, 3.

imaginary portraits which are "personal" precisely in the sense that they perform a kind of work on their author. Before the high modernists popularized the idea (paraphrased so well by Wilde) that a writer's true autobiography is found only in her work; and before the alignment of content and form became, for the New Critics, the unfailing hallmark of "organic form," Pater's imaginary portraits illustrated different versions of both ideas. The "autobiography" to be found in Pater's fiction is not a concealed *roman à clef*, but rather a record of the imaginative exercises through which the artist-critic forms his own life. In *Marius the Epicurean*, for example, the sum total of the protagonist's experiences—that is, his attractions to, ambivalences about, and eventual rejections of the various philosophical schools he encounters—do not constitute an abstract intellectual itinerary which an unaffected author designs for the sake of an imagined, future reader. Instead, the author of the novel is both Daedalus and Theseus, the maze-maker as well as the hero who must descend and emerge therefrom. And what emerges from the labyrinths of history is precisely "organic form"—an artificial inner order assimilated by author from the self-authored artifact exhibiting this quality.

Pater's Living Pictures: The *Imaginary Portraits*

> [W]hen Henri Matisse completed his masterly paintings in the Chapel of the Rosary at Vence, he stepped back and proclaimed, "I did it for myself." One of the Catholic sisters overheard him and immediately objected: "But you told me you were doing it for God." "Yes," Matisse replied, "but I am God."[89]

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[89] Philip Graham Ryken, *Art For God's Sake* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2006), 48. Compare Meister Eckhart's much-quoted remark at the end of "Sermon Fifty-Seven": "The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me: my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing and one love," *The Complete Mystical*

In the wake of *Gaston*'s arrested progress, Pater resumes his fictional work in the form of the imaginary portrait that he had perfected prior to his attempted epic's second installment. With "Emerald Uthwart" and "Apollo in Picardy," as well as with certain artistic essays that were collected after his death in the volume, *Greek Studies*, Pater produces artifacts which resemble the four portraits that were gathered in 1887 in the eponymous volume, *Imaginary Portraits*, in which subtly connected characters adumbrate, not the forward movement of a spiritual mode, but simply the dissociated scenes from history that do not develop anything except their own author. Pater's late return to this "minor" mode of the imaginary portrait, a mode in which the lineaments of his self-formative enterprise are most clear, is a sign of what is achieved in this collection.

The four sketches of this work constitute a cycle similar to the physical paintings depicted in the first portrait, "A Prince of Court Painters." Here, the titular painter-prince, Antoine Watteau, produces, in a series of four oval paintings, allegorical figures of the Four Seasons. The female narrator of the story trains her diary's eye on "Summer," and notices especially how reality migrates into Watteau's art; she sees:

> a hayfield such as we visited to-day, but boundless, and with touches of level Italian architecture in the hot, white, elusive distance, and wreaths of flowers, fairy hay-rakes and the like, suspended from tree to tree, with that wonderful lightness which is one of the charms of his work. I can understand through this, at last, what it is he enjoys, what he selects by preference, from all that various world we pass our lives in.[90]

Works of Meister Eckhart, trans. and ed. Maurice O'C. Walshe, rev. and foreword Bernard McGinn (New York: Crossroad Books, 2009), 298.

[90] *Imaginary Portraits* (London: Macmillan, 1922), 23.

Here, the free, creative power of the imagination is not exalted; rather, the artist's selections and arrangements—acts akin to those of the fictional "editor" who produces the text of this story, which is subtitled "Extracts from an Old French Journal"—are praised precisely for what they reveal about their creator. Yet the narrator's most significant comment is the one which follows the passage above: "I am struck by the purity of the room he has re-fashioned for us—a sort of moral purity; yet in the forms and colours of things."[91] This painted cycle of seasons is, therefore, not only a refined version of reality which communicates the style, taste, and personality of its creator: it also re-fashions the very reality into which it is placed, and to which, as a work of art, it returns. While the narrator goes on to lament the fact that the artist has "incorporate[d] so much of his work, of himself, with objects of use, which must perish by use, or disappear, like our own old furniture, with mere change of fashion," the effects of this decorative, ephemeral art have, nevertheless, been preserved in the journal that communicates the very personality which his art has shaped.[92]

Watteau's interrelated paintings offer a valuable model for approaching the author's own collection of *Portraits*. Each one of Pater's pictures is itself aligned with a specific season—the humid, pluvial world of "A Prince of Court Painters" with the summer; harvest season and its attendant frenzy with "Denys L'Auxerrois"; the spare, austere world of "Sebastian Van Storck" with winter; and the regenerating upheaval of the springtime thaw with "Duke Carl of Rosenmold." In addition to this explicit parallel, Pater's portraits also accomplish the same *work* as Watteau's allegorical ovals: they

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[91] *Imaginary Portraits*, 23.

[92] *Imaginary Portraits*, 23.

communicate the artist's personality, even as they create a habitat of "moral purity" for their reader. The only point which must be added here is that the artworks which create this habitat also create the artistic personality that they seem simply to reflect—but which, in fact, they actually bring into being. The parallel between the cycle of seasons painted by Watteau and Pater's own series of *Portraits*, therefore, points toward the most significant feature that they share: the real development depicted in each series is that of their own creators.

In some ways, this reading of Pater—which sounds the etymological echoes in those common metonyms for art such as "work," "oeuvre," and "opus," as well as those of the words "fiction" and "poetry" themselves—resembles the current project of Peter Sloterdijk, who has recently attempted to supplement what he calls "the familiar history of art as a history of completed works," with "a history of the training that made it possible to do art and the asceticism that shaped artists"—a kind of examination, as he puts it, of "artists in their efforts to become artists in the first place."[93] Sloterdijk, working in the same vein as Pierre Hadot and the late Foucault, would, thus, read beneath the completed works of artists, their simultaneous—and successful—efforts to become the makers of those very transformative artifacts. On this view, Pater's fiction is "instrumental," but only insofar as it is an autotelic training ground of self-culture which, while pursued for its own sake, nevertheless, produces aesthetic artifacts in and through this very process. Through this productive act, the artist's own personality is also formed: the writing life is, thus, Pater's version of the "art of life," that perennial practice which

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[93] Peter Sloterdijk, *The Art of Philosophy: Wisdom as Practice*, trans. Karen Margolis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 9.

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has its roots in both classical philosophy and Christian monasticism. In Pater, however, the "art of life" can only be a kind of pleonasm precisely because the one always implies the other: art is a record of the mode of life out of which it comes, and to which it also returns, enriching both the ascetic artist and his unknown future audience.

Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* might, therefore, be fairly described as the *Golden Legend* of aesthetic criticism, an anthology of lives that holds up a certain figure to be emulated—this exemplary figure, however, is not found among the subjects that are represented directly. Whereas "Diaphaneitè" offers its reader an implicit invitation to become the kind of critic who could identify the crystal types of history, the formed lives of the *Imaginary Portraits* invite the reader to contemplate her own authorial creator in and through the artistic acts that imagine these characters into being. Between Flaubert's conception of the novelist ("like God in the universe, present everywhere and visible nowhere"[94]) and Joyce's mischievous modification of this conception of artistic omnipresence ("the artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails"[95]) lies Pater's Schelling-like Creator who depends on Creation itself for his own identity: through his series of secular hagiographies, Pater enacts a *Bildungsroman* of his own development. This is not to say that hagiography itself is not an important template for the *Imaginary Portraits*; indeed, the influence of this genre—more than even biography proper—helps to explain why all but the last of Pater's sketches conclude with

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[94] To Louise Colet (9 Dec. 1852), *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert*, ed. and trans. Francis Steegmuller (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1:173.

[95] *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. John Paul Riquelme (New York: Norton, 2007), 215.

either the pious death as reported by a witness ("A Prince of Court Painters"), or a miraculous (but unconfirmed) reappearance ("Denys L'Auxerrois"), or with the implication of a heroic self-sacrifice ("Sebastian Van Storck"). Yet in each case, death is the sign, not of final perseverance in heroic virtue, but only of a completed artistic performance, as these finished lives mime the emergence of the perfected literary form of their own stories.

The portrait of Duke Rosenmold is the only one which departs slightly from this pattern, beginning as it does with the discovery of his (and his wife's) remains and ending, not with his own death or resurrection, but with his dialectical rebirth in the person of Goethe.[96] The Duke, though, in the thrall of his affectations and invincible bad taste, has already orchestrated and witnessed his own mock-funeral, and this lavish burial pageant—depicted, appropriately, in the collection's last portrait—forms a bookend with Watteau's allegorical paintings insofar as it offers another image of the collection itself. For in each fictional picture, Pater is, as it were, observing his own figural inhumation as each life marks an achieved (but also interred) chapter of his own artistic development, their deaths punctuating his own progression as an artist; the observing Duke is, therefore, a kind of image of Pater himself. Yet while the artist's voyeuristic *position* vis-à-vis his creation can be represented, the development which redounds *to* that creator cannot. Indeed, *Gaston de Latour* can be read as a grand attempt at fashioning an image of its author's growth—but its failure reveals that this is what must actually remain

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[96] The relationship which emerges, in the conclusion of this portrait, between the Duke and Goethe—with the disappearance of the one leading directly into the historical arrival of the other—may suggest the kind of connections that Pater envisioned between Marius, Gaston, and their third English exemplar.

permanently beyond Pater's artistic frame. In trying to depict his growth in *Gaston*, Pater only arrests it—just as Duke Rosenmold attempts to precipitate an enlightenment which, in his own person, he can only anticipate. This looked-for enlightenment, however, occurs outside of the scale of the portrait, on the historical, and not the personal, plane; and, in the same way, the growth which Pater enacts *through* his art resists direct representation *within* his art, because the locus of that growth is life itself. The *Imaginary Portraits* are, therefore, a series of artifacts which admit a parallel, not only with Watteau's paintings, but also with Denys' medieval cathedral, with Sebastian's sprawling Spinozan epistle, and with the Duke's mannered mode of life: they are each their respective artist's incomplete but quintessential output, intimately linked with their creator's interrupted life. If each of these imagined masterworks is either unfinished or ephemeral, it is because, within Pater's fiction, the wholeness or permanence they lack is supplied by the lives to which these artifacts give shape and with which they form a whole.

In the imaginary portraits that appeared before and after the publication of this collection, the same formative function of art is served, instead, by the physical spaces of early youth. In the late portrait, "Emerald Uthwart," the boy's school presents him with a "challenge" which is ventriloquized for the reader by the portrait's narrator: "to make moral philosophy one of your acquirements…to systematise your vagrant self; which however will in any case be here systematised for you."[97] Similarly, in "The Child in the House," a mature Florean Deleal has an auspicious dream at the outset of the story, which produces the very reminiscence of his childhood which this initial narrative frames:

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[97] "Emerald Uthwart" in *Miscellaneous Studies*, 207.

And it happened that this accident of his dream was just the thing needed for the beginning of a certain design he then had in view, the noting, namely, of some things in the story of his spirit—in that process of brain-building by which we are, each one of us, what we are. With the image of the place so clear and favorable upon him, he fell to thinking of himself therein, and how his thoughts had grown upon him. In that half-spiritualized house he could watch the better, over again, the gradual expansion of the soul which had come to be there — of which indeed, through the law which makes the material objects about them so large an element in children's lives, it had actually become a part; inward and outward being woven through and through each other into one inextricable texture.[98]

It is no coincidence that this early and late pair of portraits are also Pater's most "autobiographical," in the conventional sense: here, reminiscences of real scenes from the author's own youth are transmuted into art, in the same way that reality is taken up into Watteau's allegorical paintings. In each case, though, the locus of formation serves as a figure for the story itself: Florean's "process brain-building by which we are, each one of us, what we are" is tantamount to the "story of his spirit" which the reader is about to encounter. In the same way, Emerald Uthwart's day-school will do the same work that Pater's story will depict: the systemization of that character's "vagrant self." In the *Imaginary Portraits*, however, these *external* habitats are exchanged for the interior spaces that are opened by artistic production—spaces which, as in the case of Watteau, may even reshape the outward world with "a sort of moral purity; yet, in the forms and colours of things."

Guided by the theory elaborated in the *Imaginary Portraits* themselves, one can identify in them autobiographical disclosures that are even more intimate than those which critics have found in "The Child and the House" and "Emerald Uthwart": for in

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[98] "The Child in the House" in *Miscellaneous Studies*, 173.

them is seen, not the places of Pater's past, but the work which shaped the artist—or, more precisely, the work by which the artist was shaped. Thus can the observation made by the teacher of the young Sebastian Van Storck be justly applied to the author himself: "his theorems will shape life for him, directly…he will always seek, as a matter of course, the effective equivalent to—the line of being which shall be the proper continuation of—his line of thinking."[99]

Imaginary Portraits of the Artist: Pater and the Modernist *Künstlerroman*

> A parent gives life, but as parent, gives no more. A murderer takes life, but his deed stops there. A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.
> —Henry Adams[100]

Not unlike his former student, Hopkins—who, despite having his own tendency towards self-effacement amplified by Jesuit discipline, never doubted the merits of his artistic endeavors—Pater knew that his own art possessed an important potential, and high aspirations haunt his career for this very reason. Thus does the initial project of the young Pater, who imagined a "subjective immortality" for himself through writing, reappear, in the mature author of *Marius*, as the attempted epic which would have been the groundwork for a new age. Not content simply to embody a renaissance of the spirit in his own writing, Pater, at certain moments, desired to effect such a rebirth himself.

Frequently, great art requires ambitious designs of this kind as its necessary precondition—one thinks of the mythologies of Blake and Yeats, whose own theory of

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[99] *Imaginary Portraits*, 83.

[100] *The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908), 300.

personality and masks is indebted to Pater. In other cases, that condition takes the form of a method or deliberately adopted conceit; Robert Frost, for example, described his use of dialect as one of those techniques that "gives the artist the courage of his imaginings."[101] Yet Pater, no less singular—nor less courageous—than these other artists, creates under a different condition altogether; while Frost can affirm that "my natural attitude is one of enthusiasm verging on egoism," [102] Pater's version of egoism required a sort of selflessness: the self-culture that his writing effected could only be achieved through the disavowal of any hope of a welcome reception or literary posterity. Pater needed to write, as it were, intransitively.

The ascetical precondition of Pater's aesthetic criticism—its disciplined exercise of focus on the present which precludes all other ends apart from the autotelic pleasure of articulation itself—proved to be no impediment to its products exerting the very influence which its practitioner necessarily disclaims. Max Saunders has drawn attention to the degree to which Pater left an indelible impression on the writers of the following generation, arguing that Joyce and Woolf, for example, were both more indebted to Pater than critics have so far acknowledged. And their *Künstlerromane* do, indeed, echo not only the *content* of Pater's own treatments of young artists in "The Child in the House" and "The English Poet"; more importantly, these novels also employ the *method* of Pater's imaginary portraits. Unlike the formation-narratives of Goethe, Wordsworth, or Dickens, Joyce and Woolf follow Pater in emphasizing the external context of their artists

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[101] *The Letters of Robert Frost*, ed. Donald Sheehy, Mark Richardson, and Robert Faggen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1:35.

[102] *The Letters of Robert Frost*, 1:35.

over their internal development. Stephen Dedalus and Lily Briscoe each bear unwilling witness to their shaping social and historical influences, yet this focus on the material inputs of their artistic visions serves only to illustrate the artistic genesis of each artist more dramatically. Similarly, the finale of each novel is coterminous with the decisive chapters of its central artist's self-formation: the ending of *To the Lighthouse* coincides exactly with the completion of Lily Briscoe's abstract painting ("It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought…I have had my vision."[103]) whereas, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the birth of the artist is announced by the figural death (through self-imposed exile) of the eponymous "young man." In these novels, art and life not only occupy the same frame: through the cessation of creation (Woolf) and the experience of formation (Joyce), they capture the artist in the very act of becoming.

The influence of Pater's focus on the development of artists is even more pronounced in the mature masterworks of modernism by Joyce and Proust.[104] Both

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[103] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (London: Hogarth Press, 1990), 198.

[104] While critics such as Saunders have convincingly demonstrated Pater's influence on Joyce, given Proust's famous adulation of Ruskin—to say nothing of Pater's own sympathy for Sainte-Beuve, the critic whom Proust cheerfully abhorred—one might expect that Pater's influence on Proust would be minimal at most. But while its extent may not compare with Ruskin's, Pater's effect on Proust, is significant nonetheless. Around the village of Illiers-Combray (the second name of which was recently added to honor its status as the model for the one depicted in Proust's novel), a modern day pilgrim will find many sights corresponding with those of the Combray described in *Swann's Way*. Nowhere, however, will she find any of the hawthorn bushes which elicit, from the enraptured protagonist, his famous reflections on the essence of beauty, perhaps because they were encountered by Proust, not in the environs of Illiers, but rather in the pages of Pater's imaginary portrait, "The Child in the House": "I have remarked how, in the process of our brain-building, as the house of thought in which we live gets itself together…little accidents have their consequence; and thus it happened that, as he walked one evening, a garden gate, usually closed, stood open; and lo! within, a great red hawthorn in full flower, embossing heavily the bleached and twisted trunk and branches…The perfume of the tree had now and again reached him, in the currents of the

Ulysses and *In Search of Lost Time* have been interpreted as metafictional allegories of their own creations: according to readings in this vein, Stephen Dedalus' encounter with Leopold Bloom gives him the very idea for *Ulysses*, and the novel which "Marcel" envisions in *Time Regained* is, likewise, Proust's own. Such readings resemble the one expressed by René Girard, in the conclusion of his early work, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*: "The title of hero of a novel must be reserved for the character who…becomes *capable of writing the novel*."[105] This initial resemblance, however, is slightly deceptive, since the criterion Girard identifies is not artistic ability but only *capacity*, and it is precisely the capacity which, in Pater's method, correlates with the development of the author himself. As a corollary of Girard's principle, one could say: the title of author must given to the writer who becomes capable of creating a hero who develops such a capacity within the work itself. In other words, the artist's act of development culminates in a representation of that development; Joyce and Proust become the authors of the novels they write by creating fictional equivalents who could do likewise. Thus, the creations of Stephen and "Marcel" are not the novels in which they appear: more

wind, over the wall, and he had wondered what might be behind it, and was now allowed to fill his arms with the flowers…Was it some periodic moment in the expansion of soul within him, or mere trick of heat in the heavily-laden summer air?," *Imaginary Portraits*, 184-185. Such an imaginative transfer of a formative experience from literature to life would not be inappropriate for the artist who famously affirmed that "the writer's true self is manifested in his books alone," *Marcel Proust on Art and Literature: 1896–1919*, trans. Sylvia Townsend Warner (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1997), 106. On Pater's impact on Joyce, see Saunders, *Self-Impression*, 47-48; on Pater's estimation (and emulation) of Sainte-Beuve, see Ed. Block Jr, "Walter Pater, Arthur Symons, W. B. Yeats, and the Fortunes of the Literary Portrait," *SEL*, 26:4 (1986), 759–76; on the possible the intertextual connection between *Swann's Way* and "The Child in the House," see Monsman, *Walter Pater*, 182.

[105] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965), 298, emphasis in original.

paradoxically, they create their creators; their very existences become evidence of their respective authors' completed self-creation.

In his 1930 essay, "Arnold and Pater," T. S. Eliot judged the matter differently. A propos *Marius the Epicurean*, he observes: "I do not believe that Pater, in this book, has influenced a single first-rate mind of a later generation," and he concludes, instead, that Pater's real impact was in the propagation of the "confusion between life and art"—a confusion, moreover, "which is not wholly irresponsible for some untidy lives."[106] Eliot's critical gifts, however, survive even his evident distain for Pater, and the characterization of aestheticism which follows in his essay is unerring:

> The theory (if it can be called a theory) of "art for art's sake" is still valid
> in so far as it can be taken as an exhortation to the artist to stick to his job;
> it never was and never can be valid for the spectator, reader or auditor.[107]

All that should be added to these observations is that Eliot ignores the parallel that he nevertheless makes manifest: the same critical stance which conflates life and art makes the distinction between artists and "spectator[s], reader[s], or auditor[s]" impossible. Far from producing "untidy lives," Pater's work—and its conflation of life and art—shows how lives can be given form though the internalization of the order that already inheres within art itself. And the modernists who adopted Pater's method recognized that such internal organization was to be achieved through the persistent production of art.

Eliot's reference to "untidy lives," however, is undoubtedly a veiled reference to the example of that earlier, most interesting, and most infamous example of Pater's

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[106] T.S. Eliot, "Arnold and Pater," 356.

[107] "Arnold and Pater," 356.

influence—namely, Oscar Wilde.[108] In *De Profundis*, Wilde himself remarks on this inheritance, calling *The Renaissance* "that book which has had such a strange influence over my life."[109] Yet Wilde's ready acknowledgement of Pater's influence is slightly misleading, for this artistic relationship is not one of emulation and repetition, but one rather of modification, correction, and inversion. Indeed, Wilde's relation to Pater is much like that of Proust to Ruskin: "We feel quite truly that our wisdom begins where that of the author ends, and we would like to have him give us answers, while all he can do is give us desires."[110] In the following chapter, then, the desires of Pater will become the dilemmas of Wilde as the imaginary portrait turns, with *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, into something else entirely.

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[108] The first critic to notice Wilde's uncanny debt to Pater's ideas was Pater himself who, after reading (and reviewing) Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—and noting, no doubt, the willful misrepresentation of his thought which it contained—cancels a planned vacation in order to continue his abortive work on the would-be sequel to *Marius the Epicurean*; see Monsman's "Introduction" in *Gaston de Latour*, *xviii*, *xl-xlii*.

[109] *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. II, "*De Profundis. 'Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis,'*" ed. Ian Small (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), 168.

[110] *On Reading*, ed. and trans. Jean Autret and William Burford (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 35.

Oscar Wilde and the Impossible in Art; or, Representation as a Way of Life

> [T]o imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.
> —Ludwig Wittgenstein[1]

> Everything is inherently contradictory.
> —G. W.F. Hegel[2]

The curious relationship between literature and life explored in the foregoing chapters of this dissertation achieves an unparalleled prominence in the figure of Oscar Wilde, whose work and person are each consistently cast as the correction and perfection of the other. As Jorge Luis Borges puts it: "To speak Wilde's name is to speak of a dandy who was also a poet; it is to evoke the image of a gentleman dedicated to the meager proposition of shocking by means of cravats and metaphors."[3] Yet, because no figure in Victorian literature brings art and life into closer contact, their contours become that much more difficult to delineate. This, of course, is by design, and Wilde's many formulations concerning the relationship between art and life exemplify this calculated confusion. To André Gide, for example, he remarks: "I put all my genius into my life; I put only my

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[1] *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, ed. P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 11ᵉ [§ 19]. In "The Availability of the Later Wittgenstein," Stanley Cavell provides a helpful gloss of Wittgenstein's notion of *Lebensform*: "a matter of our sharing routes of interest and feeling, modes of response, senses of humor and of significance and of fulfillment, of what is outrageous, of what is similar to what else, what a rebuke, what forgiveness, of when an utterance is an assertion, when an appeal, when an explanation—all the whirl of organism Wittgenstein calls 'forms of life'," *Must we mean what we say? A Book of Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 52.

[2] *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969), 439.

[3] Borges, *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Esther Allen, Suzanne Jill Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (New York: Penguin, 1999), 314.

talent into my works."[4] The quip itself is provocative enough; but it also inverts a

statement in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* made by the character with whom Wilde most

directly identified himself.[5] "Life" and "work" thus become—like the green carnations

worn by arbitrarily chosen actors and audience members at the debut of Wilde's final

play—the indecipherable terms of a non-existent code.[6] Nor can one outflank this grand

charade by drawing from Wilde's life the perfect epitome that he himself declined to

give. He may claim, in *De Profundis*, to have "summed up all systems in a phrase, and all

existence in an epigram," but his various self-cancelling pronouncements and

performances protect his own existence from such summations.[7] Wilde, so famous for his

paradoxes, gives the same form to his life and work by making the connection that is

inevitably sought between them ultimately inscrutable.

And yet, the most perplexing feature of Wilde's combined career of art and

artistic existence is not the contrived, self-concealing contradiction that they constitute,

but rather the conviction which Borges takes as the subject in his essay: "Reading and

rereading Wilde over the years, I note a fact that his panegyrists seem not even to have

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[4] Richard Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde* (New York: Knopf, 1988), 322.

[5] Speaking to Dorian Gray at the outset of the novel, Lord Henry describes their mutual friend, Basil Hallward: "Basil, my dear boy, puts everything that is charming in him into his work. The consequence is that he has nothing left for life but his prejudices, his principles, and his common sense," *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. III, *The Picture of Dorian Gray: The 1890 and 1891 Texts*, ed. Joseph Bristow (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 217; this text, abbreviated as *DG*, will be cited hereafter in parentheses. References, throughout, are to the 1891 text.

[6] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 430.

[7] Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde,* vol. II, *De Profundis. "Epistola: In Carcere et Vinculis,"*ed. Ian Small (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 163; this text, abbreviated as *DP*, will be cited hereafter in parentheses.

suspected: the elementary and demonstrable fact that Wilde is nearly always right."[8] Indeed, Wilde's uncanny accuracy extends even beyond the modest terms identified by Borges (who praises him chiefly for his "limpid observations") to embrace even his contradictions, which are, in fact, one of the primary means of his singular exactitude.[9] His witty reversals, manifest oxymora, and provocative poses all point towards a truth: the paradox that, by means of his paradoxes, something is, in fact, communicated clearly.

In a notebook entry, Wilde declares: "The impossible in art is anything that has happened in real life," one of so many maxims which outlines an antinomy between these inescapable terms.[10] Yet, like all of the entries in the contradictory compendium that could be made of Wilde's dicta about the relation of art and life, this formula affirms a *distinction*, rather than an opposition between these realms. Wilde's point of departure for thinking about this subject is Walter Pater, his teacher at Oxford and a writer for whom these spheres become virtually coextensive. Wilde's profound personal debt to Pater's written work provided him with a vivid experience of this very connection between literature and life. But this Paterian starting point also places a boundary on art, a delimitation of its possibilities (and impossibilities) similar to the one which Wilde asserts above. Precisely because—as Wilde's own experience of Pater's work attests—

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[8] Borges, "On Oscar Wilde," 315.

[9] Borges, "On Oscar Wilde," 315.

[10] Ellmann, *Oscar Wilde*, 285*n*. A parallel formulation of this relationship is given in *Swann's Way* after Swann's lover responds to his jealous inquiries regarding the details of her former life: "Swann had prepared himself for every possibility. Reality must therefore be something that bears no relation to possibilities," Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, *In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 1, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, rev. D.J. Enright (New York: Modern Library, 1998), 516.

"real life" can occur *within* "art," what remains truly "impossible in art" is the *representation* of its formative effects. By fusing existence, aesthetic experience, and critical reflection into a single act, the Paterian life of writing makes the fine edges between these domains—and the connections between them—impossible to explore.

Pater's provocative conflation of art and life is, thus, both an impetus and an impediment for Wilde, an identification which is overcome in the phase of Wilde's career which will be the focus here. From the critical essays collected in *Intentions* to his two major works of prose fiction, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," Wilde works Pater's paradigm into a different form and recovers life, art, and criticism from the single form in which Pater had enfolded them. Aesthetic experience, for Wilde, remains the basis of a Paterian mode of life, an existence which it still enables and sustains; but because nothing remains to be mirrored when the act of writing becomes life's all-consuming, all-encompassing, and self-sustaining mode, Pater negates the representational function of verbal art which Wilde strives to restore. For Wilde, art must not simply be the means by which an artistic life is realized: it must also be the place wherein its perfect image can be captured.

This double aspect of Wilde's art—its formative function and its representational power—produces two curious (and entirely characteristic) features that are held in a balanced tension throughout his prose: his reiterative, combinatorial writing practice, which is enabled by his performative language; and the impulse towards self-representation, which manifests itself in the self-referential images that are conspicuous in so many of his works—those quasi-allegorical emblems of art which constitute a kind of meta-fictional frame-breaking. As these two strands are examined below, they will

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appear as the co-constitutive forces that allow the same self-formation through literary form also seen in Tennyson, Hopkins, and Pater. What sets Wilde apart from these predecessors, however, is that singular, second force which shapes his work: the drive to create an image of the very practice of self-formation through art in which he is engaged, the desire to depict the means by which his moral and intellectual alteration is accomplished *within* those selfsame means. Wilde's peculiar practice of form transforms this representation into a way of life.

The investigation of this dual aspect of Wilde's art will eventually need to reconcile Borges's conviction about his rightness with two confuting facts: namely, that his self-representational images of art are fictions, forgeries, or the means of moral destruction, as well as that his own name for language's performative quality is "lying." The attenuation of these *prima facie* contradictions and the reconciliation of lying with Wilde's peculiar truth is the main critical corrective offered here. Although the claim that Oscar Wilde was his own work of art *has* been made by scholars—particularly in those readings which focus on his modes of performance in the social salon and on the dramatic stage—such readings tend to diminish both the intellectual content of his work and the coherence of his gestures, which both, in that treatment, become so much scaffolding around an absent center. [11] The anti-humanist underpinnings of this self-fashioning version of Wilde fit neatly enough with the apparent anti-foundationalism of his critical writings; yet this Wilde, who is seemingly free from contradictions, is also all

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[11] See, for example, Kerry Powell's *Acting Wilde: Victorian Sexuality, Theatre, and Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), Heather Marcovitch's *The Art of the Pose: Oscar Wilde's Performance Theory* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), and Sheldon Waldrep's *The Aesthetics of Self- Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004).

but incomprehensible: a chameleon without a core, a subversive artist without an essence which his art could either reveal or conceal—or, for that matter, shape.

Beyond the reach of the dichotomies of fact and fiction, of honesty and sincerity, and of truth and lies, Wilde creates himself through an art that reflects this very process. Wilde's may be a groundless humanism, one predicated precisely on lying and forgery; yet the essential self that Wilde shapes in his art is not less vital because it emerges only through this practice, having, as it does, no other origin than art itself. Producing himself through the production of art, Wilde not only remakes himself: he also creates, as Borges might have put it, a new way to be right. Wilde's own critical account of his performative language, in conjunction with the ancient art of living, enables the self-formative project at the center of his career; following its exposition, the self-representational strength of his self-formative art will then be examined in his two most famous works of fiction.

The Renovation of Lying: Wilde's Performative Language

Reflecting, in *De Profundis*, on the various social presentations, appearances, and poses of his social persona, Wilde offers a telling retrospective on his performative former life; he writes: "to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province, and showed that the false and the true are merely forms of intellectual existence. I treated Art as the supreme reality, and life as a mere mode of fiction" (*DP* 163). In addition to reviving the oxymoronic mode of his critical writing (and coining another formula for the relationship between art and life), Wilde here recasts his well-crafted acts, in society and in print, in terms of their intellectual aims. Unwilling to dismiss his former life as a series of insincere charades, he gives a decidedly *linguistic*

emphasis to this account of the modes of "intellectual existence" he adopted, and makes a significant connection between the personal life which he describes and the performances of language that subtend his work.

The theory of language that informs Wilde's literary output—one which passes over the distinction between truth and falsehood entirely—is articulated in his essay, "The Decay of Lying." At first glance, one could easily surmise that this essay is merely a platform for Wilde's witty turns of phrase, with its content determined by an inevitable logic of inversion. It is true that the author never seems to refuse a chance to indulge in his penchant for paradox; but to find, in this essay, nothing but examples of its author's stylistic tics is to miss the serious work accomplished by his critical tropes. Indeed, a transformative motif of reversal is employed in nearly every one of the essay's counterintuitive constructions. For instance, in the course of his polemic against realism in literature, Wilde's proxy, Vivian, comes close to distilling Wilde's paradoxical position on representation: "Life imitates Art," he declares, "far more than Art imitates Life."[12] He comes closer still in lamenting that "[o]ne of the greatest tragedies of my life is the death of Lucien de Rubempré," a character in Balzac's novels, and hints here at a connection between literature and life wherein these realms shape each other in significant ways.[13] Finally, near the end of the dialogic essay, Vivian touches on the

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[12] "The Decay of Lying" in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. IV, *Criticism*, ed. Josephine M. Guy (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 94.

[13] "The Decay of Lying," 82. See also Gilbert's curious remark, cited approvingly by Borges as an example of Wilde's [infallible] accuracy: "[a]fter playing Chopin, I feel as if I had been weeping over sins that I had never committed, and mourning over tragedies that were not my own," "The Critic as Artist" in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. IV, *Criticism*, 127. A similar paradox is described by Proust in a celebrated passage in *Swann's Way* wherein the narrator's childhood experience of reading is recounted.

counterfactual dynamic entailed by self-formation through literary form as his description

of the influence of lying on life reaches its imaginative crescendo: "over our heads will

float the Blue Bird singing of beautiful and impossible things, of things that are lovely

and that never happen, of things that are not and that should be. But before this comes to

pass we must cultivate the lost art of Lying."[14] Although Wilde rarely deviates, in this

essay, from his rhetorical strategy of inversions, each instance of this strategy

nevertheless brings an important dimension of literary self-formation into view. The

connection between "the lost art of Lying" and the ancient art of living to which these

examples point will be explored more fully later with respect to his fiction; for the

moment, the Wildean ideas conspicuous in "The Decay of Lying" will be delved into

further.

The notion of lying which emerges in Vivian's spirited defense takes beauty as its

single and sufficient justification. Lying enacts a permutation of language whose force

derives from its aesthetic form rather than from any fidelity to fact, and the hyperbole of

many of Vivian's propositions offers examples of what such a theoretical position looks

like in practice. The preposterous string of insupportably strong claims that Vivian traces

throughout the essay— speaking of Hamlet, for instance, he asserts: "the world has

become sad because a puppet was once melancholy"—relates form to content in precisely

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Because the actions which any novelist depicts are internal—"it is in ourselves that they
are happening"—"as in all purely mental states, every emotion is multiplied ten-
fold…[thus,] for the space of an hour he sets free within us all the joys and sorrows in the
world, a few of which only we should have to spend years of our actual life getting to
know, and the most intense of which would never be revealed to us because the slow
course of their developments prevents us from perceiving them," 117.

[14] "The Decay of Lying," 102.

this way.[15] While displaying the same kind of reversal between the real world and art common in Wilde, this maxim joins conspicuous overstatement to its paradoxical inversion, as if the claim has been calculated to be aesthetically striking rather than persuasive. Even as the essay invites its own dismissal through overstatements of this kind, its many examples of inversion and hyperbole are Wilde's primary means of realizing in form the content that his essay presents.

The general notion of language that emerges through these inverted and overstated "lies" is, therefore, quite different from that of the literary or philosophical realists who are frequent targets in Wilde's essay. For instead of being an inert and neutral medium, language for Wilde possesses the Protean character of a lie—but without a fixed reality to which it could be unfaithful. Through the productive distortion of ordinary expression, language actively shapes what it putatively describes. Thus, by means of language, Wilde abjures the passive acceptance of life's (apparently) plain facts as his transformative words are spoken in a self-fulfilling subjunctive which defies any indicative mode. Although "The Decay of Lying" is offered under the pretense of a recovery—of renovating a *specific* use to which language was put in the past—it is, more accurately, a polemical description of the general condition of Wilde's critical and creative writings.

This active mode of language is illustrated most clearly when it is incompletely achieved. Like all of Wilde's writings, *De Profundis* is riven with contradictions, but its outright inconsistencies lack the sustained counterintuitive coherence of "The Decay of Lying." For here Wilde is attempting to enact the linguistic pose of his previous life and

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[15] "The Decay of Lying," 92.

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simultaneously describe it as well. In the passage quoted earlier, for instance, he recalls

that "to truth itself I gave what is false no less than what is true as its rightful province"

employing, in the first part of the quotation, a category seemingly forsworn in the second;

the descriptive mode fully supplants the perfomative in the second half of the same

sentence as Wilde claims that he "showed that the false and the true are merely forms of

intellectual existence." By silently shifting between the provocative accents of Wilde's

early career and the otherwise muted tone of his prison epistle, this sentence brings the

lineaments of his former mode of writing into sharp relief. Outside of the dichotomy of

truth and falsehood which is both affirmed and contradicted in this sentence, art can take

its place as Wilde's "supreme reality," while life, held between the two poles of passive

description and active creation, becomes responsive to language's performative power.

Language, then, is not just another sphere in which Wilde poses, performs, and

feigns, for in *this* sphere, all his acts are effective. Indeed, because Wilde's "supreme

reality" is art's contingent realm of created things, a connection can be drawn between J.

L. Austin's philosophical lexicon and Wilde's performative account of linguistic lying.

Austin affirms, in *How to Do Things With Words*, that a speech act "is a contingent act in

the human and social world that makes something happen," and two different types of

performatives can be recognized in many instances of Wilde's writings.[16] As articulations

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[16] Austin draws a distinction between the "illocutionary" speech acts and
"perlocutionary" speech acts. The former refers to acts *within* the act of speech, those
special cases wherein language itself creates a new fact: "the performance of an act *in*
saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something," *How to do
Things with Words*, ed. J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard
UP, 1975), 100-101. Perlocutionary acts, on the other hand, "produce certain
consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the
speaker, or of other persons," 101.

of otherwise latent imaginative possibilities, Wilde's dialogues and critical fictions actualize a counterfactual potential, and thus possess a kind of illocutionary force, announcing to the world, as he puts it, "things that are lovely and that never happen."[17] Alternatively, when the emphasis is shifted towards the possible audiences of Wilde's performative language, his various statements can be seen as what Austin would call "perlocutionary" speech acts and interpreted in terms of their effects. This approach is especially appropriate for a writer whose output so closely resembles his own dramatic prose (and his extemporaneous speech, as well); but the danger here is that the scope of his performatives is sometimes reduced, by critics, to a series of insincere charades. Yet, Austin's account of these persuasive, perlocutionary speech acts protects against this limitation since these acts may, in fact, be *self*-directed. Wilde's program of provocation can, therefore, be read as a set of performative acts not undertaken with any specific reader or listener in mind, but rather as an itinerary pursued for *the transformative effect they had on Wilde himself*.

Because language does not leave the speaker (or writer) unaltered, Wilde's own conduct can be directed and defined through it. This connection between language and conduct, so central to "The Decay of Lying," is also the key to the essay's governing conceit: through the supposed recovery of the "art of lying," Wilde actually enables the recovery of another, well-established ancient art: the so-called "art of life." This art of living, in fact, provides a way to bring together Wilde's early and abiding engagement with classical art and thought and his complex relationship with Walter Pater, through whom so much of that culture was mediated. In addition to locating Wilde's living art in

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[17] "The Decay of Lying," 101.

the context of his contemporary influences and the classical sources, the art of life can be approached through two of its most prominent modern interpreters.

The Other Side of the Pose: Wilde's Living Art

The reconstruction of the art of living found in the philosophers Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot offers a valuable paradigm for understanding Wilde's art, especially in the context of the movement with which he and Walter Pater are now invariably associated. For what Foucault calls the "aesthetics of existence" was, in fact, the centerpiece of Aestheticism, which claimed Pater's ideals and Wilde's example as their perfect expressions.[18] The characteristic pose associated with this movement is cited by Foucault as one of only two felicitous examples in which the practice of the art of life flourished after its eclipse at the end of the classical period:

> We have hardly any remnant of the idea in our society, that the principal work of art which one has to take care of, the main area to which one must apply aesthetic values is oneself, one's life, one's existence. We find this in the Renaissance, but in a slightly academic form, and yet again in nineteenth century dandyism, but those were only episodes. [19, 20]

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[18] On the "aesthetics of existence," see, for instance, Michel Foucault, *The Courage of Truth (The Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983– 1984*, ed. Frédéric Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: MacMillan, 2011), 161-164, and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1986), 89-93.

[19] That the dandyism to which Foucault here refers includes its English incarnation is clear from Foucault's linking of Wilde and Gide in a 1977 interview—although both are adduced, not as exemplars of dandyism, but as figures engaged in producing "a literature of homosexuality…at the end of the 19th century," "The End of the Monarchy of Sex," *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961-1984*, trans. John Johnston, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989), 218.

The Greek art of life is, in some sense, both Foucault's topic and his method. When he

explains his turn toward the subject and its concomitant "arts of existence" at the outset

of *The History of Sexuality*'s second volume, he accounts for his shift in focus by

appealing to the self-alteration that intellectual work can achieve: "There are times in life

when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive

differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting

at all."[21] Foucault then elaborates on the active quality of this curiosity and the work

which it produces, describing the latter as a kind of experiment:

> The "essay"—which should be understood as the assay or
> test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes
> changes…—is the living substance of philosophy, at least
> as we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times
> past, i.e., an "ascesis," *askēsis*, an exercise of oneself in the
> activity of thought.[22]

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[20] It is significant, of course, that the nineteenth-century text which became the manifesto for the movement which Foucault commends in England is itself a study of the Renaissance, the other period which Foucault cites—especially given Pater's conception of what precisely is "re-born" in this period. In explaining his anachronistic addition of a final chapter on the eighteenth-century art critic, Johann Joachim Winckelmann, to *The Renaissance*, Pater writes: "I have added an essay on Winckelmann, as not incongruous with the studies which precede it, because Winckelmann…really belongs in spirit to an earlier age…by his Hellenism, his life-long struggle to attain the Greek spirit, he is in sympathy with the humanists of a previous century," *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980), *xxiv*. Winckelmann is not the only art critic who "really belongs in spirit to an earlier age," however; for, by justifying his inclusion of him with an appeal to his "Hellenism," Pater indicates that it is precisely the "Greek spirit" that he sees being reborn in this crucial period. For Pater, then, the Renaissance truly is the second advent of an earlier era—the one to which both he and Foucault look back for inspiration.

[21] *The Use of Pleasure*, 8.

[22] *The Use of Pleasure*, 9. The intellectual range that Foucault realizes through this shift in his thought is a program of self-development which bears a resemblance to the regimen of intellectual experimentation that Dorian Gray enacts in Chapter 11: "in his search for sensations that would be at once new and delightful…[Dorian] would often

In addition to bearing a strong resemblance to the ascetic aestheticism of Walter Pater explored in the previous chapter—which made "think[ing] differently" and "perceive[ing] differently" an essential part of its program—Foucault's comments also bear on Wilde's notion expressed in a letter to Robert Ross. In it, he claims that an alternate mode of existence is available to artists: "It is by utterance that we live."[23] Because "mere expression is to an artist the supreme and only mode of life," his profession of faith in that utterance is less a grand pronouncement than a technical description of the mode in which language and conduct are interdependent.

As his editor and translator, Arnold I. Davidson, has noted, Foucault made his turn toward the subject, in part, because of his encounter with the work of the historian of philosophy, Pierre Hadot, in whose writings the notion that the primary purpose of ancient philosophy was the "care of the self" is most completely articulated.[24] According to Hadot, philosophy, for both the Greeks and Romans, was less a body of intellectual doctrines than an orientation, an attitude adopted in the face of human experience:

adopt certain modes of thought that he knew to be really alien to his nature, abandon himself to their subtle influences, and then, having, as it were, caught their colour and satisfied his intellectual curiosity, leave them with that curious indifference that is not incompatible with a real ardour of temperament, and that, indeed, according to certain modern psychologists, is often a condition of it." (*DG* 280).

[23] *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd., 1962), 850.

[24] "I do not think that it is an exaggeration to claim that Foucault's study of ancient sexual behavior is guided or framed in terms of Hadot's notion of spiritual exercises, that Foucault's aim is to link the practices of the self exhibited in the domain of sexual behavior to the spiritual training and exercise that govern the whole of one's existence," "Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy: An Introduction to Pierre Hadot," *Critical Inquiry* 16:3 (Spring 1990), 480.

"philosophy is an art of life, a style of life that engages the whole of existence."[25] Ancient philosophy, as Hadot reconstructs it, is, indeed, nothing less than a way of life, a "way of existing in the world, which should be practiced at each instant and which should transform all of life."[26] To achieve this way of life, the "philo-sopher," the lover of wisdom, constantly practices what Hadot calls "spiritual exercises"—alluding, with this term, not to the writings of St. Ignatius Loyola, but to the ancient philosophical texts from which Ignatius drew his inspiration: "Each school," writes Hadot, "had its own therapeutic method, but all of them linked their therapeutics to a profound transformation of the individual's mode of seeing and being. The object of spiritual exercises is precisely to bring about this transformation."[27]

Language is essential to the practice of the "art of life" precisely because the lived reality of a philosophical attitude is the end of these exercises. Since the philosopher, according to Hadot, can "only act on himself and others through discourse," philosophy is "a mode of life that includes as an integral part a certain mode of discourse."[28] Hence,

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[25] Qtd. in Davidson, "Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy," 480.

[26] Qtd. in Davidson, "Ethics as Ascetics: Foucault, the History of Ethics, and Ancient Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), 123.

[27] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Case (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 83. See Foucault's related observation: "No technique, no professional skill can be acquired without exercise; neither can one learn the art of living, the *techne tou biou*, without an askesis which must be taken as a training of oneself by oneself," "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983), 246.

[28] *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 26.

pithy maxims are essential as the means by which the central mental exercises of each school would be transmitted and reinforced: "To make possible these exercises in meditation, beginners are exposed to maxims or summaries of the principal dogmas of the school"; nor is the form of these maxims unimportant: "To ensure that these dogmas have a great spiritual effectiveness, they must be presented in the form of short, striking formulae."[29] Hadot's emphasis here on the connection between self-formation and literary form—developed most fully in his study of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*[30]—finds a parallel in Foucault's analysis of the ancient custom of keeping a *hypomnemata*, or "spiritual copybook" discussed in previous chapters. For Foucault, this crucial "technology of the self" was the means by which one could "collect the already-said, to reassemble that which one could hear or read, and this to an end which is nothing less than the constitution of oneself."[31] This notion of self-constitution through the collecting of maxims and phrases offers a new approach to Wilde's notoriously allusive, repetitious, and even plagiaristic artistic practice. While he is not above recycling his better *bons mots* in different contexts, Wilde's repetitions—of himself and others—are more fruitfully understood as the means by which he re-presents to himself especially important fragments of discourse so that they can continue to exert their formative power

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[29] *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 60.

[30] See Pierre Hadot, *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998).

[31] "On the Genealogy of Ethics," 247. For a fuller account of Foucault's analysis of this practice, see his essay, "Self Writing," in *The Essential Works of Foucault, Volume 1: Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), 207-222. See also Hadot's "Reflections on the Notion of the 'Cultivation of the Self'" in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, trans. Timothy J. Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 225-32.

upon him. If Wilde's works sometimes have the feel of a copybook, it is because his compositions offered him a place to assemble and consolidate an eclectic compendium of past influences.[32]

Wilde's epigrams are, therefore, not simply a means of communicating, but also of consolidating the very attitudes they express. His anthologies of phrases may be ironically intended "for the instruction of the over-educated" or "for the use of the young," but, given the self-directing capacity of speech acts and the transformative potential of his "lying" language, they can equally be considered as a vital part of his own instruction and use.[33] On this reading, Wilde's collected paradoxes become programs of self-formation, of which the Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is perhaps the most exemplary instance. Ostensibly a polemic against the critics who had attacked the novel

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[32] Compare this with both Pater's practice of imperfect quotation which Gerald Monsman describes in *Walter Pater's Art of Autobiography* (New Have: Yale UP, 1980), 15 *et passim*, as well as Brían Hanrahan's account of Walter Benjamin's *oeuvre* as an "open system" in which "ideas and passages migrate between different texts, letters morph into essays and vice versa, texts are so heavily rewritten that they contradict their previous versions," "For Future Friends of Walter Benjamin," in *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 26, 2012, <http://lareviewofbooks.org/article.php?id=791>. One could, alternatively, place a different emphasis on Wilde's plagiarisms, and read them in light of his assertion that it is "only by not paying one's bills that one can hope to live in the memory of the commercial classes"—not acknowledging one's literary debts being, by extension, the surest way of living in the memory of the critical class, "Phrases and Philosophies for the Use of the Young," *Oscar Wilde: The Major Works*, ed. Isobel Murray (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), 572.

[33] See *Oscar Wilde: The Major Works*, 570-573. Wilde's aphorisms, therefore, not only enable a mode of life for him but also communicate its features for others; they, therefore, perform the dual function of philosophy's "inner and outer discourses," identified by Hadot, which, taken together, provide the essential intellectual frame of the philosophical attitude: "the latter have as their role to express the representation of the world that is implied in such and such an existential attitude, and these discourses allow one at the same time to rationally justify the attitude and to communicate it to others," *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 31.

when its initial version appeared in *Lippincott's* magazine, the Preface is also an itinerary

of mental exercises through which Wilde creates for himself the attitude with which to

oppose them; this riposte to others is also a reminder and reinforcement for himself. The

paradoxes of the Preface, which sometimes seem to offer no apparent alternative—the

pair pertaining to the "rage of Caliban," for example—leave Wilde above the very

dispute from which they emerge. In this way, Wilde achieves the equanimity,

"relaxation[,] and detachment" which is the object of similar mental exercises in

Epicurean discourses; through his own "[d]iversity of opinion," the artist achieves an

"accord with himself" (*DG* 168). Before further considering the practice and depiction of

the art of life in this novel, however, Pater, the figure who, more than anyone else,

determined how Wilde enacted and represented this art, must be further considered.

The same attitudes toward experience which ancient philosophy sought to

inculcate in its practitioners are also central to Pater's manifesto of aestheticism, the

Conclusion to *The Renaissance*. Admittedly, the connection between this scandalous

post-script and classical thought is not obvious: except for the epigraph from Heraclitus,

Pater's references are all modern. However, material pertaining to the philosophical art of

life suffuses Pater's coda. As Hopkins said of his sonnet on Heraclitus, Pater's

Conclusion is a text wherein "a great deal of early Greek philosophical thought [is]

distilled." Take, for example, the last explicit quotation that Pater reproduces:

> Well! we are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: we are
> all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite
> reprieve — *les hommes sont tous condamnés mort avec des
> sursis indéfinis*: we have an interval, and then our place
> knows us no more.[34]

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[34] *The Renaissance*, 190.

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The sentence is dominated by the quotation which is interpolated, attributed, and translated before it is reproduced in the original. However, the content of the quotation is actually a commonplace of ancient philosophy, which Hugo frames in an arresting way, much as Montaigne's formula, "To Study Philosophy is To Learn To Die," is a reformulation of a statement by Cicero whom he quotes at the outset of his famous essay.[35] Moreover, the phrase which follows Pater's second colon—"we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more"—is the vital part of ancient spiritual exercises which train the thinker's focus on the present moment.[36] Similar meditations in the self-therapeutic vein of classical philosophy pervade Pater's Conclusion. When, after declaring that a "counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life" he asks: "How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?" his question strongly resembles ones which Marcus Aurelius poses to himself in his *Meditations*: "What remains for you to do but enjoy life, linking each good thing to the next, without leaving the slightest interval between them?" (XII 29, 3). Even Pater's definition of philosophy's aim—"to rouse [the human spirit], to startle it into sharp and eager observation," (ostensibly borrowed from Novalis) corresponds to any number of similar formulations in ancient sources.[37]

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[35] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Works: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters*, trans. Donald M. Frame (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 67.

[36] See Hadot's chapter, "'Only the Present is our Happiness': The Value of the Present Instant in Goethe and in Ancient Philosophy" in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 217-237.

[37] Pater, *The Renaissance*, 188. For example, in addition to ending with a similar question, the following sequence from Marcus Aurelius, contains many of the same topoi that Pater

The Image of Influence: Wilde's Portrait of Pater in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

Wilde, who enjoyed a reputation as a classicist even before matriculating at Magdalen

College, would have recognized Pater's sources in the Conclusion. Though writing in

English, and conspicuously quoting from contemporary European authors, Pater

translated the ideals and mental practices of the Romans and the Greeks into Victorian

prose—a program of transposition evident in *Marius the Epicurean*, the novel which

Pater advertises as the continuation of this project in the note added to the Conclusion

when it was restored to the text. Pater's example visibly informs Wilde's own strategies

for adapting classical material in his work and for representing the influences which

shape that work as well.

　　The Portrait of Dorian Gray may be Wilde's most famous work of fiction, but it

was not the story that he produced when he was commissioned to write a piece for

Lippincott's magazine. Wilde initially submitted "The Fisherman and His Soul," a story

eventually included in *A House of Pomegranates,* but which was rejected by the

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assembles in his "Conclusion": "In human life, the time of our existence is a point, our
substance a flux, our senses dull, the fabric of our entire body subject to corruption, our
soul ever restless, our destiny beyond divining, and our fame precarious. In a word, all
that belongs to the body is a stream in flow…So what can serve as our escort and guide?
One thing and one alone, philosophy," *Meditations: With Selected Correspondence*,
trans. Robin Hard (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011), 15 [Book 2, § 19]. Marcus Aurelius, of
course, figures prominently as a sympathetically drawn character in *Marius the
Epicurean*; yet, the correspondences between these two passages—their shared instance
on the ephemerality of time and the singular utility of philosophy, for instance—are not
the result of any direct reproduction of material from the *Meditations*; instead, similarities
persist between them because of the shared intellectual traditions on which they both
draw.

magazine for its insufficient length.[38] In this story, the eponymous soul becomes detached

from the fisherman's body and, in the most memorable sequence of the story, regales the

fisherman with a series of seductive, voyeuristic cadenzas which recount its immoral,

oriental adventures.[39] A similar imaginative bifurcation of conscience and curiosity

enables the exploration of prohibited experiences in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. Nor is

it a coincidence that the poles of self and soul are present in each story's title for, in each,

this dynamic is both the central relationship and the main conceit. However, the decadent

"art of life" that Dorian enacts by means of his enchanted soul-showing picture is more

obviously indebted to the ancient techniques of self-formation described above. In fact,

Dorian's progressive dissipation can be read as a parodic literalization of the artisanal

metaphors found in neo-Platonic texts extolling moral self-development. Hadot observes

that the "quest for self-realization, [the] final goal of spiritual exercises, is aptly

symbolized by the Plotinian image of sculpting one's own statue" and quotes, by way of

example, the following extract from *The Enneads:*

> If you do not yet see your own beauty, do as the sculptor
> does with a statue which must become beautiful: he
> removes one part, scrapes another, makes one area smooth,
> and cleans the other, until he causes the beautiful face in
> the statue to appear. In the same way, you too must remove
> everything that is superfluous, straighten that which is
> crooked, and purify all that is dark until you make it
> brilliant.[40]

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[38] See Donald L. Lawler and Charles E. Knott, "The Context of Invention: Suggested Origins of *Dorian Gray*," *Modern Philology*, 73:4 (May 1976), 390*n*2.

[39] "The Fisherman and His Soul," *Complete Short Fictions*, ed. Ian Small (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1995), 127-138.

[40] *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 100.

Dorian, however, does just the opposite. Following his debaucheries, he would:

> creep upstairs to the locked room…and stand, with a
> mirror, in front of the portrait that Basil Hallward had
> painted of him, looking now at the evil and aging face on
> the canvas, and now at the fair young face that laughed
> back at him from the polished glass…He grew more and
> more enamoured of his own beauty, more and more
> interested in the corruption of his own soul. He would
> examine with minute care, and sometimes with a monstrous
> and terrible delight, the hideous lines that seared the
> wrinkling forehead or crawled around the heavy sensual
> mouth, wondering sometimes which were the more
> horrible, the signs of sin or the signs of age. (*DG* 277)

The Plotinian process of self-development which is here travestied is itself, in many ways, an inversion of the image which Plato uses in *The Republic* to depict the concealed and disfigured soul within man, which Wilde's description also echoes. Hadot notes:

> in Platonism…we find the famous image of Glaucos, the
> god who lives in the depths of the sea. Covered as he is
> with mud, seaweed, seashells, and pebbles, Glaucos is
> unrecognizable, and the same holds true for the soul: the
> body is a kind of thick, coarse crust, covering and
> completely disfiguring it, and the soul's true nature would
> only appear if it rose up out of the sea, throwing off
> everything alien to it.[41]

Hadot's brief summary of the myth which is employed by Plato and echoed by Wilde omits one crucial detail—the one, in fact, which reveals the link between Wilde's original narrative and his subsequent one: Glaucos is actually not *born* a god but is, instead, a fisherman who attains his divinity after eating a magic herb. Plato's parable, therefore, might not wrongly be titled, "The Fisherman and His Soul." Thus, although Wilde's initial narrative—filled with mermaids, witches, and exotic locales—has many features that connect it more clearly to the realm of Greek myth that inspires it, Wilde actually

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[41] *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 102-103.

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comes closer to his classical inspiration in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* by making the

Soul itself into a physical work of art—not a sculpture, but a painting. By turning what,

in Plotinus, is a metaphorical analogue for the art of life into the very object at the center

of his novel, Wilde infuses this ancient practice into modern literature and continues the

project of Pater's most famous texts.

This connection with Pater would, however, remain a suggestive conjecture were

it not for Wilde's other innovation in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. When he reprises the

split between self and soul to depict the practice of the art of life through the young man

and his portrait, Wilde adds doubles to each part of this dyad, inserting a creator for the

picture in Basil Hallward and a corruptor for the youth in Lord Henry Wotton. This

important addition not only enables the exploring of new aspects of each of these

imaginative poles but, crucially, it also brings Wilde's own influences *within* the frame of

his fiction.

Lord Henry is, of course, a transparent stand-in for Walter Pater. As Gerald

Monsmon points out, he "incessantly misquotes both *The Renaissance* and *Marius*" and,

in doing so, mimes Pater's own practice of freely rendering influential quotations just as

they were retained in memory.[42] For instance, the first and most pernicious apothegm

with which Lord Henry corrupts Dorian—"Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just

as nothing can cure the senses but the soul" (*DG* 185)—interpolates a line from *Marius*

which is itself reproduced in a later chapter. When a more accurate form of this quotation

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[42] "Introduction," *Gaston de Latour*, ed. Gerald Monsman (Greensboro: ELT Press, 1995), *xl*; on Pater's practice of impressionistic misquotation, see Monsman, *Walter Pater's Art of Autobiography* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980), 15-17.

is given, it appears only when the "picture" of Dorian Gray allows Dorian himself to put it into action. In this phase of the novel, Dorian seeks "to elaborate some new scheme of life that would have its reasoned philosophy and its ordered principles, and find in the *spiritualising of the senses* its highest realisation" (*DG* 278, my emphasis). Under Lord Henry's tutelage and by means of his enchanted portrait, Dorian seeks to articulate a doctrine of life from his wealth of prohibited experiences that would fulfill this paradoxical ideal. Yet, as the internal echoes in Dorian's declaration make tellingly clear, it is Lord Henry's Paterian dicta, more than the magic picture and the epicurean adventures it sets in motion, which enable the life whose scheme Dorian would define. Out of the mode of life that was born from an epigram, Dorian strives to reproduce, with the aid of experience, a verbal formula from which his *moyen de vivre* emerged, transforming the untested phrases which seduced him into a series of axioms proved on his own pulses. The paradox of this novel about one young man's uninhibited experiments in experience—that it is only an *intellectual* doctrine which enables and sustains Dorian's life of decadence—allows Wilde to dramatize the dynamic between action and thought and to illustrate the influence of Pater's worldview on life.

To the mythic image of self-formation at the core of his novel, then, Wilde adds a depiction of the intellectual apparatus that makes this practice possible through the person of Lord Henry and the influence he exerts. Dorian's dissolute experiences produce observable effects on the magical picture of his soul just as Lord Henry's philosophy provides him with the original impetus for his experiment of illicit living: the analogy illustrates the central role of language in the art of life. Indeed, the armchair aestheticism of Lord Henry is emblematic of language's pure, performative power: the aphorisms

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which have no effect on *him* completely change Dorian, whose magic portrait acts as an

emblem for the otherwise invisible relationship between language, thought, and action.

The self-shaping power of language and thought is, moreover, what makes the "scheme

of life" that Dorian desires so necessary: an aim and end is needed to curb and to focus

the self-effecting energy that Lord Henry's language unleashes, which is precisely why

the vocabulary of "elaboration," "realization," and "self-development" is used throughout

Wilde's novel to characterize Dorian's aesthetic life.[43]

Thus, with Lord Henry, Wilde brings both the content *and the conduit* of the

classical ideals which have shaped him into his novel, a dual focus on material and

medium which is itself true to Pater's own concept of aesthetic criticism. Because, for

Pater, the faithful communication of an art is tantamount *to* that art, Wilde's own

representation of his teacher's art of life is incomplete without his own mediating image.

Yet, brilliantly, Wilde makes this representation of Pater (and his own indebtedness to

him) the means of correcting him as well; by submitting Pater's influence on him to the

formative force of novelistic representation, Wilde corrects for the lack he perceives in

his teacher's works, wherein the author himself all but disappears. In Pater's *Imaginary*

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[43] In addition to appearing at crucial points in *Dorian Gray*, the same vocabulary recurs in Wilde's review of Zhuangzi's philosophy, written while he was composing his initial draft of the novel. This review also connects the idea of self-development with that of a "scheme of life"; at the end of the review, Wilde offers the following evaluation: "It may be true that the ideal of self-culture and self-development, which is the aim of his scheme of life, and the basis of his scheme of philosophy, is an ideal somewhat needed by an age like ours, in which most people are so anxious to educate their neighbours that they have actually no time left in which to educate themselves. But would it be wise to say so?, "A Chinese Sage," in *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde,* ed. Richard Ellmann (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968), 228. The same language recurs throughout "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" to describe the salutary "new Individualism" that Socialism, in his view, is working to produce, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. IV, *Criticism*, 267 *et passim*.

Portraits, for example, the author is concealed at the top of an imaginative Chain of Being: just as the fictional subjects of these portraits produce artifacts through which essential aspects of themselves are disclosed, so too do these very portraits reveal hints of the hidden artist who invents and arranges them. The *Imaginary Portraits* are, thus, a series of pictures of created creators which together form a set of analogies for the author himself. These analogies, however, enact an art that they do *not* describe, and give only faint hints of the writing life that their author practiced in producing them. They may constitute the vital chapters of the autobiography of Pater's imagination, but, because they shirk the self-representational duty of art and sketch no self-image of their author directly, they remain incomplete.

For Pater, of course, any such fixed image would be impossible because the process of self-formation is dynamic and unending. For Wilde, however, such images are necessary *precisely because* they are impossible: partial, incomplete, and inherently provisional, such images represent the art they enact while simultaneously accomplishing its performative purpose. Wilde's famous triple-identification with the characters of his novel—"Basil Hallward is what I think I am: Lord Henry what the world thinks me: Dorian what I would like to be—in other ages, perhaps"[44]—illustrates the self-representational work that novelistic form accomplishes insofar as these characters embody their author's intuitions, influences, and aspirations. But since these characters alter the very aspects of the author that they also render, Wilde differs from them *by means* of the very act of representation through which they are realized. Thus does

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[44] *The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, 352 [To Ralph Payne, 12 Feb. 1894].

Wilde's novel fuse the opposing forces of self-representation and self-formation, a singular achievement next to be explored.

The Mutable Mirror: *Dorian Gray* and the Self-Reflection of Art

By representing the influence of Pater's seductive aesthetic philosophy, Wilde shows how the formative power of language can itself be brought within the bounds of fictional representation. But Wilde pairs Pater's stand-in, Lord Henry Wotton, with another character, an earnest artist who, because he is depicted in the inherently performative medium of language, becomes the vehicle through which Wilde reveals the performative and expressive power that representation may also possess.

Wilde's artistic avatar in the novel, the painter Basil Hallward, is decidedly *not* a liar; and, by setting the fatal events of the novel in motion by means of an unfailingly realistic rendering of Dorian Gray, Wilde is true to the art of falseness he extols in "The Decay of Lying." But instead of simply pursuing that essay's polemic against realism by staging its disastrous practice, Wilde is able to reconcile two seemingly opposed aspects of art: by representing representation itself, *his* art lies without being false. Through the vision of his fiction, Wilde turns its counterfactuals into a kind of fact without making them altogether true. Like James Joyce's incarnations in Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom, Wilde's characters embody their creator in uncertain proportions or similarity; and like Seamus Heaney in *Station Island*, Wilde also differs from the possible versions of himself that he explores.[45] Wilde, in other words, turns the otherwise intractable tension between art's representational and performative aspects into a productive

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[45] My thanks to Helen Vendler for bringing the example of Heaney to my attention.

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dynamic that gives his works their characteristic qualities. Both true and not within its own proper mode, art creates new configurations of reality and its counterfactual alternatives within the "middle voice" of its singular medium. Through the partial disclosures of art which falsify the world as it is, a formation of the artist who achieves this altered vision is accomplished.[46]

The performative force of representation and the power of representational art to depict performance are thus balanced within Wilde's novel. Their interplay, in fact, forms a single dialectical process, one which does not unfold endlessly, but which, instead, culminates in compressed expressions of art's peculiar power. Because the truth of art's very falseness can be communicated within its own bounds, the dialectic interplay between performance and representation can itself come into view through the images of this synthesis with which Wilde crowns his novel. Anchoring its swirling self-formative energies are not one but two such images—both born from its own lying language—that are emblematic of art's descriptive and transformative power: one, of course, is the eponymous picture itself, while the other is the novel that Dorian reads and imitates in the course of his lived experiments in decadence.

Early in the novel, before these experiments begin, Lord Henry tells Dorian: "you will always be fond of me. I represent to you all the sins you have never had the courage to commit" (*DG* 236). But what Dorian loses when he finds the courage to commit these

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[46] To use the language of an older critical tradition, Wilde's representations are "tropological": they produce a "moral" or "ascetic" effect through the tropes, turns, and torsions of the text which, in this case, are the swerves away from the world as it supposedly is. For the classic definition of the medieval fourfold, see Dante, "Epistle to Cangrande della Scala," *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100 – c. 1375*, ed. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 382-87.

sins is precisely his ability to relate to them *as representations*. While it is true that, as

George Steiner puts it, "Narcissus has no need of art," Wilde's Narcissus is in need of art

precisely because he makes it the means of his ongoing self-formation.[47] More important,

then, than the sins which it conceals are the sins which the portrait reveals; Dorian's

picture allows him to experience his life again, precisely through the representational

medium it now inhabits. His portrait is, thus, a kind of ekphrasis of his own art of life

which *returns* his aesthetic existence to its proper realm; Dorian's art is, therefore, lived

and relived by means of the art that reflects his own practice.[48] The novel's eponymous

object is, then, a kind of microcosm of the novel itself, one not unlike the shield of

Achilles in *The Iliad* on which is depicted the action of the entire epic in little. In Homer,

this object is significant because, as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing rightly observes, "Homer

represents nothing but progressive actions," but the shield nevertheless arrests the epic's

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[47] *Real Presences* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989), 138.

[48] Wilde's understanding of art as a form of life makes the specific art forms employed by Dorian all the more significant—it is certainly no accident that Dorian's art of life depends on the famously compared arts of painting and literature for its successful practice. Although it has been an ancient topic of reflection, the nature and the limits of the arts of poetry and painting were debated with renewed interest in the eighteenth century following the appearance of G. E. Lessing's *Laocoön*, which Wilde had read by the time he came to write his mature fiction; see Ellmann, 312. Interestingly, Paul Guyer notes that, although "the phrase 'art for art's sake' is often thought to be a nineteenth century invention,…Lessing clearly anticipates it" in the first chapter of his study when he writes: "I should prefer that only those be called works of art in which the artist had occasion to show himself as such and in which beauty was his first and ultimate aim. None of the others, which betray too obvious traces of religious conventions, deserves this name because in their case the artist did not create for art's sake [*weil die Kunst hier nicht um ihren selbst willen gearbeitet*, literally "because here art did not work for its own sake"]," "18th Century German Aesthetics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), ed. Edward Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/aesthetics-18th-german> (accessed September 5, 2016). See *Laocoön, An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Edward McCormick (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984), 55.

progressive actions, illustrates them as a static totality through its perfect formal order, and holds a mirror up to the epic itself.[49]

At the center of Wilde's novel about an ekphrastic painting is another object which serves the same function even better than the portrait: the "poisonous book," given by Lord Henry to Dorian, that presents to him, "in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world…passing in dumb show before him" (*DG* 274). Although it is modeled on Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours*, the "poisonous book" is also a figure for the novel itself, mirroring Dorian's own relentless quest for experience: "indeed, the whole book seemed to [Dorian] to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it" (*DG* 276). In Chapter 11—the short novel's longest chapter, and the only one wherein no plot-related action actually occurs—Dorian's mode of life is counterpointed with accounts of similar activities undertaken by the unnamed hero of the novel whom he then imitates. These parallels enclose a chapter which is otherwise entirely comprised of a series of long, digressive descriptions: of dinner settings; Catholic liturgies; exotic perfumes; music of all traditions, styles, and instruments; jewels, and the stories—fabulous and historical—surrounding them; elaborate tapestries, embroideries, and vestments; and Dorian's own family history. The encyclopedic quality of this catalogue mirrors the programmatic manner in which Dorian indulges in the experiences with which each description is synecdochally associated. Dorian's mode of life, therefore, is mimed in this montage, and the literary form of the chapter is analogous to the formation he pursues. Dorian becomes the protagonist in *Marius, the Epicurean*, a

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[49] *Laocoön*, 79; see Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Viking, 1990), 467-487.

representational proxy for this reader's formation. But Dorian's faithful imitation of his fictional double is only the mimetic pole of the chapter, one which is contrasted with its formative, non-mimetic pole. The chapter's long descriptive passages reproduce material from sources that expose Wilde's reader to the influences encountered by Dorian.[50] The chapter is, thus, a kind of complement to the novel's Preface as they are both *hypomnemata*: Chapter 11 assembles sequences of important extracts through which Wilde and his reader are both shaped while the Preface summarizes the process enacted by the novel through its pithy, memorable maxims.

When Wilde sets aside, in Chapter 11, the development of novelistic plot in favor of an alteration between extracts and imitative action, he reproduces the art of life within his novel by enacting it in miniature. The chapter's non-mimetic passages seem to set aside representation entirely but, through the formative capacity they demonstrate by affecting the reader, they offer a mimesis of the very process of literary self-formation. Precisely when "life itself," for Dorian, "becomes the first, the greatest, of the arts" (*DG* 278) Wilde himself makes the depiction of this art preeminent. As demonstrated above, Pater had given Wilde an example of this kind of interplay between representation and quotation in *Marius, the Epicurean* in the section in which the protagonist is profoundly altered by his reading of Apuleius. But the "golden book" of that novel and the "poisonous book" in *Dorian Gray* differ from each other in that the formative sequence in the former is Pater's own translation of Cupid and Psyche; Pater, in other words, never attempts a true representation of the art of life and mimes this process almost accidentally

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[50] On the literary sources synthesized in Lord Henry's fictitious novel, see Bristow's Introduction, *DG xi-lx*. See also Bristow's notes to this chapter of the novel, *DG* 398 *et passim*.

as his own authorial self-formation unfolds. Indeed, such a representation would seem to be the very thing which becomes impossible when literature's self-effecting power is employed by the author; yet Wilde achieves this precisely because of Pater's powerful influence.[51] By modeling Dorian's encounter with Lord Henry's novel on his own reading of *The Renaissance*—which he calls, in *De Profundis*, the book which had such a "strange influence over my life" (*DP* 168)—and extrapolating from Pater's own technique in *Marius*, Wilde reproduces his *own* process of development by repeating it in art. Thus, in Chapter 11, through the figure of a fictional book, Wilde creates a simulacrum of the novel itself by simulating an equivalent to its formative action.

By harmonizing, in his novel, the representational and self-formative ends of art, Wilde moves antithetically through his own falsifying performative language to arrive, ultimately, at a true image of these forces in their dynamic interaction. Just as Dorian seeks to return to language through the intellectual schema that would articulate the lechery he lived, and does return his art of life to the aesthetic realm through the contemplation of his own picture, so too does Wilde return the practice of literary self-formation to the level of representation with an image of the process that his novel enacts.

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[51] Wilde's engagement with Pater's novel has not received due attention. While accounts of Pater's influence on Wilde rarely fail to mention the significant aside in *De Profundis* wherein Wilde refers to *The Renaissance* as "that book which has had such a strange influence over my life" (*DP* 168), this passing reference is made as Wilde offers a comment—albeit a critical one—on *Marius*. It is true that, in *The Trembling of the Veil,* Yeats recalls Wilde praising *The Renaissance* as his "golden book," but even the language Wilde uses to extol Pater's earlier work is derived from his later novel—a work, anointed, at the end of Pater's apologetic footnote, quoted above, as its sequel; see *Autobiographies: The Collected Works of W. B. Yeats*, vol. III, ed. William H. O'Donnell and Douglas N. Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), 124.

The two perfect objects that achieve the self-representation of Wilde's art in this novel correspond to the two highest arts Dorian identifies. The microcosm that Wilde makes of his novel in the portrait which summarizes Dorian's rakish progress, of course, corresponds to the art of life— that "first" and "greatest of the arts" (*DG* 278)—while the exotic world of the poisonous book which offers a simulacrum of that art corresponds with "the creation of such worlds," an activity which, in the midst of his dissipation, "seemed to Dorian Gray to be the true object, or amongst the true objects, of life" (*DG* 280). The ultimate aim of Wilde's own art, however, is not the creation of worlds as such, but rather the creation of objects *within* those worlds which embody them. This aim accounts for the presence, in so many of Wilde's works, of certain *chefs d'oeuvre* which, while seeming to arrest his narratives, are actually masterpieces in miniature, paradoxical set-pieces wherein, as Marvell sings in "On Appleton House," "[t]hings greater are in less contain'd"[52]: in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, it is the pair of objects analyzed above, portrait and book; in "The Decay of Lying," which is subtitled "An Observation," it is the essay of *almost* the same name which Vivian reads, subtitled "A Protest"; and, in "The Portrait of Mr. W.H.," it is the theory of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, elaborated at length in its own serio-comic exegetical sections—in addition, of course, to the forged portrait of the title that is the counterfeit proof tendered in support of that same theory.[53] The emblematic objects of this last-mentioned story offer a window into the function of

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[52] *The Complete Poems of Andrew Marvell*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 56, l. 44.

[53] "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," *The Soul of Man under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose*, ed. Linda Dowling (London: Penguin, 2001), 31-101.

Wilde's self-representational gestures. Wilde's essay, "The Critic as Artist," will show

what work Wilde's recurrent allegorical objects accomplish.

True Objects of Falsehood: Wilde's Critical Art

"The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," which appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* a year before

Dorian Gray was first published, anticipates many of the dynamics of Wilde's novel:

three men circle around a picture which, while fatal, is also connected with the practice of

an art—in this case, not the art of life, but the art of interpretation. Yet the hermeneutic

mode that emerges in "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." is actually a version of the art of life

insofar as it emphasizes how the self is altered through its practice. In both narratives,

characters use the portraits for which their stories are named to measure the internal

changes that their respective arts produce. But whereas Dorian's magic picture shows

him the changes that he achieves through his actions, the characters of this story are

internally changed by interpretation itself, their attitudes toward the eponymous picture

being mere indices of that power.

In a certain sense, the forgery at the center of this story is an apt image of the

debasement involved in its requirement. Before he first unveils the portrait of Mr. W. H.

to George Erskine, Cyril Graham, the young man who offers it in proof of his

interpretation of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, declares: "The only apostle who did not deserve

proof was S. Thomas, and S. Thomas was the only apostle who got it."[54] Like the lagging

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[54] "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," 44. The quip alluding to the famous doubt of Saint
Thomas implicitly places Graham among those blessed "who have not seen and yet have
believed" (Jn 20:29). But an even more apt description of Graham's faith is found in the
counterintuitive principle of the early Christian apologist, Tertuillian: "*certum est quia*

conversation partner in Wilde's critical essays, Erskine is unable to see beauty and truth in separate spheres; for Graham, however, the sheer appeal of his reading of the *Sonnets* is an entirely sufficient justification. Thus, the forgery that he commissions for his friend's benefit neither vitiates nor verifies his theory, which is already grounded in its own aesthetic form. In fact, insofar as the portrait *seems* to verify a reading that does not actually depend on proof, it reproduces Graham's theory in a different art, revealing, though its own falseness, the truth *of the beauty* that his interpretation offers, as well as its total independence from fact. The portrait, then, is valuable only because it is fake: a meretricious invention whose appeal depends precisely on the perception which it alters, it symbolizes the self-transformative work of interpretation required to make it seem true.

The interpretive art depicted in this story offers the clearest illustration of the inversion of life and art described in "The Decay of Lying." The dénouement of the narrative turns on another forgery, Erskine's death from consumption which is orchestrated, through his letter to the narrator, to appear like a suicide. Erksine's counterfeit death would seems to parody the suicide of Graham, who really did die for the sake of his theory. But Erskine's very contrivance is actually the perfect complement to Graham's suicide because it, like his friend's theory, is an exegetical act that overcomes the purely objective truth of his sickness, adding a kind of artistry and freedom to the inevitability of death. This final forgery is, in some sense, then, the interpretive act *par excellence*, since it transmutes facts through nothing more than language.

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impossibile est," it is to be believed, because it is absurd, *On the Flesh of Christ*, trans. Peter Holmes (Whitefish: Kessinger, 2004), 12.

The model for both of these fabrications is the third forgery that occurs in the story: the reading of Shakespeare's poetry proposed by Graham—and developed at length by the narrator in the in-set sequence of literary criticism that comprises the story's middle section—which unfolds according to a similar principle of transformation. This theory holds that the *Sonnets* pertain exclusively to the poet's relationship with the boy-actor, William Hughes, to whom they are also dedicated. Through the *legerdemain* of Wilde's ingenious interpretive gestures, the critical cruxes of the sonnet sequence all align in support of this otherwise occluded secret. The dark lady is Shakespeare's muse, and her betrayals are synchronized with the young actor's departures from Shakespeare's own troupe. The name of the actor is cunningly drawn from the poet's many puns on the words "will," "hues," "hews," and "use" which are each adduced in turn.[55] Wilde's theory even draws on the very historical record that is disavowed in the name of internal evidence, turning a musician of the same name employed by Lord Essex into the boy-actor's father. This account of the *Sonnets*, comprised of intrigue, invention, and interpretation in equal parts, is, of course, preposterous; yet, the preposterous *form* of this all-encompassing theory is, for Wilde, not a vice but a virtue. The very etymology of "preposterous"— pointing toward the reversal of "before" and "after" that the word describes—mimes the theory's own inverted movement from conclusion to evidence. Like Graham's forged portrait of William Hughes and Erskine's fraudulent orchestration of an apparent suicide, the reading of Shakespeare developed in the story supplies a fiction in order to create a new aspect of fact, attenuating the necessity of historical truth

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[55] "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," 42-44.

with the contingency of an imaginative creation. The new wholes which emerge in these combinations are proof, not of a theory, but of interpretation's power.

But, in addition to being images of a certain art's performative capacity similar to the those offered in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the interpretive forgeries depicted in this story are also artistic images of Wilde's own criticism. In sounding the depth's of Shakespeare's various puns on "Willy Hughes," Wilde would not have missed, in the name, the semantic possibility of "willful use," which is an apt characterization for his own reading. As a personal and passionate misprision of great art, which appropriates it in an utterly unique way, Wilde's inventive reading of Shakespeare is a vivid example of the mode elaborated in "The Critic as Artist," the longest and most substantial essay collected in *Intentions*. Wilde here goes beyond Pater's addition of subjectivity to Arnold's famous formula for criticism—"to see the object as in itself it really is"— offering as one of his definitions its very antithesis: "to see the object as in itself it really is *not*."[56] Since "the work of art" is, to the critic, "simply a suggestion for a new work of his own"; and since "one characteristic of a beautiful form is that one can put into it whatever one wishes, and see in it whatever one chooses to see," the critic, thus, becomes "a creator in his turn, and whispers of a thousand different things which were not present in the mind of him who carved the statue or painted the panel or graved the gem."[57]

Wilde's posture here seems almost too familiar: anticipating, in its rejection of the artist's authority, the intentional fallacy of New Criticism (as well as its post-structuralist

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[56] "The Critic as Artist," 159. For Arnold's essay, see "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," *Lectures and Essays in Criticism* in *Complete Prose Works*, ed. R. H. Super, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P), vol. 3, 258-285.

[57] "The Critic as Artist," 159.

heirs in its assertion of the independence of the interpretation from its object), this theory fits neatly enough into extant traditions of critical discourse. This resemblance is misleading, however, since Wilde's affirmation of the freedom of the interpreter to invent must be read in line with his rejection, a few pages earlier, of Emerson's view that great artists are "wiser than they knew."[58] Wilde holds, to the contrary, that "there is no fine art without self-consciousness," for "self-consciousness and the critical spirit are one."[59] If this is the case, then the artist, no less than the critic, must express self-consciousness through his creations and, by the same token, the critic's very creative *misrepresentations* must comprehend the artist's self-understanding that, in their very willfulness, they travesty. Wilde's interpretations must see what they swerve from clearly, and their creative deviations depend on a deep understanding of their source. Thus, if Wilde's essay anticipates any 20th-century critical position, it is T. S. Eliot's conception of tradition as an endless aggregation of self-understanding whereby "we *know* so much more than" the "dead writers" of the past insofar as they are precisely "that which we know."[60]

Like realism in art, fidelity in interpretation repeats when it ought to rewrite, and the performative misinterpretations of "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." illustrate the artistic criticism that is outlined in Wilde's essay. But, as this chapter has endeavored to show, the performative valence of Wilde's writing is always only one half of its scope; it is a

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[58] "The Critic as Artist," 142.

[59] "The Critic as Artist," 143.

[60] "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Essays, 1917-1932* (London: Farber and Farber, 1932), 6.

motive sustained in tension with a countervailing desire for clear-eyed accuracy. "The Critic as Artist," therefore, not only gives a true account of Wilde's own encounter with art, proving, as he does so, that criticism is, indeed, "the record of one's own soul" and "the only civilised form of autobiography"[61]; the essay also *represents* the act of creative misrepresentation through its very dialogic form, giving, to Gilbert's extemporized speeches, the mediated quality of Vivian's fictional paper in "The Decay of Lying." Thus do the critical acts of misrepresentation presented in "The Critic as Artist" correspond with the self-representational images of Wilde's own art because they both embody the second-order self-consciousness proper to criticism. As descriptive epitomes of art's performative power, Wilde's allegorical self-images constitute a kind of auto-criticism, one which accords entirely with the definition that he offers in "The Critic as Artist," prior to his antithetical inversion of Arnold: "I would call criticism a creation within a creation."[62] When Wilde punctuates his texts with self-referential emblems, he artistically articulates the understanding that would otherwise fall to the critic to produce, creating, within his own works, objects that describe them as such.

Despite Pater's abiding reputation as a critic and Wilde's enduring fame as an artist, each now wears the laurels to which the other aspired. Pater's writing life was, of course, premised on a conflation of art and criticism, and Wilde, for his part, sought to restore art's independence, even though it remained, for him, the means of a properly aesthetic life. In doing so, however, Wilde produced a *critical* art, one devoted to the

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[61] "The Critic as Artist," 154; a famous variation on this line also appears in the Preface to Dorian Gray: "The highest as the lowest form of criticism is a mode of autobiography" (*DG* 167).

[62] "The Critic as Artist," 154.

representation of the very life which it enacted. To make life and art legible, an artistic

criticism which represents their connection becomes Wilde's necessary mode. Thus do

his fictions and essays culminate in creations within their creations, microcosms and

simulacra that submit his imaginative products to the concision of his own wit in order to

express perfectly what they achieve. Nor is the critical drive towards self-consciousness

found only at these peaks of self-expressive compression. Wilde's most succinct and

frequent expression of critical self-consciousness is that trope which yokes oppositions

into new combinations. Paradox, for Wilde, is criticism in its smallest quantum which is

precisely why that rhetorical figure is so ubiquitous in his work.

The Duration of Paradox

> GILBERT…Action! What is action? It dies at the moment
> of its energy. It is a base concession to fact. The world is
> made by the singer for the dreamer.
>
> ERNEST. While you talk it seems to me to be so.[63]

The last paragraph of the "The Portrait of Mr. W. H." is an equivocal epilogue, one in

which the fate of that story's fatal portrait is described:

> The picture hangs now in my library, where it is very much
> admired by my artistic friends. They have decided that it is
> not a Clouet, but an Ouvry. I have never cared to tell them
> its true history. But sometimes, when I look at it, I think
> that there is really a great deal to be said for the Willie
> Hughes theory of Shakespeare's Sonnets.[64]

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[63] "The Critic as Artist," 151.

[64] "The Portrait of Mr. W. H.," 100-101.

In the course of the story, Erskine and the narrator fall in and out of passionate belief with the theory, with the former rekindling his belief through the latter at the very moment when he himself begins to doubt it. Although it leaves its interpreter changed in unpredictable ways, the theory seems to exist primarily in the vital act of exegesis, living again in the final look that the narrator casts on the forgery, that portrait which recalls the magical picture in Wilde's novel which made a similar passing moment endure in life. Wilde's paradoxes, too, last only for a moment—yet their very ephemerality sustains a certain form of life, one that was realized in the delivery of artful epigrams, in person and in print. Instead of summing up "all existence in an epigram," as he claims to have done in *De Profundis*, Wilde's own existence consisted of their continuous creation in the essays and stories that place life in art into endless permutations. This fact helps to explain why all of the works considered in this chapter were written more than once. The essays from *Intentions* were both revised and expanded, and, in each of their second incarnations, both works of fiction almost doubled in length. Writing and rewriting works that encapsulated his own existence, Wilde lived out his own epigrammatic art of life.

In his short story, "The Secret Miracle," Borges tells of a playwright who, in the final second before his execution, feels the physical universe stop and, in the perduring moment that he is granted by God, he unfolds his unfinished *magnum opus* in his head, filling out its half-conceived situations and elaborating its tangled arc.[65] When his imagined play's last word falls into place, time recommences, and he dies. Wilde's own work seems to emerge from a similar series of such miracles, his *oeuvre* being, as Borges

[65] "The Secret Miracle" in *Collected Fictions of Jorge Luis Borges*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Viking Press, 1998), 157-162.

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says in his essay, "so harmonious that it can seem inevitable and even banal."[66] If, therefore, "it takes an effort for us to imagine the universe without Wilde's epigrams," it is because Wilde's own improbable life of critical work created an illusion of necessity, an illusion which is itself a vivid testimony to the enduring reality of art's feigning power. [67]

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[66] "On Oscar Wilde," 315.

[67] "On Oscar Wilde," 315.

Conclusion

> I envy—though I'm not sure if envy is the right word—those people about whom one could write a biography, or who could write their autobiography. Through these deliberately unconnected impressions I am the indifferent narrator of my autobiography without events, of my history without a life. These are my Confessions and if I say nothing in them it's because I have nothing to say.
>
> —Fernando Pessoa[1]

> A poet always writes of his personal life...he is never the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete.
>
> —W. B. Yeats[2]

In 2013, Mason Currey published *Daily Rituals: How Artists Work*, a book that was called into existence by its sheer appeal.[3] A compendium of brief sketches summarizing the routines and habits of famous artists, the book began as an exercise in procrastination, the hobby blog which its author started one idle afternoon.[4] The first, fateful entry was Nabokov's description of his schedule for winter and summer workdays. A little more than a year later, the website—having provided a series of similar vignettes on figures ranging from Kafka to Kingsley Amis—commanded a legion of visitors, and its proprietor was fielding offers from a swarm of editors. The book that soon ensued has since been translated into eight languages.

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[1] *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. Margaret Jull Costa, ed. Maria José de Lancastre (London: Serpent's Tail Classics, 2010), 24.

[2] "A General Introduction for my Work" in *The Major Works*, ed. Edward Larrissy (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 379.

[3] Mason Currey, *Daily Rituals: How Artists Work* (New York, Knopf, 2013).

[4] Mason Currey, "Daily Routines (the blog) is now *Daily Rituals* (the book)," March 19, 2013, http://dailyroutines.typepad.com/daily_routines/2013/03/daily-routines-the-blog-is-now-daily-rituals-the-book.html.

What to make of this stunning success? The interest that brought the book into being was not any thirst for biographical gossip, for *Daily Rituals* offers the literary voyeur no lurid scenes from famous lives. Instead, one finds page after page of mundane details about diurnal rhythms and hebdomadal habits. Schubert, for example, composed in the morning; Schiller would write at night. Kierkegaard drank coffee; Jane Austen, apparently, drank tea. *Daily Rituals*, then, satisfies a very different kind of curiosity by revealing the quotidian practices that creativity requires. As their private lives yield only routine schedules of production, the artists in the book emerge, not as subjects of inspiration or inheritors of genius, but rather as practitioners of patterns, their achievements being dependent on the predictable shape of unremarkable days.

Instead of revealing the clay feet of great writers, the very banality of the artist's daily rituals brings into focus the disjunction between art and labor noted by Valéry mentioned in the Introduction—namely, the contrast between great works of art and the unseen effort out of which they emerge. The lives of artists give only the outward appearance of this internal process, and their works give that same process's finished product; behind the ascetic form of their disciplined lives and the aesthetic forms of their stunning creations lies a process of self-formation—a process which, while invisible to the biographer, is never completely hidden from view. When Flaubert counsels a correspondent to be "regular and orderly in your life…so that you may be violent and original in your work,"[5] he indicates what transformative torsions occurred in his search for *le mot juste*. And when Woolf's artist-avatar in *To the Lighthouse*, Lily Briscoe,

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[5] Letter to Gertrude Tennant (December 25, 1876), qtd. in *Madam Bovary*, trans. Adam Thorpe (London: Vintage, 2011), *xv*.

begins the painting whose completion will coincide with the end of the novel, she

exchanges "the fluidity of life…for the concentration of painting."[6] In this exchange of

life's fluidity for art's austere and demanding form, Lily begins the same process which

is imposed on her creator by the act of writing, and which is reflected in the form of the

novel itself.[7]

Although none of the writers examined in the foregoing chapters makes an

appearance in *Daily Rituals*, the works of these artists reveal more than the sketches of

their common routines ever could. Not only do these works testify to the transformation

which each artist achieved by means of them, but they also make this otherwise invisible

process apparent. The profound self-formative changes which go unrecorded in the

biographical record of their lives endure in the literary forms that remain as evidence of

these alterations. Tennyson, broken and mended by his mourning of Hallam; Hopkins,

destroyed and re-created by God's affecting "gift of tears"; Pater, pursuing an

uninterrupted project of cloistered, intense self-cultivation; and Wilde, turning a mirror to

that same project while nevertheless performing it himself—each one of these figures

makes literature into an art of life by turning literary form itself into a practice. The

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[6] "To the Lighthouse" in *Collected Novels of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Stella McNichol (London: Macmillan, 1992), 297.

[7] The all-consuming ordeal of artistic creation—that starts, for Lily, as "a painful and exciting ecstasy" and ends, in its achievement, with "extreme fatigue," "To the Lighthouse", 296—makes the hidden effort of artistic labor the focus of her life in the same way that the novel relegates the major events in nations and in families to brief parentheses in which "Time Passes." Thus, if Woolf's novel and Lily's painting attain, at crucial moments, the same vision of its central character as a dim and abstract form, this alignment is a subtle authorial signal that parallel processes of formation have shaped their artistic perceptions.

practice of form, in each case, transmutes the private chaos of personal experience into something which can be fixed, unified, ordered, and shared.

But to find, in literary form, the lineaments of such self-transformative practices, an enduring assumption of literary studies must be reconsidered. Through the rise and fall of literary theories in the last century, one critical principle remained intact: the firm separation of the artist from the artifact and the writer from the text. Reevaluating this separation need not lead to belletristic impressionism or to predictable allegories which read a submerged *roman à clef* out of any given work. This approach leads, instead, to richer and more nuanced understandings of life and work alike. This method—a kind of genetic criticism without drafts read in and through literary form itself—recognizes a formative power in the traditional objects of the discipline of literary studies, a power that has been occluded by virtuoso readings of various kinds.[8]

If the self-shaping agency of texts is allowed to guide the critic's approach to them, new insights into seemingly abstract artifacts can be gleaned. The brief discussion of Proust and Joyce in the final section of Chapter Three, for instance, in addition to the comment on Woolf above, suggests its utility for interpreting the modernist novel; it would be no less useful for modernist poets such as T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens. Reading *The Waste Land* as a practice of self-organization in which ventriloquized voices are balanced and arranged would make the self-parody at work in the poem's academic apparatus more apparent.[9] In throwing a patina of erudition over his own contrived chaos,

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[8] See Rita Felski, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2015), 33-38.

[9] For a discussion of the origin of the notes to *The Waste Land*—which differs from Eliot's own account in "The Frontiers of Criticism," *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber

Eliot puts himself at a further symbolic remove from the academic life that he repudiated when he declined to defend his completed dissertation. "The Comedian as the Letter C," the last poem to be written for Stevens' first volume, *Harmonium*, is a similar formative exercise in self-irony, one which makes its own mocking tone the basis for its autobiographical disclosure. Approaching this narrative, not as an exercise in self-representation, but as a performative purgation would illustrate its debt not to Browning's "Sordello," which Stevens' grandiloquent language closely resembles, but rather to "Pauline," the poem through which Browning imaginatively frees himself from his own story in the same way: by telling it.

As this last comparison indicates, the case studies here do not exhaust the instances of self-formation through literary construction which could be drawn from Victorian literature. Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, for instance, is an exemplary exercise through which the tailor re-tailors himself. In assembling his pseudepigraphal text from an earlier but abandoned autobiographical novel, Carlyle makes his scathing self-commentary the means of finding his distinctive authorial voice. A very different example of formation could be found in George Eliot in the curious compositional history of *Romola* and *Silas Marner*. When Eliot interrupts the composition of her historical novel about religious extremism in 15th-century Florence to write a story about an adoptive family in a rustic setting, she illustrates the self-formative function of her *own* fiction-writing: the scholarly labor required by the former novel sharpens Eliot's vision of the human values which are attenuated in the latter. Eliot, therefore, can produce a novel

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and Faber, 1957), 120-121—see Lawrence Rainey, *Revisiting "The Waste Land"* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2005), 37-39, 109-114, 125-127.

of natural human sympathies almost spontaneously, because the stern asceticism of Savonarola is the imaginative obverse of Silas Marner's homely virtues.

To read, beneath an author's completed works the simultaneous—and successful—effort to become the maker of those very artifacts is to view these works under the aspect of their emergence, from a place where art and life are not entirely distinct. Although the anecdotes collected in *Daily Rituals* seem to confirm Pessoa's protest that the writer's life is an "autobiography without events,"[10] *The Practice of Form* shows that this predicament is an achievement in itself because this lacuna in life is the locus of the writer's anterior training; the mark which this labor leaves—and the identity which comes into being through it—has no outward form except the literary form. The writer *qua* writer, then, lacking a life story to tell, has been shaped by a process which is perfectly articulated in the very confessions which "say nothing" because there is "nothing to say."[11] To stand before this blank expanse, the writer must have already "been reborn as an idea," as Yeats put it, becoming, through the formation of form, "something intended, complete."[12]

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[10] Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, 24.

[11] Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, 24.

[12] Yeats, "A General Introduction for my Work," 379.

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