

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide

a journal of nineteenth-century visual culture

Lene Østermark-Johansen

Enshrined in a Library Edition, and an Incubus to Get Rid of: Walter Pater's *Renaissance* around 1910

Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide 14, no. 2 (Summer 2015)

Citation: Lene Østermark-Johansen, "Enshrined in a Library Edition, and an Incubus to Get Rid of: Walter Pater's *Renaissance* around 1910," *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2015), <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/summer15/ostermark-johansen-on-walter-pater-s-renaissance-around-1910>.

Published by: [Association of Historians of Nineteenth-Century Art](#)

Notes:

This PDF is provided for reference purposes only and may not contain all the functionality or features of the original, online publication.

License:

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#) [Creative Commons License](#).

Abstract:

This essay addresses the reception of Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) in the first decades of the twentieth century in the writings of Bernard Berenson, Roger Fry, and T.S. Eliot. Pater's acute sense of visual form in many ways points towards modernist art criticism, yet by 1910, when the Library Edition of Pater's works was published, the author had obtained the status of a vampiric figure, ruling from the grave, against whom Fry, Berenson, and Eliot felt the need to react, each in different ways.

Enshrined in a Library Edition, and an Incubus to Get Rid of: Walter Pater's *Renaissance* around 1910

by Lene Østermark-Johansen

When Walter Pater's (1839–1894) *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* was first published in February 1873, the print run was 1250 copies. Before his early death in 1894, Pater had issued four editions of this first book, each time revising his text on the level of the individual word, adding or expanding essays, even removing the controversial "Conclusion" in 1877, only to reinsert it again in 1888.^[1] With its essays on medieval French stories, Pico della Mirandola, Botticelli, Luca della Robbia, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Giorgione, Joachim du Bellay, and Winckelmann, *The Renaissance*, as it was soon nicknamed, challenged fixed notions of periodization and put the subjective response of the aesthetic critic center stage. It became Oscar Wilde's "golden book"; as he confessed to W. B. Yeats, "I never travel anywhere without it; but it is the very flower of decadence: the last trumpet should have sounded the moment it was written."^[2] Wilde had first read the book in Oxford in 1874. When in July 1895 he was allowed to have fifteen volumes sent to him in Wandsworth prison, *The Renaissance* was among them,^[3] and, while still in prison in the spring of 1897, Wilde referred to it as "that book which has had such a strange influence over my life."^[4]

Between 1873 and 1900, a total of 10,500 copies of *The Renaissance* were printed in England and America. What is less known is that during the first decade of the twentieth century, publishers on both sides of the Atlantic brought out a similar number of copies—10,350 to be exact—thus testifying to a continued demand for the book well after Pater's death.^[5] These sales may have been stimulated by the first two biographies of Pater, by Arthur Christopher Benson and by Thomas Wright, published in 1906 and 1907, respectively.^[6] Another contributing factor may well have been the popularity of the *Burlington Magazine*, founded in 1903 by a small handful of Pater disciples: Herbert Horne, Roger Fry, Bernard Berenson, and Charles John Holmes. As an art journal, devoted at first to a study of the Old Masters, but soon also to formalist art criticism of both ancient and modern art, the *Burlington Magazine* stimulated considerable renewed interest in Renaissance art and took the formalist ideas expressed in Pater's "The School of Giorgione" (1877) into new territory. Indeed, the first monographs of two of these disciples followed the master's interest in minor Venetian painters: Berenson published on Lorenzo Lotto in 1895, Fry on Giovanni Bellini in 1899.^[7] The editorial of the very first issue of the *Burlington Magazine* advocated an ideal of "austere Epicureanism," thus echoing Pater's novel, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). Having bewailed the status of modern British art, the editor turned the gaze backward, while keeping an eye open for the future:

Our hope, then, lies in the cultivation of an austere Epicureanism, an attentive and rigorous weighing of values, and this we may attain by the study of art produced under more auspicious conditions, though we may from time to time turn our experience to account in applying the principles thus acquired to whatever of contemporary art comes within their range. The ever-increasing zest with which this study of ancient art is now pursued is evidence of the starvation diet which most of modern art supplies for the needs of the imagination and the gratification of the finer senses.^[8]

Walter Pater rarely wrote about modern art, but many of his views on the art and literature of the past in both his criticism and his fiction are characterized by a double optics and are as applicable to the artistic productions of his contemporaries as to those of the past.^[9] His notions of the Renaissance spirit as an ongoing creative force, a unifying continuum, had ramifications well into the twentieth century. My concern in this essay is partly book historical, relating to matters of editions and copies of *The Renaissance* early in the twentieth century, and partly with the generations of Pater's readers introduced to him in the 1880s who were establishing themselves as authorities on art, taking criticism into new directions, while Wilde was re-reading Pater in prison. I wish to explore the afterlife of Pater's notions of the Renaissance and of his appreciative prose, together with his status as a critic of Italian art. It is important to bear in mind that the very word "Renaissance" became a problematic term to some writers and scholars, tainted by its association with Pater and the aesthetic movement. It was therefore often substituted by "Italian," "Florentine," or "Venetian" in book titles and university courses.^[10]

Turn-of-the-century responses to Pater range from godlike adoration to depictions of him as a dangerous shaman, a benevolent father figure, an amateur, or a vampire ruling from the grave. But irrespective of the nature of the response, there is little doubt that he exerted an important influence on the subject matter, prose style, and methodology of art criticism in the early twentieth century. Where much art criticism later in the century tended to dismiss Pater, charging him with subjectivity and lack of art-historical method, his status as a predecessor to be reckoned with or reacted against is indisputable. Thus, Roger Fry, writing to R. C. Trevelyan from Rome in 1898, was looking both backward and forward, after having completed his reading of Pater's posthumous *Miscellaneous Studies* (1895):

I've just been reading Pater's *Miscellanies*. It is a pity he makes so many mistakes about pictures; but the strange, and for a Morelli-ite disappointing, thing is that the net result is so very just. What is wanted now in the way of criticism is someone who will make appreciations as finely and imaginatively conceived and take them into greater detail as well. Perhaps Berenson will get to this if he gets over his theories.^[11]

Berenson's dialogue with Pater lasted for some seven decades, and oscillated between complete adoration, filial rebellion, and a few decades of active emancipation, followed by a return to the master in the 1940s when the German occupation of Italy made German scholarship hateful and bombastic compared to Paterian suggestiveness.^[12] *Marius the Epicurean* had served as Berenson's definitive bildungsroman. Rereading the novel for the eighth time in 1942, he found in it his own "spiritual biography" and declared that "never when rereading have I felt myself so identified with the thoughts, aspirations, doubts, and consents that I discover in *Marius*."^[13] Paul Barolsky has pointed out how Berenson became an Edwardian Marius, taught by Pater not only what to see but also what to be, with life at the Villa I Tatti in Florence as an emulation of Marius's visionary idealism of the villa.^[14]

In the autumn of 1886, Herbert Horne sent Pater a copy of his journal, the *Century Guild Hobby Horse*, and during the late 1880s and early 1890s he frequently asked Pater to contribute essays to the journal, an invitation Pater never took up. Horne owned one of the very few portraits of Pater in existence, Simeon Solomon's 1872 pencil drawing of the critic, and gave Pater another Solomon drawing for his fiftieth birthday in 1889.^[15] His ultimate tribute to Pater was the

dedication to him of his lavish monograph on Botticelli in 1908.^[16] The minor quattrocento painter whom Pater had made famous in his 1870 essay, included in *The Renaissance*,^[17] was elevated to a leading High Renaissance artist with Horne's book, reverential in its dedication and its description of individual paintings, while also taking art history into the realms of serious archival research and specialized connoisseurship. Roger Fry wrote a perceptive review of Horne's monograph, in which he pointed out how

one scarcely recognizes the art critic in Mr. Horne. He gives but little hint of any personal views on aesthetics in general. . . . He is either incapable or contemptuous of all that delicate analysis of the spiritual and temperamental components of a work of art, all that subtle exposition of the artist's intention, that illustration of the work of art by means of analogy and simile, which make up so large a part of the best critical literature.
^[18]

Instead, he praised Horne's detached, technical tone and scientific approach, while acknowledging certain qualities of the art criticism represented by Pater. Issues of attribution and archival research had never weighed heavily in Pater's writings, in spite of references to the mirrored handwriting in Leonardo's notebooks and to the contents of Michelangelo's letters. Such references may have conveyed the impression that the critic had been close to primary sources, yet Pater had, in fact, gained most of his knowledge of such primary material second-hand from nineteenth-century French or German critical works. Pater's credo of the aesthetic critic—"What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? And if so, what sort or degree of pleasure?"^[19]—was challenged by the document-based research and connoisseurship, recently made available to an English audience.^[20] Yet I want to argue that for several of the younger art critics, Pater was a pervasive force who could not be eradicated entirely and replaced by seemingly more objective methods. As a consequence, we find a confluence of Paterian style, appreciation, and subject matter with Morellian attention to detail and substantial archival research in much of the art criticism around the turn of the century.

The Edition de Luxe and the Library Edition

The first decade of the twentieth century saw two collected editions of Pater's writings, the Edition de Luxe of 1900 and the Library Edition of 1910. Only now, a century later, will these two editions have a sequel in the *Collected Works of Walter Pater*, due to appear from Oxford University Press.^[21] The early twentieth century produced an extraordinary number of collected works of authors either recently dead or still alive, such as the Cook and Wedderburn Library Edition of John Ruskin (1903–12), various collected editions of R. A. M. Stevenson, and Henry James's New York Edition (1907–9). As tombs or ornate monuments to great British writers whose lives had expired with the century, the collected editions defined a canon, and shrouded and sealed the past. During his lifetime, Pater had published all of his books with Macmillan's publishing house as individual volumes. After Pater's death, his literary executor, Charles Lancelot Shadwell, brought out three volumes of writings with Macmillan: *Greek Studies* (1895), *Miscellaneous Studies* (1895), and the unfinished novel *Gaston de Latour* (1896). In January 1900, Frederick Macmillan made the decision to celebrate Pater's writings in a so-called Edition de Luxe,^[22] a series in which the works of Charles Lamb, Alfred Tennyson, and Rudyard Kipling had already appeared. As Macmillan wrote to Pater's sisters, Hester and Clara, "These books are handsome in appearance and profitable to publish as the number of copies printed is limited and they are consequently at once bought up by collectors—people who

regard books as bric-a-brac.”^[23] The impecunious sisters accepted immediately, and began negotiations about raising the royalties for Pater's writings, a battle that they lost.^[24] On June 7, 1900 the eight-volume Edition de Luxe appeared in a limited print run of 775, in a fine silk binding, with a gold medallion on the front and gilt lettering on the spine.^[25] The collected writings of Pater had become an aesthetic object, destined for the rarefied few, for connoisseurs and collectors on whose shelves the delicate volumes would look handsome alongside the other volumes in the series. The poet Lionel Johnson stressed the exclusive character of the edition in his review, entitled “For a Little Clan”; he spoke of the subtle and exclusive quality of both Pater and his writings and concluded that “Their *édition de luxe* will prove no sumptuous casket enshrining fine gold waxen dim, scentless spices, and treasure turned to dust,”^[26] thus suggesting that the beautiful and evocative powers of Pater's prose were as pervasive as ever, now given a suitable packaging.

The Edition de Luxe, heralded by *The Renaissance* as Volume One, could only be purchased on subscription for all eight volumes. *The Renaissance*, however, appeared in a reprint only some two months after the Edition de Luxe had been launched, testimony, no doubt, to the renewed interest in Pater's first book, sparked by the lavish complete edition. Although both part of a series—in the company of the late Poet Laureate, a Romantic essayist, and the still living Kipling—and part of the collected works of Walter Horatio Pater, *The Renaissance* retained its status as a golden book, with a life of its own, not to be entirely confined to a boxed set.

It was, indeed, the low stock of *The Renaissance* in the winter of 1910, together with the awareness that the copyright of the book would expire in 1915, that provoked Frederick Macmillan to bring out a new collected works of Walter Pater, the so-called Library Edition which, in spite of neither textual nor critical apparatus, has served as the only standard edition of Pater's works for more than a century now. Well aware of the need to keep the book constantly in print and desiring to bring Pater's sisters the maximum revenue, Frederick Macmillan approached Clara and Hester for their permission to reprint.^[27] The ten volumes appeared in swift succession from March to August 1910,^[28] but unlike the Edition de Luxe, the volumes of the Library Edition were also sold individually. Laurel Brake has pointed out how Macmillan chose to advertise the Library Edition together with titles which reinforced the idea of Pater's work as learned, exotic, and academic, such as J. G. Frazer's *Totemism and Exogamy*, Herbert George Ponting's *In Lotus Land, Japan*, and E. Norman Gardiner's *Greek Athletic Sports and Festivals*.^[29] Later in the year, the Library Edition was, however, not mentioned in Macmillan's December advertisements for “Books Suitable for Presents.”^[30] Macmillan was also J. G. Frazer's publisher, and the 1900 three-volume second edition of *The Golden Bough* and the 1906–15 twelve-volume third edition of Frazer's great opus serve as an interesting context for the two collected editions of Pater's writings. Published in 1910—the year which has conventionally been hailed as the advent of modernism, with the death of Edward VII, Marinetti's visit to London, Stravinsky and Diaghilev's *Fire Bird* ballet, and Roger Fry's first Post-Impressionist exhibition, among many other events—the Library Edition appeared at a time of great social, cultural, and political change. The life-death symbolism which pervades Pater's *Renaissance* and which structures the mythological writings in his *Greek Studies* and his *Imaginary Portraits* serves as an interesting counterpart to Frazer's explorations of such cyclical symbolism in primitive cultures. The modernity of Pater's double-edged figures of Demeter, Dionysus, and Apollo—as gods of fertility, abundance, and creativity, at the same time as they are represented as gods of death and destruction—is put into relief by Frazer's anthropological writings, so often celebrated for their impact on T. S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis, and Ezra Pound. Macmillan's

choice of reissuing the complete Pater in 1910 may have been spurred on by low stocks and issues of copyright, but his publisher's instinct also told him that this was an auspicious moment, when the appreciation of Pater was still high and likely to remain so for a while.

The Renaissance proved a special case. After a year of high sales of the Library Edition, Macmillan decided to issue Pater's first book in a cheap, shilling edition to cater to a wider and more popular market, a publication which might even stimulate further sale of the complete edition. On July 4, 1911, he wrote to Hester, the last surviving of Pater's sisters, pursuing his idea of a shilling edition. The new status of *The Renaissance* as a popular book with a broad and general appeal positioned it in a very different market from that of the bible of the aesthetes in the 1870s and 1880s. Hester proved difficult to locate, but the correspondence in the Macmillan archives testifies to Frederick Macmillan's repeated attempts at finding her to obtain permission for a cheap edition, which eventually appeared in 1913.^[31]

Berenson, Pater, and the Mona Lisa as Incubus

Just over a month after Macmillan's first request for a shilling edition of *The Renaissance*, the painting which more than any other epitomized Pater's powers as an art critic, disappeared from the Louvre. On August 21, 1911 the *Mona Lisa* was stolen by an immigrant Italian workman, Vincenzo Peruggia, who had been working in the museum.^[32] He was keen to bring back some of the many Italian spoils brought to France by Napoleon and erroneously settled on the *Mona Lisa*,^[33] because, as he later explained, "*mi sembrava la più bella*," she seemed to him the most beautiful of them all. He abducted the masterpiece to Florence and was only found out in 1913, when he attempted to pass on the painting to an art dealer who reported him. The publicity given to the theft in France and in the Anglophone world contributed to a further increase in the popularity of the painting. Pater's celebrated description of the *Mona Lisa* in *The Renaissance* had not only been enshrined in the Library Edition in 1910; it was simultaneously employed as evidence of the complex interrelationship between Leonardo's sexuality and the smiling women in his oeuvre in Sigmund Freud's study of the artist, which appeared in German in 1910.^[34] Using Pater's essay as his starting point, Freud established a link between Leonardo's homosexuality and his obsession with the strange smile seen in most of his depictions of women as evocations of his mother's smile. As a symbol of the modern idea, Pater's *Mona Lisa* had made it into the avant-garde of psychoanalysis some 26 years before W. B. Yeats opened his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* with a transcription of Pater's *Mona Lisa* passage into poetry as the first modern poem.^[35] The modernity of the painting, as well as of Pater's description, would seem to be an ongoing phenomenon, an illustration of the continuum embodied in Pater's notion of the Renaissance.

Freud's Leonardo essay appeared in an English translation in 1916, the very same year that Berenson published his views on Leonardo in *The Study and Criticism of Italian Art*. The first 37 pages of his book were ostensibly devoted to Leonardo, but the real subject of a significant part of the essay was his rebellion against Walter Pater and the influence Pater's writings had had on Berenson's life and approach to art. Berenson concluded his passage with the anecdote of how he had responded to the news of the theft of the *Mona Lisa* some five years previously:

One evening of a summer day in the high Alps the first rumour reached me of "Mona Lisa's" disappearance from the Louvre. It was so incredible that I thought it could only be a practical joke, perpetrated by the satellites of a shrill wit who had expressed a

whimsical animosity toward a new frame into which the picture had recently been put. To my own amazement I nevertheless found myself saying softly: "If only it were true!" And when the news was confirmed, I heaved a sigh of relief. I could not help it. The disappearance of such a masterpiece gave me no feelings of regret, but on the contrary a sense of a long-desired emancipation. Then I realized that the efforts of many years to suppress my instinctive feelings about "Mona Lisa" had been in vain. She had simply become an incubus, and I was glad to be rid of her.[\[36\]](#)

Only with the actual physical disappearance of the iconic object, which to Berenson, as to so many other readers, sat as the very core of Pater's book, could Berenson liberate himself from decades of Paterian influence. The passage above appears as the culmination of a few pages in which Berenson described his many hours spent "on the slippery floor of the Salon Carré, breathing its lifeless air," looking intensely at the *Mona Lisa*, while attempting to match what he saw with Pater's description. In doing so, he was, in fact, performing an act the author had never intended his readers to perform. Pater famously never illustrated his books, presumably because he wished his ekphrastic evocations of individual masterpieces to stand uncontested, as artworks in their own right. The minute comparison of word with image undertaken by Berenson inevitably makes one question his understanding of Pater. Most of the elements from which Pater takes his points of departure are there for all to see in the painting: the river, the rocks, the smile, the eyelids, and the hands, tinged by Leonardo's *sfumato*, but the real interest lies in the wealth of connotations and cultural contexts into which his associative technique expands. We know nothing about Pater's working habits, whether he employed notebooks during his visits to galleries, whether he had an extraordinary photographic memory, or whether he had a collection of photographs which he consulted while writing. No matter where his intertextual references may take him, Pater always engages in and keeps returning to a close dialogue with formal aspects of the artworks discussed. For Berenson in 1916, however, Pater had first and foremost become a seductive voice, working his way into his readers' minds by subtle, suggestive, and mesmerizing prose rhythms, while leaving the object far behind:

Brought up almost exclusively on words, I easily yielded to incantations and talismanic phrases. They put me into states of body and mind not very different from those produced by hypnotic suggestion, and I should have stayed under the spell, if only I had been kept away from the object. But the presence of the object disturbed coma and prevented acquiescence. Its appeals grew and grew until finally it dared come into conflict with the powers of a shaman so potent even as Walter Pater. My eyes were unglamoured and I began to look. What an enchanted adept died in me when I ceased listening and reading and began to see and taste![\[37\]](#)

We are here reminded of how Macmillan had advertised Pater among the exotic and anthropological titles on their list: Pater the shaman, uttering talismanic phrases and incantatory descriptions, is closely related to the world of J. G. Frazer. The art critic as a mediator between the physical and the spiritual world, capable of connecting the living and the dead, while performing restorative rituals by means of voice and music, is far removed from the Morellian connoisseur, paying attention to the minutest details in the rendition of eyes and fingers. In his filial rebellion, Berenson denied Pater his keen sense of visual form and made him almost exclusively into a visionary seer, with inner sight, one for whom "[t]he presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters" was a phantom of the imagination.

Although Berenson was challenging Pater's subjectivity, one is struck by the prevailing presence of the Berensonian eye/I in many of his writings. Where the occurrence of the first-person personal pronoun is very rare in Pater's writings, it is everywhere in Berenson's. The strong personality of the connoisseur pervade his texts, just as photographic portraits of Berenson often depict him in the very act of looking, carefully posed in a gallery, engaging with works of sculpture or painting (figs. 1, 2). The images reflect not merely any myopic visitor to the gallery, but so very distinctly Berenson applying his personalized expertise to the world of art. By contrast, the few portraits of Pater in existence show him as the dandified gentleman, without any attributes to indicate his profession (fig. 3). Yet this merely blurs the interrelationship between the critic and the object, as indeed Pater only very rarely spoke of his experiences in the museums and galleries, although he must have spent a significant part of his time there.



Fig. 1, David Seymour (Chim), *Bernard Berenson*, 1955. Gelatin silver print, printed 1982. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC © David Seymour Estate/Magnum Photos. [\[larger image\]](#)



Fig. 2, David Seymour (Chim), *Bernard Berenson at Ninety, Visiting the Borghese Gallery, Rome*, 1955. Gelatin silver print, printed 1982. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC © David Seymour Estate/Magnum Photos. [\[larger image\]](#)

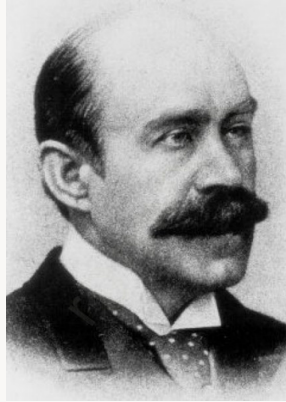


Fig. 3, Elliott and Fry, *Walter Pater*, 1880s. Photograph. [\[larger image\]](#)

Berenson's vignette of himself in the Salon Carré, confronting the *Mona Lisa* with Pater's description, indirectly engages with Wilde's long eulogy of Pater in "The Critic as Artist" (1891). In Wilde's dialogue, Gilbert and his male friend, likewise positioned in front of Leonardo's painting, take turns in quoting Pater while taking the description apart, and turning it into a new mosaic dialogue in celebration of the creative powers of criticism. Wilde asks who cares "whether Mr Pater has put into the portrait of Monna [*sic*] Lisa something which Lionardo [*sic*] never dreamed of," then confronts Leonardo with a passage from Pater in an imaginary conversation and replies:

He [Leonardo] would probably have answered that he had contemplated none of these things, but had concerned himself simply with certain arrangements of lines and masses, and with new and curious colour-harmonies of blue and green. And it is for this very reason that the criticism which I have quoted is criticism of the highest kind. It treats the work of art simply as a starting-point for a new creation.[\[38\]](#)

Wilde's Leonardo becomes a Whistler *avant la lettre*, purely concerned with form, while Pater's spectator-oriented criticism triumphs and heralds an endless series of new works of art. Wilde's piece was written while he and Berenson saw a fair amount of each other, during Berenson's early years in Europe. Having taken lodgings in Oxford in the spring of 1888, Berenson first contacted Pater, asking permission to sit in on his lectures. The evasive Pater declined, on the grounds that he was giving tutorials rather than lectures,[\[39\]](#) and the two never met. Berenson was more successful in London with Wilde, whom he saw on a regular basis in the late 1880s and early 1890s, until, apparently, Wilde's infatuation with Lord Alfred Douglas disrupted their friendship. According to Meryle Secrest, Berenson withdrew in homophobic fear, and broke off all contact, refusing to help Wilde when he was in Naples in 1897 after his release from prison.[\[40\]](#) Yet, in 1891, one might even imagine Berenson as Gilbert's interlocutor, the imaginary friend, with whom he was taking turns when chanting Pater's talismanic phrases in front of the *Mona Lisa*.

T. S. Eliot's Copy of *The Renaissance*

Wilde and Berenson's responses to Paterian ekphrasis reach the word-image debate from very different angles. Wilde gives supremacy to the word and to the powers of language to recreate

visual images with even greater impact, while Berenson is advocating a return to the image, provoked by a fear of the evocative powers of the music and rhythm of language. In his 1930 essay "Arnold and Pater," T. S. Eliot would draw a very clear line between the two, as part of his own long process of dissociating himself from Pater's form of aestheticism: "If, as the *Oxford Dictionary* tells us, an aesthete is a 'professed appreciator of the beautiful,' then there are at least two varieties: those whose profession is most vocal, and those whose appreciation is most professional. If we wish to understand painting, we do not go to Oscar Wilde for help. We have specialists, such as Mr. Berenson, or Mr. Roger Fry."^[41] Eliot contributed the essay to Walter de la Mare's collection *The Eighteen-Eighties*,^[42] and the general tenor of his piece groups Pater with Carlyle, Ruskin, and Arnold as voices securely lodged in the mid-nineteenth century. The modernity of Pater is completely avoided in Eliot's essay, as is any acknowledgement that both *Marius the Epicurean* and *The Renaissance* had any positive impact on readers of subsequent generations. Having just mentioned Berenson with great reverence, Eliot launches an attack on *Marius*, the very book which Berenson saw as his spiritual autobiography:

I do not believe that Pater, in this book, has influenced a single first-rate mind of a later generation. His view of art, as expressed in *The Renaissance*, impressed itself upon a number of writers in the 'nineties, and propagated some confusion between life and art which is not wholly irresponsible for some untidy lives. 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.^[43]

The untidiness of Oscar Wilde's life hardly deserves spelling out, but Eliot's nasty need to draw a direct line between the impact of *The Renaissance* and personal tragedy takes Pater's book into new territory. Undoubtedly, Eliot's negative stance toward Pater was one of the contributing factors in the decline in Pater's popularity from the 1920s onwards.^[44] Yet, as Lesley Higgins demonstrates so convincingly, Eliot's writings from the second decade of the twentieth century onward abound with references to Pater. Shortly before leaving for Europe in 1910, he had studied Fine Arts at Harvard, both the History of Ancient Art and Florentine Painting, and in the summer of 1911 he toured the museums and art galleries of Italy.^[45] The Hayward Bequest of King's College, Cambridge, holds Eliot's own annotated copy of the first edition of *The Renaissance*.^[46] Eliot's notes reveal very clearly how he had personalized the book, how it was part of his private history: given to him by his mother, it was subsequently lent to his first wife. *The Renaissance* was stamped as Eliot's own possession, with his ex libris with an elephant's head and the laconic motto "*Tace et fac.*" Eliot wrote the following inside the cover:

The notes in pencil, on the margin of the Conclusion, were made by me, comparing the text with the later edition.

T.S. Eliot

This volume was bought for me by my mother, at a sale of surplus books of the Mercantile Library, St. Louis U.S.A. for 10 cents.

T.S. Eliot

On the flyleaf is the note "Lent to Vivien Eliot Aug. 1924"

These signed messages must have been meant for posterity. Although Eliot charged *The Renaissance* with some untidy lives, he never intended to slur or erase his own reading of the dangerous book, and while his delicate pencil markings in the margins draw the reader's attention to more than a score of different passages throughout the book, the really intriguing piece of annotation is found in Pater's "Conclusion." Eliot's proud note on the inside cover directs us to a dense fabric of textual changes on the word level, as he collates the texts of the 1873, the 1888, and the 1893 editions. He interfered very discreetly and tactfully with the text of Pater's first edition by underlining or encircling words, adding the new words in the margin. Eliot occasionally corrected Pater's faulty French and crossed out words, while revealing both himself and Pater as meticulously attentive to detail, to a reading and rereading of themselves. He must have consulted both the 1888 and the 1893 editions in order to make these marginalia, but Eliot was not consistently choosing the text of one edition over another. When one compares the fabric of text he produces with the text critical apparatus in Donald Hill's edition, one begins to wonder about the nature of Eliot's project. Was Eliot, in fact, fixing the Paterian flux of text with a choice of words as he would have liked it, thus giving us his own preferred readings? He was appropriating Pater's text, and in a strange way making it his very own, as the paratextual inscriptions and the ex libris also clearly indicated that the book itself was his very own property.

Eliot's ongoing reading and discussion of *The Renaissance* are also confirmed by a letter of August 8, 1929 from the journalist and literary critic Harold Montgomery Belgion (1892–1973) enclosed at the back of the book. Eliot had been discussing Pater's "Conclusion" with him, and Belgion requested access to Eliot's precious first edition to check the exact wording of the very concluding words of Pater's book. In his 1930 essay, Eliot proudly asserted in a footnote that "In quoting from *The Renaissance* I use the first edition throughout."^[47] In spite of Eliot's repeated attempts to deny the significance of Pater, Wilde's "golden book" was no less fetishized in the late 1920s, when Freud was linking the fetish to the male sexual organ in his 1927 essay on "Fetishism." Eliot may have contributed strongly towards the silencing of Pater in his own writings, but the book itself in King's College Archives tells another story.

In Berenson's autobiographical *Sketch for a Self-Portrait* (1949), written when he was 84 years old, *The Renaissance* is conspicuous for its absence in the list of works by Pater which have influenced him:

The genius who revealed to me what from childhood I had been instinctively tending toward—was Walter Pater in his *Marius*, his *Imaginary Portraits*, his *Child in the House*, his *Emerald Uthwart*, his *Demeter*. It is for that I have loved him since youth and shall be grateful to him even to the House of Hades where, in the words of Nausicaa to Odysseus, I shall hail him as god.^[48]

As the only one of Pater's books to remain more or less continuously in print since its first publication in 1873, *The Renaissance* has fluctuated in popularity during the twentieth century with its own peculiar merging of the idea of perpetual rebirth and an urge towards the moribund. Unlike Wilde, its most eloquent disciple, the book survived the turn of the century, and in some respects attained a far more complex and pivotal position by 1910 than when it was first published.

Lene Østermark-Johansen, Reader of English Art and Literature at the University of Copenhagen, is the author of *Walter Pater and the Language of Sculpture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011) and *Sweetness and Strength: The Reception of Michelangelo in Late Victorian England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998). Together with John Law she edited *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). Her critical edition, the first one ever, of Walter Pater's *Imaginary Portraits* appeared in the MHRA Critical Texts series in 2014 (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association), and she is currently editing the *Imaginary Portraits* for the forthcoming *Collected Works of Walter Pater*, due to appear from Oxford University Press in 2016. She is also working on a monograph on Walter Pater and portraiture.

Email the author [oesterm\[at\]hum.ku.dk](mailto:oesterm[at]hum.ku.dk)

Notes

[1] When the second edition was published in 1877, Pater's book changed its title to *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, thus leaving out the word "History" in response to contemporary criticism which had accused Pater of not taking a historical approach to the Renaissance. All subsequent editions published during Pater's lifetime kept the title of the second edition. The standard edition is Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, the 1893 text, edited with textual and explanatory notes by Donald L. Hill (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Citations in these notes will be to that edition, unless otherwise specified.

[2] W. B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 130.

[3] See Oscar Wilde, *Selected Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 139n. See also Thomas Wright, *Oscar's Books: A Journey around the Library of Oscar Wilde* (London: Vintage, 2009), 319–22.

[4] Wilde in the long letter to Lord Alfred Douglas known as *De Profundis*, in Wilde, *Selected Letters*, 199.

[5] Print runs for all of Pater's books until 1910 are given in Robert M. Seiler, *The Book Beautiful: Walter Pater and the House of Macmillan* (London: Athlone Press, 1999). See appendix, 180–84.

[6] Arthur Christopher Benson, *Walter Pater* (London: Macmillan, 1906); and Thomas Wright, *The Life of Walter Pater*, 2 vols. (London: Everett & Co., 1907).

[7] Bernard Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto: An Essay in Constructive Art Criticism* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1895); and Roger Fry, *Giovanni Bellini* (London: Unicorn Press, 1899). See also Caroline Elam, "Roger Fry and Early Italian Painting," in *Art Made Modern: Roger Fry's Vision of Art*, ed. Christopher Green (London: Merrell, 1999), 86–106.

[8] Editorial in the *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 1 (March 1903): 4.

[9] I pursue this view in Lene Østermark-Johansen, *Walter Pater and the Language of Sculpture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011). See, especially, chapters 1 and 4.

[10] See D. S. Chambers, "Edward Armstrong (1846–1928), Teacher of the Italian Renaissance at Oxford" in *Victorian and Edwardian Responses to the Italian Renaissance*, ed. John Law and Lene Østermark-Johansen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 215.

[11] Roger Fry, *Letters of Roger Fry*, edited with an introduction by Denys Sutton (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972), 1:171–72.

[12] See his entry for October 13, 1942: "Finished *Appreciations* and with it the reading of Pater's entire work. It stands the past, and seems as valuable as ever for its suggestiveness, its stimulus, its specific quality of quiet, restful intellectuality. So different from the German who insists, like so many children with their toys and first watches, on smashing the subject he is treating to see how it works." Bernard Berenson, *One Year's Reading for Fun (1942)* (London: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 133.

- [13] Ibid., 105–6.
- [14] Paul Barolsky, “Walter Pater and Bernard Berenson,” *New Criterion* 2, no. 8 (1984): 47–57.
- [15] See the letters to Horne from Pater from October 1886 onwards in Walter Pater, *Letters of Walter Pater*, ed. Lawrence Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).
- [16] Hebert Horne, *Alessandro Filipepi, Commonly Called Sandro Botticelli, Painter of Florence* (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1908).
- [17] For accounts of the late Victorian reception of Botticelli, see Gail S. Weinberg, “Ruskin, Pater and the Rediscovery of Botticelli,” *Burlington Magazine* 129 (January 1987): 25–7; Paul Tucker, “‘Reanimate Greek’: Pater and Ruskin on Botticelli” in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, ed. Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, and Carolyn Williams (Greensboro: ELT Press, 2002), 119–32; and Adrian Hoch, “The Art of Alesandro Botticelli through the Eyes of Victorian Aesthetes” in Law and Østermark-Johansen, *Victorian and Edwardian Responses*, 55–85.
- [18] Roger Fry, “Mr. Horne’s Book on Botticelli,” *Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs* 13 (May 1908): 83–87.
- [19] Pater, *The Renaissance*, xix–xx. Pater’s italics.
- [20] See J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in North Italy, Venice, Padua, Vicenza, Verona, Ferrara, Milan, Friuli, Brescia from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century. Drawn up from Fresh Materials after Recent Researches in the Archives of Italy; and from Personal Inspection of the Works of Art Scattered throughout Europe*, 2 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1871); Giovanni Morelli, *Italian Masters in German Galleries: A Critical Essay on the Italian Pictures in the Galleries of Munich, Dresden, Berlin*, trans. L. M. Richter (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1883); and Giovanni Morelli, *Italian Painters: Critical Studies of their Works*, trans. Constance Jocelyn Ffoulkes, intr. A. H. Layard, 2 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1892–93).
- [21] From 2017 onward Oxford University Press will be bringing out the ten-volume *Collected Works of Walter Pater*, under the general editorship of Lesley Higgins and David Latham. This will be the first critically annotated edition of all of Pater’s writings.
- [22] *The Works of Walter Pater*, 8 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1900).
- [23] Frederick Macmillan to Hester and Clara Pater, January 24, 1900. Quoted in Seiler, *Book Beautiful*, 122.
- [24] Seiler, *Book Beautiful*, 123–25.
- [25] I am grateful to Laurel Brake who generously sent me her paper on the Edition de Luxe and the Library Edition of Pater’s writings, delivered at the NAVSA conference in Montreal in November 2010: “Canonising Walter Pater: The ‘De Luxe’ and ‘New Library’ Editions of 1900 and 1910.”
- [26] Lionel Johnson, “For a Little Clan,” *Academy*, October 13, 1900, 314–15. Quoted in Robert M. Seiler, ed., *Walter Pater: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), 395–99.
- [27] See Seiler, *Book Beautiful*, 134–35 for this correspondence.
- [28] *Imaginary Portraits* and Pater’s unfinished novel *Gaston de Latour* had appeared in one volume in the 1900 edition; they were now given separate volumes. Pater’s *Essays from the Guardian*, collected and published posthumously by Edmond Gosse in 1896, but not included in the Edition de Luxe, was added as the tenth volume.
- [29] See *Athenaeum*, June 4, 1910, 734; *Saturday Review*, July 2, 1910; and Brake “Canonising Walter Pater.”
- [30] Brake “Canonising Walter Pater.”
- [31] See Seiler, *Book Beautiful*, 137–39.
- [32] For an account of the theft of the painting, see Roy McMullen, *Mona Lisa: The Picture and the Myth* (London: Da Capo Press, 1976), 210–15.
- [33] Leonardo brought the painting with him to France when he became court painter for François I. It was in the inventory of the Castle of Cloux by 1517 and has remained in French collections ever since. Ibid., 32.
- [34] Sigmund Freud, *Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci* (Vienna and Leipzig: Franz Deuticke, 1910).
- [35] W. B. Yeats, ed., *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892–1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936).
- [36] Bernard Berenson, *The Study and Criticism of Italian Art*, 3rd ser. (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1916), 4.
- [37] Ibid., 2–3.

- [38] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," quoted in Richard Ellmann, ed., *The Artist as Critic: Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 366–67.
- [39] See Evans, *Letters of Walter Pater*, 172.
- [40] See Meryle Secrest, *Being Bernard Berenson: A Biography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 124–26. Ernest Samuels, *Bernard Berenson: The Makings of a Connoisseur* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1979), 291, quotes a letter from William T. Blayden to Bernard Berenson, requesting him to assist the recently released Wilde in Naples, a request Berenson apparently ignored.
- [41] T. S. Eliot, "Arnold and Pater," in *Selected Essays 1917–1932* (London: Faber, 1934), 438.
- [42] Walter de la Mare, ed., *The Eighteen-Eighties: Essays by Fellows of the Royal Society of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930).
- [43] Eliot, "Arnold and Pater," 442.
- [44] John Conlon, "Eliot and Pater: Criticism in Transition," *English Literature in Transition 1880–1920* 25 (1982): 169–77; and Lesley Higgins, "No Time for Pater: Breaking the Homophobic Silence" in *The Modernist Cult of Ugliness: Aesthetic and Gender Politics* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 79–119.
- [45] See Higgins, "No Time for Pater," 95–96.
- [46] Annotated copy of Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, PP/HB/B/21, Hayward Bequest, King's College, Cambridge.
- [47] Eliot, "Arnold and Pater," 436.
- [48] Bernard Berenson, *Sketch for a Self-Portrait* (London: Pantheon, 1991), 129.

Illustrations



Fig. 1, David Seymour (Chim), *Bernard Berenson*, 1955. Gelatin silver print, printed 1982. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC © David Seymour Estate/Magnum Photos. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 2, David Seymour (Chim), *Bernard Berenson at Ninety, Visiting the Borghese Gallery, Rome*, 1955. Gelatin silver print, printed 1982. National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC © David Seymour Estate/Magnum Photos. [\[return to text\]](#)



Fig. 3, Elliott and Fry, *Walter Pater*, 1880s. Photograph. [\[return to text\]](#)