Introduction to Part I

The first part of this book looks at Pater's contribution to English studies and literary criticism within a number of broader contexts. Kenneth Daley provides initial orientation for the reader. He compares Pater's *Appreciations* with the writings of other critics in the period, stressing how the volume asserts the centrality of the 'romantic' tradition in English literature, and contributes influentially to late nineteenth-century literary historiography and the tradition of the English critical essay. *Appreciations* may not have enjoyed the *succès de scandale* of *The Renaissance*, but it was widely disseminated and admired, with six editions and thirteen other reprintings up to 1927.

Pater pioneered a new literary form which he called the 'imaginary portrait', a hybrid of fiction and essay, which had a considerable influence, first on Oscar Wilde and Vernon Lee, and then on the Modernist generation, and which can be read as literary or artistic criticism in another mode. Lene Østermark-Johansen focusses on two such portraits with an English setting and on the nature of the 'Englishness' involved: the unfinished fragment 'An English Poet' written in the late 1870s but not published until 1931; and the short manuscript fragment for Pater's proposed third novel entitled 'Thistle' (late 1880s). In their concern with *Bildung*, with the coming-into-being of the poet or aesthete, and the growth of the imagination, these exhibit Pater as a late-flourishing romantic, while also closely tracking Sainte-Beuve's *portraits littéraires*, and so giving the stories a European dimension.

Pater devoted much of his career as a writer to the essay form (and its fictional equivalent, the imaginary portrait). Along with the dialogues of Plato, Montaigne's *Essais*, which, perhaps surprisingly, Pater seems to have read, not in the original French, but in Charles Cotton's elegant seventeenth-century translation, were always, for him, especially exemplary for the mode. In his view the essay suited 'the relative spirit' so characteristic of modernity: sceptical, informal, undogmatic, provisional

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('*Que sais-je?*'), committed to suspended judgement, multi-faceted, fluctuant and diverse, above all revealing of personality. Furthermore, in *Gaston de Latour* Pater brings Montaigne to life, introducing him, as Fergus McGhee argues, not only as a philosopher and self-inquirer, but as a 'lover of style', anticipating Harold Bloom's characterisation of the *Essays* as a vast work of literary criticism.

In parallel with the establishment of English as an academic subject, Pater's lifetime coincided with the institutionalisation of Modern Languages as an independent field of enquiry within British universities; in 1886 – the year of the *Pall Mall Gazette* survey on English at Oxford – H. M. Posnett's *Comparative Literature*, the foundational document in English for comparative literary studies, was published. Stefano Evangelista shows how Pater's writings on English literature, like those of Matthew Arnold, favoured cosmopolitan and comparative approaches that rejected the increasingly widespread Victorian practice of appropriating English literature for the promotion of a nationalist ideology. Evangelista pays particular attention to Pater's late lecture (1890) on the French writer Prosper Mérimée, which he was invited to deliver as part of the Taylor Lectures alongside European figures such as Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Bourget, and which were later collected, after Pater's death, in a volume entitled *Studies in European Literature* (1900).

To conclude *Appreciations*, Pater repurposed his essay of 1876 'Romanticism' (a telling title for an essay that actually deals with the opposition between romanticism and classicism). The new title, 'Postscript', as Ross Wilson observes, reminds us that for Pater there is never, except contingently, a last word, and of his commitment to the provisional and to second thoughts, and a never-ending process of revision, refinement, and reformulation. Wilson explores the complexities in Pater's account about aesthetic and historical categorisation, and about the way that periodisation can act as a straitjacket inhibiting proper understanding and appreciation; on this reading the essay becomes a key text for a crucial ongoing debate in literary study.

This first part concludes with two very different takes on Pater's somewhat controversial essay 'Style', an essay that over the years has been both highly praised and roundly disparaged. Michael Hurley contrasts Pater's views with those of three influential contemporaries, Arnold, Saintsbury, and Newman. He also insists that Pater's version of art for art's sake has been widely misunderstood by those who ignore his emphasis on 'truth'; for this reason, he sees the eloquent final paragraph of 'Style' as entirely at one with Pater's larger vision. Scarlett Baron, by contrast, finds

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here an inconsistent return to literary orthodoxy on Pater's part, but she also highlights the way that other aspects of his style and aesthetics, which he explores in 'Style' through his reading of Flaubert, position him on the threshold of Modernism, and explain his influence on authors such as Joyce and Woolf. Pater's practice of citation, which has aroused some criticism, can be seen more profitably as an anticipation of twentieth-century accounts of intertextuality from Joyce to Kristeva and the practice of 'second-hand writing' (to coin a phrase from Antoine Compagnon's *La seconde main*).

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