CHAPTER 3

Pater's Montaigne and the Selfish Reader

Fergus McGhee

> I am glad that one living scholar is self-centred & will be true to himself though none ever were before; who, as Montaigne says, 'puts his ear close by himself, & holds his breath, & listens'
>
> Ralph Waldo Emerson[1]

'A book, like a person', suggests the narrator of *Marius the Epicurean*, 'has its fortunes with one; is lucky or unlucky in the precise moment of its falling in our way' (*ME*, i. 93, ch. 6). In the autumn of 1877, advertisements began to appear for a new English edition of Montaigne's *Essais*.[2] Fresh from a tour of France, his mind still grazing on 'stained glass, old tapestries, and new wildflowers', Pater was thirty-eight years old – the very age at which 'this quietly enthusiastic reader', as he would later call Montaigne, withdrew from public office to begin a life of literary adventure in his book-jammed tower (*Gast.*, 89, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 83).[3] Pater had reasons to feel similarly disposed. As the controversy kindled by *The Renaissance* in 1873 once again fanned into flame, it seemed to put a decisive end to his remaining Oxford ambitions. Renewed attacks in the press coincided with the publication in book form of W. H. Mallock's *The New Republic* (successfully serialised the previous year), with its caricature of Pater as the whimsical and fleshly 'Mr Rose'. In March, he withdrew from the race to become Oxford's next Professor of Poetry, but the student press continued to give him a thrashing, and in May, Macmillan published the second edition of *The Renaissance*, stripped of its controversial 'Conclusion' at Pater's own request.[4] The nature of the attacks on Pater in this period bear a remarkable resemblance to the fraught reception of Montaigne's *Essays*, arraigned down the centuries for their egotism, scepticism, and sensuality.

Patricia Clements has observed that, after *The Renaissance*, Pater's work was largely 'tailored as explanation and justification'; but rather than viewing this process as a bashful retreat from youthful indiscretion, it

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might better be understood as a witness to the tenacity of his convictions.[5] Montaigne's essays, I want to suggest, played a vital role in helping Pater to articulate a renewed defence of his critical enterprise. The character of this enterprise is adumbrated by Mallock in the suggestion that Mr Rose has but two interests: 'self-indulgence and art'.[6] Mr Rose, one might say, indulges himself in art and makes an art of self-indulgence. I propose to take this criticism seriously, as I believe Pater did, and to examine both halves of this far from ill-chosen term of abuse in connection with Pater's portrayal of Montaigne. If Pater fashions Montaigne as an exemplary reader, he does so not in spite of, but *because* of his being – as William Hazlitt warmly described him – a 'most magnanimous and undisguised egotist'.[7]

Pater borrowed the first volume of Charles Cotton's seventeenth-century translation of the *Essays* from Brasenose College library in October 1877, and later acquired his own copy of the revamped version of Cotton published that November, edited by William Carew Hazlitt (grandson of the famous essayist).[8] Hazlitt's edition sought to take advantage of the French variorum edition published in Paris in 1854, gently pruning Cotton's translation of redundancies and paraphrases, and restoring passages omitted by Cotton's eighteenth-century editors on the grounds of delicacy.[9] Though it may have lacked the exuberance of John Florio's Elizabethan translation, Cotton's version was rightly regarded as more accurate and scholarly, and still more so in the light of Hazlitt's emendations. A landmark essay on Montaigne by Henry Crabb Robinson (1820), for example, praised Cotton for reproducing 'the quaintness, liveliness, and simplicity, of the author's style, with great felicity and effect'.[10] As the century wore on, 'Cotton's Montaigne' began to attain the status of a classic of *English* literature, hallowed by the love of Byron, Hazlitt, Emerson, and Arnold (Cotton was, after all, a vigorous poet in his own right).[11] This context may partly explain why Pater did not choose to read Montaigne in the original, uniquely among the French writers on whom he wrote. At least, there is no evidence he did so, and every one of Pater's quotations from the *Essays* is drawn from Hazlitt's Cotton.

Pater's own three-volume copy of this edition now resides at Brasenose, and like his volume of Flaubert's *Trois Contes* (also published in 1877), its margins bristle with ticks and scores in pencil.[12] Though none of Pater's other extant books are marked in this way, Edmund Gosse makes tantalising mention of a 'curiously marked copy of *Mademoiselle de Maupin* belonging to Pater' in 1885.[13] Moreover, the documented chains of provenance of the Montaigne and Flaubert volumes are substantially

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distinct, reducing the possibility that the annotations can be attributed to subsequent owners.[14] It is tempting to speculate, therefore, that the markings are Pater's own, but in the absence of further evidence this surmise remains impossible to prove. If such evidence were ever forthcoming, it would suggest just how much Montaigne meant to Pater; but we need no archival proof of that – it is written all through Pater's later work.

To Eat of All the Trees

Indulge: 'To give free course to one's inclination or liking', suggests the *OED*.[15] In his review of *The Renaissance*, Sidney Colvin had worried that Pater's 'Conclusion' would lead to 'general indulgence', and when the second edition appeared the admonitions grew still more excitable: 'Pater-paganism', it was warned, with its gospel of 'promiscuous indulgence', would unleash 'the worst passions and most carnal inclinations of humanity'.[16] The fear that Pater had provided an intellectual licence for unrestrained sensual gratification was central to criticism of his work through the 1870s. Pater was accused of leading young men 'miserably astray' by teaching them to abandon all 'self-restraint'; of being like a highly cultivated Renaissance prince who besmirched his honour with 'license foul'; of providing an insidious 'sanction' for 'casting to the winds . . . all exterior systems of morals or religion which can restrain a man against his will'.[17] So widely had Pater's influence penetrated, agonised one writer in the reliably illiberal student press, that in certain public schools 'many subjects are daily discussed, which should never be discussed at all and many others treated as open questions which in sober earnest, are no more open questions than the facts of our own existences'.[18] As Pater's rival for the Chair of Poetry, W. J. Courthope, suggested in a vituperative article of 1876, the 'general point at issue' in Pater's reception was 'the right of the imagination to unlimited liberty'. Accordingly, accusations of 'scepticism and sensuality' went hand in hand.[19]

I quote these assaults in quantity because they sow the seeds of Pater's portrayal of Montaigne as one who provided 'a theoretic justification, a sanction' for the liberty of thought and sensation which Pater associated with the Renaissance and, by extension, 'modernity' (*Gast.*, 83, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 80).[20] In Pater's unfinished novel *Gaston de Latour* (the first five chapters of which, including the ones on Montaigne, were published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1888[21]), the impressionable young hero's arrival at the Château de Montaigne emblematises the wider historical moment when humanity 'was called, through a full knowledge of the past, to enjoy

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the present with an unrestricted expansion of its own capacities' (82–3, *CW*, iv. 80). The crucial 'justification' for this emancipating ethic, argues Pater, 'was furnished by the Essays of Montaigne' (83; *CW*, iv, 80). In making this claim, Pater granted Montaigne a much more significant role as a moral philosopher than he had usually been accorded in Britain, where he was regarded as a congenially empirical thinker hopelessly compromised by his 'carelessness' and inconsistency, his lack of intellectual 'refinement'.[22] As with so many of the portraits in *The Renaissance*, then, Pater's account of Montaigne is highly revisionist: not only does he give Montaigne pride of place among Renaissance philosophers, he refutes the charge that his thinking lacked refinement by invoking 'the spectacle of that keen-edged intelligence, dividing evidence so finely, like some exquisite steel instrument with impeccable sufficiency' (104, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 91).

But if Montaigne's mind was not held in especially high esteem in Victorian intellectual culture, he was nonetheless widely respected for his benevolent heart: Montaigne was the 'apostle of toleration', a voice of sanity and moderation who loathed all forms of cruelty and persecution.[23] Pater endorsed this view of Montaigne as a 'singularly humane and sensitive spirit' (88, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 83), going so far as to call him 'the solitary conscience of the age' (114, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 96). And yet he also insinuated a 'strange ambiguousness in the result of his lengthy inquiries', which threw some doubt on the effects, if not the motives, of his singular moral temper (114; *CW*, iv. 96). The scene of Ulysses approaching the palace of Circe, illustrated by the tapestry in Montaigne's study, becomes a symbol for this lingering anxiety in the novel. 'Was Circe's castle here?' Gaston wonders; if she 'could turn men into swine, could she also release them again?' (90, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 83). When, therefore, the narrator notes Montaigne's stress on 'Man's kinship to the animal, the material' (112, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 95) – 'the earthy side of existence' (108; *CW*, iv. 93) – these homely observations come haunted by the ghost of Homer's enchantress. And just as Circe's song 'makes one forget everything beside' (*CW*, iv. 138, ch. 9), Montaigne's 'magnetic' conversation (87, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 82) insulates Gaston against the 'reverberation of actual events around him', and still more of 'great events in preparation', like the terrible massacre of St Bartholomew's Day (115, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 97). In Paris, Gaston reflects that he may have learned Montaigne's lesson too well, or perhaps that he had taken one side of it too much to heart. Following 'with only too entire a mobility the *experience* of the hour', he finds himself 'more than he could have thought possible the toy of external accident' (124, ch. 6; *CW*, iv. 103). Unleavened by judgement, Pater implies, such mobility may

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wither into helplessness; and experience, which might have been 'water to bathe and swim in' (as he puts it in his preternaturally eloquent early essay on William Morris) may leave us 'washed out beyond the bar in a sea at ebb'.[24]

This glimmer of Montaigne as a potentially threatening, even Mephistophelean, presence had played almost no part in his English reception hitherto, but was a key aspect of his reception in France, notably in the writings of Pascal and his nineteenth-century chronicler, Sainte-Beuve. In an extraordinary passage of *Port-Royal* (1842), which Pater was reading at Brasenose in 1868, Sainte-Beuve compares Montaigne to 'a cunning demon, a cursed enchanter' who takes his victims by the hand, draws them into his sceptical labyrinth, and tells them to trust to his lamp alone, before snuffing it out with a chuckle.[25] For Sainte-Beuve at this period (he later modified his view substantially) Montaigne was a playful figure who may have meant little harm but who wreaked havoc through the godless radicals inspired by his writings, like Rousseau and Bayle.[26] The pleasant-seeming roots of 'paganism' planted by Montaigne had grown into a Dantesque abode of suicides: a 'thick, dark, and poisonous forest … fatal to Werther and to all dreamers who fall asleep in its shade'.[27]

The parallels with Pater's reception are striking: 'Could you indeed have known the dangers into which you were likely to lead minds weaker than your own,' his colleague John Wordsworth wrote to him, 'you would, I believe, have paused.'[28] Pater's was 'the voice of the charmer', leading unsuspecting young men to their doom.[29] In 1877, an article on him observed that 'The cultured College Tutor … wields a potent influence over his pupils', and Pater himself was to use the loaded Oxford term 'tutor' to describe the role Montaigne occupied in relation to Gaston (*CW*, iv. 166, ch. 11).[30] Indeed, Pater repeatedly invoked Montaigne to parry contemporary criticism of his own supposed debaucheries, first by exposing the hypocrisy of such indictments and secondly by demonstrating the tact and acuity of Montaigne's famous fleshliness.

As early as *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), Pater had contended that, like the '"aesthetic" philosophy' of the Cyrenaics, the 'kindly and temperate wisdom of Montaigne', though it be 'refining, or tonic even, in the case of those strong and in health', was 'as Pascal says … "pernicious for those who have any natural tendency to impiety or vice"' (*ME*, i. 149, 150, ch. 9). This exculpation reappears in *Gaston*, which quotes Montaigne's own plea to this effect: 'In truth,' the narrator admits, Montaigne 'led the way to the immodesty of French literature', but he 'had his defence, a sort

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of defence, ready.—"I know very well that few will quarrel with the licence of my writings, who have not more to quarrel with in the licence of their own thoughts"' (*Gast.*, 112, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 95). Pater's late essay, 'Pascal', turns the tables on Montaigne's great antagonist by applying the same principle. For Pascal might equally be credited with 'a somewhat Satanic intimacy with the ways, the cruel ways, the weakness, *lâcheté*, of the human heart', writes Pater; 'so that, as he says of Montaigne, himself too might be a pernicious study for those who have a native tendency to corruption' (*MS*, 85).[31] Montaigne had been habitually rebuked in the nineteenth century for his 'love ... of coarseness and obscenity', his 'indecency', his 'unabashed and deliberate filthiness'.[32] But the fact that Montaigne was 'not revolted' by such subjects, Pater argues, should not blind us to his keenly discriminating sensibility (*Gast.*, 112, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 95). 'Delicacy there was, certainly', he suggests, '—a wonderful fineness of sensation' (111; *CW*, iv. 94). Pater pieces together a *cento* of quotations in support of this provocative reading, citing Montaigne's intense sensitivity to particular scents and climes, his ear for the breeze that forebodes the storm, and his desire for wine served in the clearest of glasses, 'that the eye might taste too' (112; *CW*, iv. 95). Pater's Montaigne, then, is not (or not merely) a bantering bawd but a scrupulous aesthete. And nowhere does he apply his discernment more scrupulously, and more passionately, than in his appreciation of literature.

Lively Oracles

When the poet Ronsard commends Montaigne to Gaston, it is not as a philosopher, an analyst of human behaviour, or a delightful raconteur, but as a student of style: 'Monsieur Michel could tell him much of the great ones—of the Greek and Latin masters of style. Let his study be in them!' (69, ch. 3; *CW*, iv. 71). In Montaigne's tower, Gaston finds 'quaintly labelled drawers' filled with 'Notes of expressive facts, of words also worthy of note (for he was a lover of style)' (86, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 81). This makes Montaigne sound not unlike the subject of Pater's 'An English Poet', who has 'a savour before all things of the style—how things were said—of manner' (*CW*, iii. 151). Given that Pater composed this essay around 1878, just as he was devouring the *Essays*, it is perhaps no coincidence that Pater there defines style as 'those elements of taste or of literary production which, because they are so delicately and individually apprehended and are yet so real, resemble physical sensations' (151). For this is how Montaigne describes the language that makes the greatest impression on him: the

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'sinewy' style of his Gascon countrymen, or the 'sharp' style of Seneca's Latin, which 'pricks and makes us start'.[33] Language, in this way, may evoke what one of Pater's most influential critical heirs, Bernard Berenson, called 'tactile values': weaving a Pateresque chaplet of nouns, Berenson describes how the work of art may 'appeal to one's senses, nerves, muscles, viscera'.[34] Cognition is not eschewed in favour of frissons that are merely skin-deep, but continually proved on the pulse, so that (as *Marius* suggests) 'one's whole nature' is mobilised as 'one complex medium of reception' (*ME*, i. 143, ch. 8).

An extraordinary gift of receptivity is what Gaston finds in Montaigne, a profound interest in his own responsiveness to the world that is the very opposite of solipsistic: 'openness—that all was wide open, searched through by light and warmth and air from the soil' – as with the house, so with its master (*Gast.*, 84, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 80). Pater's celebration of the breezy openness of Montaigne's abode, and by extension his writings, defiantly revises the French historian Michelet's crotchety characterisation of the *Essays*, in his monumental *Histoire de France* (1833–67), as 'this airless *bookshop*' ('cette *librairie* calfeutrée').[35] That Pater should champion the vitality of Montaigne's romance with literature is entirely apt, since as Denis Donoghue notes (with a coolness somewhat mysterious in a professional literary critic), 'Such thinking as Pater did, he did by commenting on the work of other writers'.[36] In *The Renaissance*, Pater had lovingly quoted Goethe's remark about Winckelmann's writings: 'they are a life, a living thing, designed for those who are alive' ('Winckelmann', *Ren.*, 155), and in *Gaston* he makes the same suggestion about Montaigne's *Essays*: they 'were themselves a life' (83, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 80).

This is no casual hyperbole: for Montaigne himself, Pater writes, the activity of reading, 'which with others was often but an affectation, seducing them from the highest to a lower degree of reality, from men and women to their mere shadows in old books, had been for him nothing less than personal contact' (97, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 88). Mallock's *New Republic* made much comic ado about people throwing their 'souls and sympathies' into 'the happier art-ages of the past', lampooning those quixotic creatures for whom 'Borgia is a more familiar name than Bismarck'.[37] Pater calls Montaigne as his witness against this parochialism of the present: for if '"we have no hold even on things present but by imagination", as he loved to observe,—then, how much more potent, steadier, larger, the imaginative substance of the world of Alexander and Socrates, of Virgil and Cæsar, than that of an age, which seemed to him, living in the midst of it, respectable mainly by its docility' (98, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 88). Seen in this

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context, the well-worn criticism of Pater's fictional method – that Gaston 'seems almost to be reading about himself and the age in which he lived' – self-combusts.[38] In Pater's account, reading is not a bloodless imitation of reality, but one of the most powerful, intimate, and sensuous ways we have of experiencing it. In his unpublished essay 'The Aesthetic Life' (probably begun around 1877), Pater wrote lyrically of 'that large life wh[ich] he looks in the face, ponders like a strange book';[39] as though reading were a way not of shirking reality, or facing it down, but of squaring up to it in all its breadth and mysteriousness.

Montaigne's scepticism is both cause and effect of his many-mingled engagement with literature: whereas in *Marius* the satirist Lucian's scepticism is said to have 'surrounded him . . . with "a rampart," through which he himself never broke, nor permitted any thing or person to break upon him' (*ME*, ii. 143, ch. 24), Montaigne's was 'the proper intellectual equivalent to the infinite possibilities of things' (*Gast.*, 104, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 91). Not things in general merely, but *particular* things. For 'it is "things" after all which direct him', as Erich Auerbach would later say of Montaigne: 'he moves among them, he lives in them; it is in things that he can always be found, for, with his very open eyes and his very impressionable mind, he stands in the midst of the world'.[40] 'Montaigne was constantly, gratefully, announcing his contact', Pater marvels, 'in life, in books, with undeniable power and greatness, with forces full of beauty in their vigour' (95, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 87). Pater's account of Montaigne's preeminent impressionability builds upon Matthew Arnold's observation, in *On Translating Homer* (1861), that the critic of poetry should have 'the most free, flexible, and elastic spirit imaginable', ever aspiring towards 'the *undulating and diverse* being of Montaigne'.[41] But Pater also controverts Arnold by insisting that, for Montaigne, 'the essential dialogue was that of the mind with itself' – the very malaise with which Arnold thought modern literature was afflicted (85, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 81). Such '*inward* converse', Pater suggested, was not in the least hidebound, let alone 'morbid' and 'monotonous' (as Arnold had claimed), because it 'throve best' with 'some outward stimulus', like 'some text shot from a book', for example (85, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 81).[42]

Pater quotes Montaigne's testimony that books were ever 'at his elbow to test and be tested' (88; *CW*, iv. 82), alluding to the literary form which he credited Montaigne with inventing: the essay, cognate with 'assay', 'A trial, testing'.[43] The quotation nicely suggests the reciprocal nature of Montaigne's relationship to literature, which both bombards him with impressions and calls forth his own best powers in response. In *Marius*,

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Pater had compared Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations* to 'the modern essayist', whose desire is 'to make the most of every experience that might come' (*ME*, ii. 47, ch. 18), while in his essay on Lamb he associated 'true essay-writing' with 'the dexterous availing oneself of accident and circumstance, in the prosecution of deeper lines of observation' (*App.*, 118). Pater's portrayal of Montaigne glances back at these earlier formulations of the essayist's double existence as pursuer and pursued. Pater pictures Montaigne 'shrewdly economising the opportunities of the present hour' (*Gast.*, 104, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 91), sifting experience with a bright expectancy: 'That "free and roving thing," the human soul,—what might it not have found out for itself, in a world so wide?' (113; *CW*, iv. 96).

This Montaigne is indeed 'the studious man' (84, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 81), but his 'studies' are of a very particular kind, for which Pater celebrates the essay as the ideal medium. In a passage which he later plucked from *Gaston* for his lectures on Plato, Pater identifies this medium as 'that characteristic literary type of our own time, a time so rich and various in special apprehensions of truth, so tentative and dubious in its sense of their *ensemble*, and issues' ('The Doctrine of Plato', *PP*, 174).[44] These two aspects of the essay's identity are related to its ambiguous location 'midway' between two earlier historic forms of philosophical thought, the poem and the treatise (174). As Pater notes, Montaigne rejoiced in prose that shone with 'the lustre, vigour and boldness . . . of poetry' (*Gast.*, 101, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 90), and in Pater's essay on 'Style' he too would insist that poetry was no unwelcome 'intruder' in prose (*App.*, 6). As an instrument of literary criticism, the essay is at once keenly investigative like the treatise, while at the same time willing to risk lyricism in virtue of the peculiarly evocative character of its objects of investigation. Just as Montaigne did with the moral and historical curiosities he loved to recount, the essay is always insisting that experience is 'not to be resolved into anything less surprising than itself' (*Gast.*, 95, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 87). Its distinctive mission is the pursuit of truth, 'not as general conclusion, but rather as the elusive effect of a particular personal experience' (*PP*, 175).[45]

Spontaneous Me

Montaigne's essays, Pater affirms, are an account of 'how things affected him, what they really *were* to him, Michael, much more than man' (*Gast.*, 105, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 92), echoing the demand which *The Renaissance* makes of every encounter: 'What is this . . . to *me*?' ('Preface', *Ren.*, xix–xx). 'Every one has heard of Montaigne's egotism', observed R. W. Church in

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1857, and Pater does not shrink from the charge: 'beyond and above all the various interests upon which the philosopher's mind was for ever afloat,' the narrator of *Gaston* reflects, 'there was one subject always in prominence—himself' (105, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 92).[46] Pater's sentence glows with ironic lustre, for he himself had been unceasingly accused of just this: 'Selfishness', 'self-worship', 'self-centred thought'.[47] Christopher Ricks is the most accomplished recent critic to have picked up this baton (or bludgeon): 'criticism, like creation for him', he laments, 'is not a loss of self, joyful or otherwise, but ... a matter of never finding yourself at an end'.[48] Selfishness, however, comes in many guises. There is the selfishness of self-conceit – 'the egotism which vulgarises most of us', as Pater deplores it in 'Emerald Uthwart' (*MS*, 225; *CW*, iii. 188) – but there is also the stealthier selfishness of self-effacement. There is a curiously Nietzschean moment in Pater's essay on Wordsworth where he alludes to the pursuit of 'mean, or intensely selfish ends' like those 'of Grandet, or Javert' (*App.*, 60). As if selfishness might keep company, not with indulgence, but with meanness: the wretched austerity of Balzac's miser, or the sinister sobriety of Hugo's police inspector, with his 'life of privation, isolation, self-denial'.[49] By contrast, Montaigne takes an 'undissembled' interest in the quality of his own various and volatile awareness of the world (*Gast.*, 105, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 92). Like Socrates, not the least of his virtues is '[t]o make men interested in themselves' ('Plato and the Sophists', *PP*, 120).[50]

From Pater's very first mention of Montaigne in the essay on du Bellay, he had associated him with 'something individual, inventive, unique, the impress there of the writer's own temper and personality' (*Ren.*, 137), and in the essay on Lamb he dubbed such subjectivity 'the *Montaignesque* element in literature' (*App.*, 117). In these circumstances, it might even be said that 'egotism is true modesty', as John Henry Newman had outrageously proposed in his much-discussed *Grammar of Assent* (1870). The honest religious inquirer, Newman wrote, 'brings together his reasons, and relies on them, because they are his own, and this is his primary evidence'.[51] Three years later, Pater would make the parallel insistence that in the realm of aesthetic experience, 'one must realise such primary data for one's self, or not at all' ('Preface', *Ren.*, xx). Though Newman's seeker is convinced that others will agree with him if they themselves 'inquired fairly', or will only 'listen to him', he is at the same time clear that 'he cannot lay down the law'.[52] Montaigne makes a still humbler and more hospitable claim, as Pater observes: 'I never see all of anything' (and 'neither do they who so largely promise to show it to others', he roundly adds (*Gast.*, 103, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 91)). For this reason Montaigne can

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maintain that 'a competent reader often discovers in other men's writings other perfections than the author himself either intended or perceived, a richer sense and more quaint expression'.[53] This, of course, is a notorious trademark of Pater's own critical practice, whether it be his perception of a vein of 'sweetness' in Michelangelo or a kind of sceptical indifference in the expression of Botticelli's Madonnas – insights which baffled critics pledged to hair-shirt historicism.[54]

The Montaignesque critic, attracted by 'some new light' he finds in one in a hundred of the faces belonging to the work under contemplation, will in turn leave much to the 'willing intelligence' of the reader (103; *CW*, iv. 91). Such writing, then, participates in a virtuous spiral: 'dependent to so great a degree on external converse for the best fruit of his own thought', as Pater observes of Montaigne, 'he was also an efficient evocator of the thought of another—himself an original spirit more than tolerating the originality of others,—which brought it into play' (86–7; *CW*, iv. 82). In this spirit of curiosity and respect, Pater goes on, Montaigne 'would welcome one's very self, undistressed by, while fully observant of, its difference from his own' (87; *CW*, iv. 82). Not only, perhaps, because he wants to see the object from a different angle, but because he values new ways in which he might differ from himself.

Writing, then, if it touches us at all, bids for an interest that is vitally personal, not because it can be threaded through the needles of our existing interests and commitments but precisely to the extent that it prises open those needles' eyes. 'For if men are so diverse', remarks Montaigne, 'not less disparate are the many men who keep discordant company within each one of us'; hence, Pater comments, 'the variancy of the individual in regard to himself' (93, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 86). The theme is recognisably Paterian: consider the 'strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves' insisted upon by the 'Conclusion' (*Ren.*, 188), or Emerald Uthwart's 'vagrant self' (*MS*, 207; *CW*, iii. 180), or the 'elusive inscrutable mistakeable self' evoked in 'The History of Philosophy'.[55] But Montaigne inflects it for him with a bracing sense of possibility missing from these elegiac intimations, and he does so by uniting it to Pater's passion for surprise: 'even on this ultimate ground of judgement', notes the narrator of *Gaston*, 'what undulancy, complexity, surprises!' (*Gast.*, 106, ch. 5; *CW*, iv. 92). 'The more I frequent myself . . . the less do I understand myself', Pater quotes, and the words have the air of a boast, not a concession (107; *CW*, iv. 92–3). Montaigne's sense of the self as inchoate and anticipatory – a fount of 'miraculous surprises' – suggests that we reimagine self-indulgence as a kind of sociable self-experiment (89, ch. 4; *CW*, iv. 83).

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Aesthetic experience may be richly and ineluctably personal, but it is not ineffably private nor jealously proprietary. What's more, if the self is perpetually at stake in such encounters, then it is never something already given, nor has it need of any anxious defence. The antithesis of blocked sympathies and cloying consumption, the selfish reader so conceived comes close to fulfilling one of Pater's earliest and most hopeful intuitions: that 'the choice life of the human spirit is always under mixed lights, and in mixed situations; when it is not too sure of itself, is still expectant, girt up to leap forward to the promise'.[56]

Notes

1 Ralph Waldo Emerson to Thomas Carlyle, 14 May 1834, in *The Selected Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. Joel Myerson (New York 1999), 130.
2 See, for example, *Academy* 283 (6 October 1877), ix.
3 Pater to Edmund Gosse (10 September 1877), in *Letters*, 26.
4 See the notice of Pater's withdrawal in *Oxford and Cambridge Undergraduate's Journal* no. 233 (15 March 1877), 305.
5 Patricia Clements, *Baudelaire and the English Tradition* (Princeton 1985), 81.
6 W. H. Mallock, *The New Republic*, 2 vols (1877), i. 24.
7 William Hazlitt, 'On the Tatler' (1815), in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, vol. 2, ed. Duncan Wu (1998), 10–13 (10).
8 Inman (1981), 404.
9 See 'Preface', *The Essays of Montaigne*, ed. William Carew Hazlitt, 3 vols (1877), i. v–viii. This edition was based on the earlier edition (1842) of Hazlitt's father.
10 'Montaigne's Essays', *Retrospective Review* 2 (1820), 209–27 (227). Jane Campbell identifies the author in *The Retrospective Review (1820–1828) and the Revival of Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Waterloo 1974), 59.
11 Richard I. Kirkland Jr., 'Byron's Reading of Montaigne: A Leigh Hunt Letter', *Keats-Shelley Journal* 30 (1981), 47–51; Hazlitt, 'On the Tatler'; Emerson, 'Montaigne, or the Skeptic', in *Representative Men* (1850), *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. iv, ed. Wallace E. Williams and Douglas Emory Wilson (Cambridge 1987), 83–106; Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, 1 May 1853, in *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang, 6 vols (Charlottesville 1996–2001), i. 263.
12 Oxford, Brasenose Library, Sparrow 53, 54, 55; the Flaubert is Oxford, Brasenose Library, Sparrow 145.
13 Edmund Gosse to Ellen Gosse, 1 November 1885, Cambridge, University Library, MS Add 7020.2.
14 Both were donated to Brasenose by John Sparrow. *Trois Contes* passed by bequest to Clara Pater, then Hester Pater, May Ottley, and Constance Mary Ottley, who sold it to John Sparrow in 1972. The provenance of the

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Montaigne volumes, which bear Pater's signature, is hazy: the endpapers bear the name G. W. Young (probably Geoffrey Winthrop Young, 1876–1958) as well as a price of £6 / 6s, suggesting they were sold (or offered for sale) at some point before 1971. It is unknown when they entered Sparrow's possession or from whom he acquired them.

15 'indulge, *v.*', *OED Online*, sense I.1b.

16 Sidney Colvin, 'Studies in the History of the Renaissance', *Pall Mall Gazette* (1 March 1873), repr. in *Critical Heritage*, 47–54 (54); 'Muscular Christianity', *Oxford and Cambridge Undergraduate's Journal* no. 240 (31 May 1877), 450–2 (451).

17 J. F. Mackarness, 'A Charge Delivered to the Diocese of Oxford' (1875), repr. in *Critical Heritage*, 94–7 (96); W. W. Capes, sermon quoted in *Oxford Undergraduate's Journal* no. 149 (27 November 1873), 98–9 (98); 'Paganism', *Oxford and Cambridge Undergraduate's Journal* no. 236 (3 May 1877), 370.

18 'Paganism', 370.

19 W. J. Courthope, 'Wordsworth and Gray', unsigned review of Alexander Grosart (ed.), *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, *Quarterly Review* 141 (January 1876), 104–36 (134, 136).

20 Cf. the Preface to *The Renaissance* on 'the breaking down of those limits which the religious system of the middle age imposed on the heart and the imagination' (*Ren.*, xxii–xxiii). *Plato and Platonism* declares that Montaigne 'does but commence the modern world' (*PP*, 194).

21 The chapters on Montaigne are (IV) 'Peach-Blossom and Wine' and (V) 'Suspended Judgment'.

22 See for example Henry Hallam, *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, 4 vols (1837–9), ii. 169–77 and Dugald Stewart, 'Dissertation, exhibiting a General View of the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical, and Political Philosophy, since the Revival of Letters in Europe' (1815–21), in *The Works of Dugald Stewart*, 7 vols (Cambridge 1829), vi. 91–8. The charge of 'carelessness' is Hallam's (ii. 169), lack of 'refinement' Stewart's (vi. 94).

23 Alexander Smith, 'An Essay on an Old Essayist—Montaigne', *Good Words for 1862*, ed. Norman Macleod (1862), 362–6 (366); see also W. E. H. Lecky, *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, 2 vols (New York 1866), ii. 63. An important exception to this view in England was Bayle St John, Montaigne's first biographer (in any language), who held the triumph of his conciliatory politics responsible for 'the adjournment of Liberalism for exactly two centuries'. See *Montaigne the Essayist: A Biography*, 2 vols (1858), i. 80.

24 'Poems by William Morris', *Westminster Review* 34 (October 1868), 300–12 (309, 311).

25 See Inman (1981), 192–3; C.-A. Sainte-Beuve, *Port-Royal*, III, vol. 2 (Paris 1867), 441.

26 See Donald M. Frame, 'Influence of Montaigne's Thought: Sainte-Beuve', in *Montaigne in France 1812–1852* (New York 1940), 140–84.

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27 Sainte-Beuve, *Port-Royal*, III, 405.
28 John Wordsworth to Pater, 17 March 1873, repr. in *Critical Heritage*, 62.
29 'Paganism', 370.
30 'Æstheticism', *Oxford and Cambridge Undergraduate's Journal* no. 235 (26 April 1877), 350–1.
31 The direct reference to Montaigne's French could be seen as evidence of Pater's engagement with the original text, but he could equally have picked it up second-hand from Sainte-Beuve's criticism, e.g. *Causeries du Lundi*, 3rd ed., 15 vols (Paris 1857–62), iv. 90. This is the edition Pater owned; see Inman (1981), 338.
32 Thomas Carlyle, 'Montaigne', in *The Edinburgh Encylopædia*, ed. David Brewster, 18 vols (Edinburgh, 1820), xiv. 675–9 (658); Hallam, *Introduction*, 176; R. W. Church, 'The Essays of Montaigne', in *Oxford Essays, contributed by Members of the University: 1857* (1857), 239–82 (245).
33 Montaigne, 'Of Presumption', *Essays*, ii. 418; 'Of Physiognomy', *Essays*, iii. 342.
34 Bernard Berenson, *Aesthetics and History* (New York 1948), 69, 67.
35 Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France*, 17 vols (Paris 1852–67), x. 401. Pater borrowed this particular volume from Brasenose in 1868 (see Inman (1981), 166).
36 Denis Donoghue, *Walter Pater: Lover of Strange Souls* (New York 1995), 97.
37 Mallock, *New Republic*, ii. 118, 119.
38 Gerald Monsman, 'Critical Introduction', *CW*, iv. 12.
39 'The Aesthetic Life', Houghton MS 39.
40 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton 1953), 294.
41 Arnold, *Prose*, i. 174.
42 Matthew Arnold, 'Preface to First Edition of *Poems* (1853)', Arnold, *Prose*, i. 1–15 (3).
43 *OED*, 'essay, *n.*', sense I.1a.
44 For the original version of the passage intended for *Gaston de Latour*, see *CW*, iv. 215–16.
45 Cf. *CW*, iv. 215–16.
46 Church, 'Montaigne', 251.
47 'Paganism', 370; W. J. Courthope, 'Modern Culture', *Quarterly Review* 137 (October 1874), 389–415 (412); Capes, sermon, 98.
48 Ricks, 'Misquotation', 415.
49 Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Lascelles Wraxall, 3 vols (1862), i. 145, 146.
50 Compare Montaigne's famous remark, 'If the world find fault that I speak too much of myself, I find fault that they do not so much as think of themselves' ('Of Repentance', *Essays*, iii. 23).
51 John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), 379.
52 Newman, *Essay*, 379, 380, 381, 380.
53 Montaigne, 'Various Events from the Same Counsel', in *Essays*, i. 142.

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54 See Colvin, 'Studies', 51–2; Margaret Oliphant, unsigned review of *The Renaissance*, *Blackwood's Magazine* 114 (November 1873), repr. in *Critical Heritage*, 85–91 (88–9).
55 Houghton MS 3, fol. 23 verso.
56 'Poems by William Morris', 307.

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