Introduction to Part II

The second part of this book focusses on Pater's engagement with a number of major English writers. *Appreciations* covers all post-medieval centuries, excluding only the 'Augustan' period about which Pater was rather less than enthusiastic (though he did design, and perhaps complete, an essay on Dr Johnson). Pater is not normally thought of as a leading Shakespearean, but unsurprisingly Shakespeare was central to his idea of English literature, and at one point he may possibly have planned a whole volume on him; he was also at least sympathetic to the idea of undertaking a commentary for schoolboy use on *Romeo and Juliet*, whose 'flawless execution' he commended ('Measure for Measure', *App*., 170). Typically he did not write about the most celebrated plays (his own favourites also included *Hamlet*), but instead chose for treatment ones less popular in his day: *Love's Labour's Lost* (perhaps because of its reflections on language and style), *Measure for Measure* (arguably the finest of his three essays, centrally concerned with the way a work of art can profitably engage with ethics), and *Richard II* (the main focus of 'Shakespeare's English Kings', where Pater contributed to the idea of Richard as the 'poet-king' and added to the understanding of the deposition scene). Alex Wong examines all three essays in detail, and comments on the overall value and distinctive character of Pater's view of Shakespeare.

Pater was part of a critical movement that gradually brought back into favour seventeenth-century writers of prose, neglected in the previous century. Kathryn Murphy explores Pater's use of the word 'quaint' in 'Sir Thomas Browne' to examine the qualities in Browne's prose that attracted him, despite any reservations he might have felt about a mode of writing that often fell short of classical precision. Through a careful reception history she shows that Pater develops the earlier positive estimates by Coleridge and Lamb, and anticipates the revaluation of the 'metaphysical' writers (so dubbed by Dr Johnson in critical vein) in the Modernist generation.

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Pater was committed to stressing the importance across time of the 'romantic' tradition in English literary history, and included in *Appreciations* three essays on writers of the generation now generally described as Romantic. While Blake never became the subject of an essay, Pater refers to Blake on what is, for him, a quite unusual number of occasions, from the essay on Michelangelo (1871) onwards. This is doubtless partly because Blake is both a poet and a painter, and thus relevant to the issue of the relationship between the various arts discussed in 'The School of Giorgione', partly because Blake is a figure in some ways 'out of his time' or particularly relevant to other times (something that always fascinated Pater). Luisa Calè suggests that Pater's interest may have been triggered by exhibitions in 1871 and 1876, at which he encountered Blake's paintings *The Spiritual Form* of Pitt, of Nelson, and of Napoleon. It also seems likely that Pater's interest throughout was fuelled by his still greater interest in the art and poetry of Rossetti, and in Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism generally. Blake's illustrations to Job were highly admired in these circles, especially '*When the Morning Stars Sang Together*', mentioned by Pater more than once. Blake can readily be seen as a forerunner of Romanticism and of the Pre-Raphaelites, for example in his hostile annotations to Reynolds's art theories, from which Pater quotes. Next Charles Mahoney demonstrates the ways in which Pater's accounts of two of the great Romantic poets, Coleridge and Wordsworth, established new terms for their consideration (in Coleridge's case in the context of his relative neglect; in Wordsworth's, as an alternative to an already established pattern of reading his poetry), that in a number of important respects helped to evolve approaches that are still operative in our appraisal of their works. Of course Pater, like his contemporaries, did not use the designation 'English Romantic poets' in the current manner – for him Wordsworth and Coleridge were part of the 'Lake School' – but the word 'romantic' is used throughout the essay on Coleridge to characterise both the man and his work. In the last chapter on this group of writers Stacey McDowell explores Pater's view that the writings of Lamb illustrate 'the value of reserve' in literature and examines what Pater meant by the term. Within the context of the Tractarian doctrine of reserve, Keble and Newman identify its poetic expression with verbal indeterminacy, indirectness, metaphor, and irony. By flaunting such qualities, Lamb's openness becomes a form of deflection, his lightness valued in itself and for what it modestly conceals.

Finally, we come to the Victorians. Lewis R. Farnell, who was inspired by Pater's lectures on Greek sculpture to become an archaeologist, records a dinner-party conversation in Oxford:

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> One of our best conversationalists was Walter Pater, who gave charming dinner-parties, where his talk had the delicate aroma of his writings, but with more ease and simplicity. . . . we were talking of the comparative merits of contemporary poets, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, Matthew Arnold and William Morris, each of whom had his champion, when Pater summed up with a gentle but emphatic decision that each of the others excelled Tennyson in some particular quality, but that generally and all round Tennyson excelled them all and would outlive them. (*An Oxonian Looks Back* (1934), 113)

Characteristically Pater did not write about the acknowledged favourite (though he did review Arthur Symons's book on the more controversial Browning). Instead, consonant with his especial interest in Pre-Raphaelitism and Aestheticism, he published essays on Morris and Rossetti (the latter not included in Farnell's list, presumably because already dead). Marcus Waithe takes Pater's engagement with Morris as a basis for thinking about his contribution to the development of English studies, exploring his evaluative criteria and methodology; what Pater values in Morris also envisions what he values in literature more generally. As a poet-painter, like Michelangelo and Blake, Rossetti was always a special point of reference for Pater; William Sharp recalls Pater describing him in 1880 as 'the greatest man we have among us, in point of influence upon poetry, and perhaps painting' ('Reminiscences of Pater', 1894, in *Walter Pater: A Life Remembered*, ed. R. M. Seiler, 81). Elizabeth Prettejohn argues not only that Pater's densely intertextual essay plays a more important role in Pater's overall critical project than previous scholars have recognised, but also that Pater's treatment had a distinctive impact on the next generation of Modernist critics. Indeed, Pater's essay may be most important for explaining to us a historical fact that may seem difficult to understand: the extraordinary influence of Rossetti on both painters and poets of his own and succeeding generations, an influence out of all proportion, some may think, to his actual achievement in either art form.

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