

**Bénédicte Coste**

## **“From Dreamlight to Daylight”**

### **Pater’s Medievalism**

This article examines William Morris’s medievalism according to Walter Pater’s “Poems of W. Morris” (1868). Conversely to many Victorian writers, Pater does not see the Middle Ages as a mere historical period but as a personal experience whose aim is to make the subject come to terms with the Real. As an ontological moment, the Middle Ages should be linked to Pater’s vision of Hellenism and of the Renaissance as it deploys itself in “Winckelmann.” Pater’s revision of history leads to a reappraisal of the notion of subjectivity.

Because of the title of his first published book, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, Pater is often linked to the Renaissance. His views of “that complex, many-sided movement”<sup>1</sup> mainly focus on the 15th and 16th centuries in Italy and France. Devoting chapters to medieval texts, Italian sculpture, and painting and French poetry, Pater intended to “giv[e] [the Renaissance] a much wider scope than was intended by those who originally used it to denote only that revival of classical antiquity in the fifteenth century which was but one of many results of a general excitement and enlightening of the human mind.”<sup>2</sup> Defined as an “outbreak of the human spirit,”<sup>3</sup> the Renaissance ceased to be a historical period and became a personal and collective experience that was bound to occur time and again.

The Paterian Renaissance amounts to what Heideggerian philosophy has described as a presencing, to what psychoanalysis would describe as a (partial) easing of repression that allows the subject of the unconscious to emerge, through an aesthetic experience:

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1. Walter Pater, “Preface,” in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, The 1893 Text, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980), i–xxv, p. xxii.

2. Pater, “Preface,” p. xxii.

3. Pater, “Preface,” p. xxii.

On a sudden the imagination feels itself free. How facile and direct, it seems to say, is this life of the senses and the understanding, when once we have apprehended it! Here, surely, is the more liberal life we have been seeking so long, so near to us all the while. How mistaken and roundabout have been our efforts to reach it by mystic passion, and monastic reverie; how they have deflowered the flesh; how little they have emancipated us! Hermione melts from her stony posture, and the lost proportions of life right themselves.<sup>4</sup>

The Paterian Renaissance is a return towards the signifying dimension of being, as opposed to the purely intellectual and ideal world in which many medieval or later artists and many Paterian heroes have shut up. As my definition makes clear, this study partly relies on Freudian and Lacanian concepts: however it is not applied psychoanalysis but an attempt at shedding light on Pater's rigorous vision using some of those concepts<sup>5</sup> and underlining the similarity of the subjective logic in both thinkers.

Although he mainly dealt with Greco-Roman, Renaissance and modern art, Pater kept a long-lasting interest for the Middle Ages: in his texts on Greek sculpture, he underlined the similarities between archaic Greek art and medieval pieces.<sup>6</sup> His

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4. Walter Pater, "Winckelmann," in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, pp. 146–7.

5. The topic of Pater's historical vision has been fully discussed. For his debt to Hegel, see Antony Ward, *Walter Pater: The Idea in Nature* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1968). A. Ward sees Pater approaching nature with Hegelian tools. Also see William Shutter, "The History as Palingenesis in Pater and Hegel," *PLMA* 86 (1971) 411–21, for a detailed study of Pater's debt to Hegel which he often tried to rescue against itself. Wolfgang Iser nevertheless stresses the differences between Hegel and Pater's historical visions and emphasizes the absence of eschatological fulfilment or teleology in history for Pater. See Walter Pater, *The Aesthetic Moment* (1957; Cambridge: CUP, 1987). In *Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1990), Carolyn Williams sees "Pater's history [a]s thoroughly dialectical and genealogical" (p. 60). Williams is right to point out that Pater's artistic genealogies centre round a diffracted and reassembled unity whose centre is Hellenic times.

6. "In what Cicero calls 'rigidity' of Canachus, combined with what we seem to see of his poetry of conception, his freshness, his solemnity, we may understand no really repellent hardness, but only that earnest patience of labour, the expression of which is constant in all the best work of an early time, in the *David* of Verrocchio, for instance, and in the early Flemish painters, as it is natural and becoming in youth itself" (Pater, "The Beginnings of Greek Sculpture II: The Age of Graven Images," *Greek Studies* [1895; London: Macmillan, 1931], p. 250).

last published texts<sup>7</sup> focus on medieval architecture seen as a means to bring about a sense of community or individuality.<sup>8</sup> *The Renaissance* devotes a whole chapter to the Middle Ages, “this earlier Renaissance within the middle age itself,”<sup>9</sup> as Pater explains that the Renaissance “may be traced far into the middle age itself, with its qualities already clearly pronounced, the care for physical beauty, the worship of the body, the breaking down of those limits which the religious system of the middle age imposed on the heart and the imagination.”<sup>10</sup> The medieval Renaissance is a renaissance in itself, focusing on sensuousness and in tension with religious constraints. Such a vision was in itself heterodox as Pater’s predecessors and contemporaries (Scott, Carlyle, Ruskin to name but the most famous) tended to emphasize the order and natural hierarchy of medieval times. However, Michelet and Renan<sup>11</sup> had discussed a French medieval cultural and political renaissance on which Pater could rely as a starting ground for his personal views.

In *The Renaissance*, the Middle Ages are characterized as a transition between sweetness and strength which Pater locates “in Pointed architecture, in the doctrines of romantic love, in the poetry of Provence, [where] the rude strength of the middle

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7. Walter Pater, “Vézelay,” in *Miscellaneous Studies* (1895; London: Macmillan, 1931), 106–120 and “Notre-Dame d’Amiens,” in *Miscellaneous Studies*, 91–105.

8. In “Notre-Dame d’Amiens” Pater contrasts Roman and Gothic architecture to underline their different aims: “Notre-Dame d’Amiens is the church of a commune. In that century of Saint Francis, of Saint Louis, they were still religious. But over against monastic interests, as identified with a central authority – king, emperor, or pope – they pushed forward the local, and, so to call it, secular authority of their bishops, the flower of the ‘secular clergy’ in all its mundane astuteness, ready enough to make their way as the natural Protectors of such townships. The people of Amiens, for instance, under a powerful episcopal patron, invested their civic pride in a vast cathedral, outrivalling neighbours, as being in effect their parochial church, and promoted there the new, revolutionary, Gothic manner, at the expense of the derivative and traditional, Roman or Romanesque, style, the imperial style, of the great monastic churches. Nay, those grand and beautiful *people’s* churches of the thirteenth century, churches pre-eminently of ‘Our Lady,’ concurred also with certain novel humanistic movements of religion itself at that period, above all with the expansion of what is reassuring and popular in the worship of Mary, as a tender and accessible, though almost irresistible, intercessor with her severe and awful Son” (“Notre-Dame d’Amiens,” pp. 109–10).

9. Pater, “Preface,” p. xxii.

10. Pater, “Preface,” p. xxii.

11. Hill mentions Michelet, *Histoire de France*, vol. VII (1855) and Renan “L’art du moyen-âge et les causes de sa décadence,” *Revue des Deux-Mondes* xl, 1 July 1862, p. 203. See Hill, p. 304.

age turns to sweetness”; adding that it cannot be dissociated from the Renaissance which was to supersede it as

the taste for sweetness generated there becomes the seed of the classical revival in it, prompting it constantly to seek after the springs of perfect sweetness in the Hellenic world. And coming after a long period in which this instinct had been crushed, that true “dark age,” in which so many sources of intellectual and imaginative enjoyment had actually disappeared, this outbreak is rightly called a Renaissance, a revival.<sup>12</sup>

The Renaissance is a transition leading to a return of the Hellenic culture that had been repressed.

In this historical scheme, the Middle Ages herald the Renaissance with Pater going as far as to write that the Renaissance was “an uninterrupted effort of the middle age, that it was ever taking place”<sup>13</sup> in the sense that the return of the repressed became more conspicuous. At the same time, the Middle Ages also harked back to the Hellenic past which was to play a central part in Pater’s historical and aesthetic vision. The Middle Ages appear as the beginning of the Renaissance,<sup>14</sup> Pater almost reversing the usual temporal scheme by what amounts to the dissolution of periodization, as J.-B. Bullen has noticed.<sup>15</sup> Such a dissolution manifests itself rhetorically in Pater’s series of parallels between times and artists that confuse the reader’s sense of history, so that the Renaissance appears diffracted in a multiplicity of works and artists. It is no longer a historical moment but a psychological experience.

However, and Pater was always adamant on this point: there can be no unmediated approach of the past for the modern Victorian reader. It comes wrapped in the mists of reconstitution (this is what medievalism is about) and it is the nature of this

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12. Walter Pater, “Two Early French Stories,” *The Renaissance*, p. 2.

13. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 180.

14. “And the Renaissance, in France at least, is said to be the autumn of medieval times: the Renaissance thus putting forth in France an aftermath, a wonderful later growth, the products of which have to the full that subtle and delicate sweetness which belongs to a refined and comely decadence; just as its earliest phases have the freshness which belongs to all periods of growth in art, the charm of *asceticism*, of the austere and serious girding of the loins in youth” (“Preface,” p. xxiii).

15. “[C]hronological sequence is replaced by a series of affinities. Periodization is dissolved” (J. B. Bullen, “The Historiography of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*,” in *Pater in the 1990’s*, ed. Laurel Brake and Ian Small, [Greensboro, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1991], p. 159).

“mist” that I propose to discuss. Medievalism is another means of discussing the troubled relation between reality and its representation, the status of remembrance and the ontological foundations of the subject.

In fact, Pater had already used the above-described scheme to characterize the Middle Ages as a period of yearning and rediscovery bound to lead to the Renaissance, in one of his first published essays in 1868, a review of William Morris's poetry,<sup>16</sup> which he republished in 1889 in the first edition of *Appreciations* under the title “Aesthetic Poetry.” However, there can be no question that it contains Pater's already full-fledged theses on the Middle Ages,<sup>17</sup> including one of Pater's first definitions of the Renaissance, in its relation to the Middle Ages and Hellenism, since there can be no understanding of his theses without these concepts.

I have chosen to discuss Pater's definition of the Middle Ages, thus ignoring Morris's poetic vision.<sup>18</sup> Like many of his contemporaries or immediate predecessors, Morris engaged in medievalism understood as a discursive construct running

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16. “The Poems of W. Morris,” *Westminster Review* xxxiv ns (October 1868) 300–12. The last six paragraphs of the text became the “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance*. Although Pater changed the original title, he kept the original date of publication. However, in the second edition of *Appreciations*, “Aesthetic Poetry” was replaced with “Feuillet's *La Morte*” a somewhat straightforward reading of the French writer lately deceased. It seems that Pater had grown dissatisfied with the views expressed as they had been better expressed in *The Renaissance*. The term “aesthetic” did not appear in the 1868 text. In her article, L. Brake reminds us that the medieval times were a fashionable topic in the 1860's which was also the heyday of the Gothic revival. See Laurel Brake, “The ‘wicked Westminster,’ the *Fortnightly*, and Walter Pater's *Renaissance*,” in *Literature in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-century British publishing and reading practices*, ed. John O. Jordan and Robert L. Patten (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 289–305. H. Sussman, who has read Pater's essay in relation to masculinity, underlines that the 1868 version, praising homoeroticism, became more muted in 1889. See Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995).

17. In *The Sensible Spirit: Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (Tampa: U of South Florida P, 1986), F. C. McGrath noticed that this essay was a turning-point in Pater's writings: “from the Morris essay on, Pater's formulation of the unified sensibility migrated persistently, if not consistently, in the direction of idealism of various sorts” (p. 173). Pater emphasized the primacy of the senses before qualifying it, a process that found its achievement when he bridged the gap between the sensual and the intelligible with an implicit theory of the signifier.

18. One may still read Alice Chandler's fine study on Morris in *A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

throughout the nineteenth century and having various political or aesthetic uses. But unlike them, he was one of the first to question it as a mythic time of joy and order,<sup>19</sup> promoting a non-Christian medievalism, a choice which may account for Pater's interest. His focus on Morris's poetry rather than on his work as an artist shows Pater's will to discuss representation rather than objects, relation to time and language rather than resemblance of the medieval original and its modern copy. His vision is linked to the central concept of Hellenism, which I shall try to define in relation to Heideggerian philosophy and through "Winckelmann," the other seminal essay on the Paterian renaissance. Pater's vision of historical change should also be linked to Heideggerian historicity where history is a continuous un/veiling, un/concealing of Being.<sup>20</sup>

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Pater defines the aesthetic poetry of which Morris is a main proponent, as an idealisation of the ideal:

Greek poetry, medieval or modern poetry, projects, above the realities of its time, a world in which the forms of things are transfigured. Of that transfigured world this new poetry takes possession, and sublimates beyond it another still fainter and more spectral, which is literally an artificial or "earthly paradise." It is a finer ideal, extracted from what in relation to any actual world is already an ideal.<sup>21</sup>

Aesthetic poetry is the sublimation of the transfigured world, that is, the representation of the so-called reality, "twice removed from the actual world: it abstracts from an already existent idealized abstraction of the world" as F. C. McGrath contends,<sup>22</sup> before underlining Pater's "rarefied sensibility"<sup>23</sup> when he chose to accentuate the

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19. See A. Chandler: "although almost completely medieval in content, [the Defence of Guenevere] is far from presenting the Middle Ages as an ideal. Several of his poems imitate Browning, most show a conscious mingling of beauty and anguish" (Chandler, *A Dream of Order*, p. 214).

20. Heidegger defines historical *epoche* in his essay "On Time and Being" (1962); see *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, 1972) for a definition of *epoche* as a halt in which the dedication of Being and time is being perceptible.

21. Walter Pater, "Aesthetic Poetry," *Appreciations* (London: Macmillan, 1889). All references are to this edition.

22. McGrath, *The Sensible Spirit*, pp. 174–5. McGrath notices that the same abstraction process is used in the portrait of the "Lady Lisa," in *The Renaissance*.

23. McGrath, *The Sensible Spirit*, p. 174.

representative function of language which the poets take as the starting ground for a new poetics, something we need to remember when discussing the nature of medievalism, which cannot be anything else than a representational recreation. Aesthetic poetry does not amount to a revival: "Like some strange flowering after date, it renews on a more delicate type the poetry of a past age, but must not be confounded with it" (214). As C. Williams has argued, aesthetic poetry is also a "double movement of transfiguration [that] marks a poetry that specifically incorporates and transforms the poetry of an earlier historical period"<sup>24</sup> in a movement similar to an Hegelian *Aufhebung*.

Reading Morris's poetry as the outgrowth of 19th-century Romanticism, Pater points out that medievalism ("things medieval," 214), understood as a discursive return towards a forgotten past, was concomitant with a return to Hellenism, both being part of "a reaction against [the] outworn classicism" of the 18th century (214). Leaving aside the return to Hellenism, he traces the various steps of that return which started with Goethe's *Goetz von Berlichingen* (1771), exemplifying a "superficial, or at least external" (214) type of medievalism centering on "[a]dventure, romance in the frankest sense, grotesque individualism" (214) of which Goethe and Scott are the true instances.<sup>25</sup> Relying on the traits of what they surmised the Middle Ages must have been, neither writer seems to have reached the deeper spirit of the Middle Ages based on the tension between religion and passion: "its mystic religion at its apex in Dante and Saint-Louis, and its mystic passion, passing here and there into the great romantic loves of rebellious flesh, of Lancelot and Abelard" (214). Scott's superficial approach to the Middle Ages contrasts with another, inner way of re-discovering it: "That stricter, imaginative medievalism which recreates the mind of the Middle Age, so that the form, the presentment grows outward from within, [which] came later with Victor Hugo in France, with Heine in Germany" (214-5). These writers seem to have experienced something which allows them to write perfect, balanced works where form and content are fused.

It is this type of medievalism, focused more on what Pater terms the "spirit" (that is, on an attitude towards the past and temporality) than on any outward manifestations (*signs* of medievalism) that Morris has taken to refine,<sup>26</sup> thus demonstrating the inferiority of mere reconstitution. Paradoxically, this type of medie-

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24. Williams, *Transfigured World*, p. 5.

25. In fact, as A. Chandler reminds us, Scott had given a free translation of Goethe's 1771 drama in 1799.

26. "[A] refinement upon the later, profounder medievalism" (p. 215).

valism allows one to understand what the Middle Age was, as Morris's poetry focuses on the choice between reason and passion, in an echo of "the strange suggestion of a deliberate choice between Christ and a rival lover" (215), that is, between the two main elements of the medieval spirit (religion and passion) as they are put into tension.

Like Rousseau's writings, Morris's vision echoes and thus validates Pater's conception of the medieval temper in which religion was sensually expressed<sup>27</sup> and love whose "highest expression [was] the Provençal poetry" (215), before it became "a rival religion with a new rival *cultus*" (215-6). Under the influence of religion, poetry starts to confine itself to castles and to the kind of fantasies that are bound to happen there: "Hereon, as before in the cloister, so now in the *château*, the reign of reverie sets in" (216). The Middle Ages may be one of the first instances of the idealization of the idealized reality, borrowing its dominant trend from religion and, so to speak, laicizing it or transferring it into the personal sphere where "the mood of the cloister" (216) becomes a lay cult whose object is "absent or veiled" (216). This is exemplified by the courtly poetry of the Troubadours, or Morris's works, both mirroring each other, but more importantly, accounting for each other as they partake of the same spirit.

The spirit of the Middle Ages can be defined as a time of *rêverie* synonymous with an idealization of the ideal, which is bound to end up and which accounts for Morris's poetic changes. "Reverie, illusion, delirium: they are the three stages of a fatal descent both in the religion and the loves of the Middle Age" (217). Ascent and descent: like most of the mid-Victorians, Pater seems to espouse the view that all things wax and wane, thus following a universal law of development which he had discussed in "Coleridge's Writings" in 1866.<sup>28</sup> However, what disappears is not suppressed: history is a permanent rediscovery,<sup>29</sup> as shown by the surprising example of

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27. "[T]he Latin hymn-writers, who for one moral or spiritual sentiment have a hundred sensuous images" (p. 215).

28. "Nature, which by one law of development evolves ideas, hypotheses, modes of inward life, and represses them in turn, has in this way provided that the earlier growth should propel its fibres into the later, and so transmit the whole of its forces in an unbroken continuity of life" (Walter Pater, "Coleridge," in *Appreciations* [1890; London: Macmillan, 1931], p. 64, all references are to this edition).

29. "But the suspicion of a mind latent in nature, struggling for release, and intercourse with the intellect of man through true ideas, has never ceased to haunt a certain class of minds. Started again and again in successive periods by enthusiasts on the antique pattern, in each case the thought may have seemed paler and more fantastic amid the growing consis-



that decline where heated passion and the religion of love end up in delirium: “No-where has the impression of this delirium been better conveyed by Victor Hugo in *Notre Dame de Paris*” (217). Once again the past is only fully understood by the present, especially when modern artists have found the spirit rather than the signs of medieval times. Morris’s poetry achieves the quintessence of the (re-created) Middle Ages in “King Arthur’s Tomb,” “Galahad: a Mystery” and the “Blue Closet”<sup>30</sup> all the more so as he is given to understand how the decline occurred. The Victorian artist explains and instantiates the law of ascent and descent used by Pater to account for historical, aesthetic and ontological change.

“Surely, such loves were too fragile and adventurous to last more than for a moment” (217): some excess in tenuity seems to have been reached there. What Morris exemplifies is that “passion of which the outlets are sealed, [and which] begets a tension of nerve, in which the sensible world comes to one with a reinforced brilliancy and relief – all redness is turned into blood, all water in tears” (218): it is out of surfeit that things decline and degenerate. It is because there is no outlet that the surfeit occurs, thus leading to illusion and delirium, i.e., an exaggerated idealization of the ideal which eventually loses sight of reality.

Such a collective historical movement in the Middle Ages is echoed on the personal aesthetic level when Pater discusses the changes in Morris’s poetry:

*The Defence of Genevieve* was published in 1858; the *Life and Death of Jason* in 1867; to be followed by *The Earthly Paradise*; and the change of manner wrought in the interval, entire, almost a revolt, is characteristic of æsthetic poetry. Here there is no delirium or illusion, no experiences of mere soul while the body and the bodily senses sleep, or wake with con-

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tency and sharpness of outline of other and more positive forms of knowledge. Still, wherever the speculative instinct has been united with a certain poetic inwardness of temperament, as in Bruno, in Schelling, there that old Greek conception, like some seed floating in the air, has taken root and sprung up anew” (Pater, “Coleridge,” p. 77).

30. “[Morris] has diffused through *King Arthur’s Tomb* the maddening white glare of the sun, and tyranny of the moon, not tender and far-off, but close down – the sorcerer’s moon, large and feverish. The colouring is intricate and delirious, as of ‘scarlet lilies.’ The influence of summer is like a poison in one’s blood, with a sudden bewildered sickening of life and all things. In *Galahad: a Mystery*, the frost of Christmas night on the chapel stones acts as a strong narcotic: a sudden shrill ringing pierces through the numbness: a voice proclaims that the Grail has gone forth through the great forest. It is in the *Blue Closet* that this delirium reaches its height with a singular beauty, reserved perhaps for the enjoyment of the few” (p. 216).

vulsed intensity at the prompting of imaginative love; but rather the great primary passions under broad daylight as of the pagan Veronese. (221)

The medieval spirit had lost touch with reality, now is the time to go back to it, that is, to reclaim the sensible world: “a better daylight, but earthly, open only to the senses” (222). In a seeming contradiction with its previous definition, æsthetic poetry is now seen as a return to reality, but both estrangement and return characterize the transitional aspect of Pater’s vision of the medieval times and spirit.

In fact the recreated experience of the poet allows us to understand that idealizing the ideal is bound to end up:

Complex and subtle interests, which the mind spins for itself may occupy art and poetry or our own spirits for a time; but sooner or later they come back with a sharp rebound to the simple elementary passions – anger, desire, regret, pity, and fear: and what corresponds to them in the sensuous world – bare, abstract fire, water, air, tears, sleep, silence, and what De Quincey has called the “glory of motion.” (222)

What the monk or the poet had wished for and divined<sup>31</sup> must become realized in the first sense of the word as one finds the way back to reality (to things as they are, as Arnold<sup>32</sup> would contend), to an originary dimension that has been smothered. Moreover, this evolution obeys a simple “law of the life of the human spirit, and of which what we call the Renaissance is only a supreme instance” (224). The personal and the collective echo each other, both on a historical and an ontological plane. The Renaissance comes to stand as a return to reality – a thesis which was imported to the “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance* – or to what Pater summarizes as a “reaction from dreamlight to daylight” (222). This return which is also a re-discovery of the originary sensuous dimension of the human subject manifests itself as an interest for morning lights as shown by Morris mainly dealing with “morning and things of the morning” (222). The dreams he presents are “dreams, not like Galahad’s or Guenevere’s, but full of happy, childish wonder as in the ear-

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31. “Just so the monk in his cloister, through the ‘open vision,’ open only to the spirit, divined, aspired to, and at last apprehended, a better daylight, but earthly, open only to the senses” (p. 222).

32. “[T]o see the object as in itself it really is” (M. Arnold, “On Translating Homer,” *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Robert H. Super [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan P, 1960], vol. I, p. 40).

lier world," (222) as opposed to the nocturnes of delirious nights. Such a Baudelairean "vie antérieure" is in fact a return to an originary dimension that has been repressed, including that of the sensuous or imaginary world:

It is a world in which the centaur and the ram with the fleece of gold are conceivable. The song sung always claims to be sung for the first time. There are hints at a language common to birds and beasts and men. Everywhere there is an impression of surprise, as of people first waking from the golden age, at fire, snow, wine, the touch of water as one swims, the salt taste of the sea. (222)

The subjects of poetry experience the world anew, as if the renaissance, clearly understood as a psychic moment, sent everyone back to one's origins. Morris has found again what characterizes in fact the Middle Ages according to Pater, "that earliest return from the overwrought spiritualities of the Middle Ages to the earlier, more ancient life of the senses" (224) on which *The Renaissance* will focus more explicitly, linking the senses with the return towards Hellenism understood as the origin of the subject.

Morris's medievalism, which Pater opposes to "vain antiquarianism" (223), cannot be reduced to or conflated with a mere revival of the Middle Ages. The poet has embraced a true renaissance of the spirit, which Pater defined more fully in 1873, as an awakening, through all the artists he portraitured. Revival and renaissance are in fact two different or even opposed concepts: revival being predicated on imitation and signs, renaissance on elements which function as signifiers. For Pater, the subject has access to the past as the "composite experience of all the ages is part of us" (223). But, against Ranke's "wie es eigentlich gewesen sei," not as a reality, which would amount to "com[ing] face to face with the people of a past age, as if the Middle Age, the Renaissance, the eighteenth century had not been" (223). The past is experienced as "the element it has contributed to our own culture" (224), i.e., as a series of signifiers from which it is "possible to isolate such a phase, to throw it into relief, to be divided against ourselves in zeal for it, as we hark back to some choice space of our own individual life" (224). The Paterian subject has the capacity to divide itself between past and present (and we might add with Pater, also between the present and the future) because these temporal dimensions are predicated on a signifying order which divides the subject. The most famous example is that of Winckelmann, first described in 1867 and developed in 1873. Echoing Morris's experience,

Winckelmann “reproduces” the “sentiment” of the Renaissance, not the Renaissance itself<sup>33</sup> by his rediscovery of the past.

The collective past, or what Pater calls “the general history of culture”<sup>34</sup> in “Winckelmann” and the history of individual – the “solitary man of genius”<sup>35</sup> – are organized along the same signifying order and the subject can but find signifiers instead of the image or the representation of the past functioning as a sign.<sup>36</sup> Pater’s implicit theory of the signifier accounts thus for two types of remembrance: signifying remembrance and revival of signs as in Goethe and Scott, and two types of medievalism, one dealing with its signifying legacies (“the element it has contributed to our own culture”) and one dealing with “superficial” or “external” tokens. Hence the distinction Pater makes between the revival and the Renaissance, the first being a mere repetition, the second amounting to Platonician “reminiscence” as described through the case of Winckelmann, or to Kierkegaard’s repetition defined as what “is recollected forwards” as opposed to recollection – what is recollected is repeated backwards.<sup>37</sup> Kierkegaardian repetition is not a retrospective movement, but foremost an anticipation, it has an anticipatory dimension, as shown by the art historian who “seems to realise that fancy of the reminiscence of a forgotten knowledge hidden for a time in the mind itself; as if the mind of one, lover and philosopher at once in some phase of pre-existence . . . fallen into a new cycle were beginning its intellectual career over again, yet with a certain power of anticipating its results.”<sup>38</sup> There is knowledge within the subject, in the Lacanian sense of the term where it designates the play of signifiers arising to constitute the discourse of the subject of the unconscious, and one may say that the Renaissance is but the experience of that repressed knowledge suddenly coming to light, triggered, in the case of Winckelmann, by the sensible or aesthetic experience of the discovery of Greek relics.<sup>39</sup> Paterian Renais-

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33. “Winckelmann here reproduces for us the earlier sentiment of the Renaissance” (Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 146).

34. “Winckelmann,” p. 155.

35. “Winckelmann,” p. 146.

36. C. Williams rightly sees in Pater’s analogy between the collective and the individual planes “the beginnings of a theory of the unconscious.” See C. Williams, p. 76.

37. Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, trans. Walter Lowrie (1842; London: OUP, 1942), pp. 3–4. Kierkegaard adds: “repetition is a decisive expression for what ‘recollection’ was for the Greeks.”

38. “Winckelmann,” p. 155.

39. F. C. McGrath aptly describes Pater not as a proponent of the sensual but as “devotee and master of the sensuous response to intellectual stimuli, complex stimuli that involve both intellect and sense, but often more intellect than sense” (McGrath, p. 178).

sance does not praise remembrance for its own sake but within the present, the return of something which leads towards or remains open to the future. Moreover, if anticipation was not included from the beginning within repetition, the latter would remain a mere recollection of things past, precluding any sense of history. As Pater explained, the Renaissance was not “merely the discovery of old and forgotten sources of enjoyment but [led] to divine new sources of its, new experiences, new subjects of poetry, new forms of art.”<sup>40</sup> If the artists of any given period did not look for what was to come, if they were not “curious” (in the Paterian sense<sup>41</sup>) art would remain a mere celebration of the past, with no sense of the future and in fact, there would be no history but only a mere chronology. The Renaissance can be described as the experience of tridimensional time which is usually veiled, as we do not need to permanently ground our relation to temporality.

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Morris is said to be exemplifying the first type of medievalism which is akin to the “Hellenism of Chaucer” (224), a laconic pronouncement in need of explanation as Pater returns to what is, according to him, the other element of 19th-century Romanticism. Firstly, Morris’s Hellenism is defined as “the Hellenism of the Middle Ages, or rather of that exquisite first period of the Renaissance within it” (224). The poet exemplifies the Middle Ages as the beginning of the Renaissance, which, like all things subjected to the law of evolution, “becomes exaggerated or facile” (224). Medievalism thus refers to a way of experiencing the past, and all temporal dimensions. It is no longer a reconstitution serving various agendas and predicated on images and representation but the experience of the nexus between the subject and temporality, hence the definition of the medieval renaissance as anticipating its fifteenth-century aftergrowth. The renaissance is not only a return to the past but also an anticipation<sup>42</sup> of what is to come; it is the empty locus where the dimensions of time deploy

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40. Pater, “Preface,” p. xxii.

41. “What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions” (Pater, “Conclusion,” p. 189).

42. In “Duke Carl of Rosenmold,” Pater mentions the “forecast of capacity,” experienced by the proponents of the Enlightenment “[a]s precursors Goethe gratefully recognised them, and understood that there had been a thousand others, looking forward to a new era in German literature with the desire which is in some sort a ‘forecast of capacity,’ awakening each other to the permanent reality of a poetic ideal in human life, slowly forming that public consciousness to which Goethe actually addressed himself” (Walter Pater, “Duke Carl of Rosenmold,” in *Imaginary Portraits* [1887; London: Macmillan, 1931], p. 152).

themselves, the articulation between temporal dimensions. However Pater does not reduce the last to the common tridimensionality (past, present and future) but goes further to locate a more originary time whose finest image is that of ancient Greece.

Medievalism appears as a remembrance of past signifiers leading to a real experience of the un/veiling of Being, whose Paterian favorite image is that of the ray of light or dawn: “when [the monk] escapes from the sombre atmosphere of his cloister to natural light” (225). In *The Renaissance*, the same image is used to describe the awakening of Winckelmann’s Hellenism.<sup>43</sup> A light which could be linked to Heidegger’s *Lichtung*, or clearing, defined in “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking” as “the open region for everything that becomes present and absent,” “the opening of presence concealing itself, the opening of a self-concealing sheltering.”

What one may find is but the second moment (not the original Hellenic time but its first aftergrowth, as the Hellenic times are defined as escaping all representation, the real originary moment in “Winckelmann” on which I am going to concentrate to discuss Pater’s Hellenism. He first defined it in Arnoldian terms as “the principle pre-eminently of intellectual light (our modern culture may have more colour, the medieval spirit greater heat and profundity, but Hellenism is pre-eminent for light).”<sup>44</sup> But he gave a deeper meaning to Arnold’s simple and efficient dichotomies by transforming them in what amounts to a real historial scheme linking Hellenism, the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, which allowed him to account for both the individual and the collective levels. Winckelmann is another subject, Pater’s Arch-subject, we could say, experiencing a personal renaissance similar to that of “the Renaissance, [when] in the midst of a frozen world, the buried fire of ancient art rose up from under the soil.”<sup>45</sup> However, Winckelmann’s Hellenism develops more fully what Pater means by Morris’s Chaucerian Hellenism. Hellenism is a truly singular signifier in Pater’s conception, which he develops to account for the structure of the individual and collective mind.

It is in “the collection of antiquities at Dresden” that the German professor woke up to Greek art and poetry: “handled the words only of Greek poetry, stirred indeed and roused by them, yet divining beyond the words an unexpressed pulsation of sensuous life. Suddenly he is in contact with that life, still fervent in the relics of plastic

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43. “Hellenism . . . has always been most effectively conceived by those who have crept into it out of an intellectual world in which the sombre elements predominate. So it had been in the ages of the Renaissance” (Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 151).

44. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 146.

45. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 146.

art,"<sup>46</sup> which acts as an *agent provocateur* of his reminiscence and discovery of the Greek art. Winckelmann then goes to Rome where his situation "present[s] all the elements of an intellectual situation of the highest interest. The beating of the intellect against its bars, the sombre aspect, the alien traditions, the still barbarous literature of Germany, are afar off; before him are adequate conditions of culture, the sacred soil itself, the first tokens of the advent of the new German literature, with its broad horizons, its boundless intellectual promise."<sup>47</sup> Like the monk in the cloister, Winckelmann experiences a passion whose outlets are sealed and which is going to generate a change and awaken his Hellenism especially defined as an easing of repression: "This repression, removed at last, gave force and glow to Winckelmann's native affinity to the Hellenic spirit."<sup>48</sup> In contact with the relics of the past, Winckelmann reenacts the experience of the Renaissance. To account for this, Pater develops his vision of the beginnings of culture as an historical process mirrored in the individual.

Indeed, what one may experience as the past does not radically disappear but remains as a more or less explicit tradition: "The spiritual forces of the past, which have prompted and informed the culture of a succeeding age, live, indeed, within that culture, but with an absorbed, underground life. The Hellenic element alone has not been so absorbed, or content with this underground life; from time to time it has started to the surface; culture has been drawn back to its sources to be clarified and corrected" (158). The Paterian culture is seen as a process of return and rediscovery, a real *Schritt zurück* towards the legacy of the Greeks: "Hellenism is not merely an absorbed element in our intellectual life; it is a conscious tradition in it."<sup>49</sup> Culture appears as a retrospective process whereby one gets back to one's origin to find it

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46. Pater, "Winckelmann," p. 146.

47. Pater, "Winckelmann," p. 151.

48. Pater, "Winckelmann," p. 151. Interestingly, "repression" was translated as "refoulement" in the only French translation of *The Renaissance*, a term which has also been used to translate Freud's *Verdrängung*. See F. Roger-Cornaz, *La Renaissance* (Paris: Payot, 1917).

49. Pater, "Winckelmann," p. 158. "[C]onscious" seems quite ambiguous: Pater's explanation of Hellenism points to its capacity to appear from time to time, to be, in orthodox Freudian terms, preconscious. At the same time it may refer to the excess of Greek knowledge pervading Victorian times as he implies: "Of the Greeks as they really were, of their difference from ourselves, of the aspects of their outward life, we know far more than Botticelli, or his most learned contemporaries; but for us long familiarity has taken off the edge of the lesson, and we are hardly conscious of what we owe to the Hellenic spirit" ("Sandro Botticelli," *The Renaissance*, p. 46).

structured by “an element of permanence, a ‘Standard of Taste’ ” which “takes its rise in Greece, at a definite historical period. A tradition for all succeeding generations, it originates in a spontaneous growth out of the influences of Greek society.”<sup>50</sup> Hellenism does not disappear but is repressed, to return at various epochs, binding the ages to each other by the way each of them connects to it, reviews and appropriates it. It therefore functions as a primary signifier, as the signifier of the origin everyone has met and which has defined one’s relation to time. Hume’s “Standard of Taste” is something Pater does not motivate, but which motivates culture as a compulsive *Schritt zurück* towards an origin escaping representation.

Pater also defines Hellenism as a by-product of “that Hellenic ideal, in which man is at unity with himself, with his physical nature, with the outward world,”<sup>51</sup> i.e., a mythic time of harmony between the senses and the intellect, the subject and the world, inner and outer dimensions,<sup>52</sup> which has passed away, never to be recovered in full or as such, only to be fantasised or to be what Pater termed “the Sangrail” of the human quest.<sup>53</sup> In fact it appears as a mythical moment of poise or, as Pater writes, a “delicate pause in Greek reflexion”:<sup>54</sup> the Greek pause is the real matrix of those later moments that art has the power to conjure up, but which must also undergo the movement of ascent and descent described in relation to Morris and the Middle Ages. “But if [man] was to be saved from the *ennui* which ever attaches itself to realisation, even the realisation of perfection, it was necessary that a conflict should come, and some sharper note grieve the perfect harmony, to the end that the spirit chafed by it might beat out at last a larger and profounder music.”<sup>55</sup> Again, Pater does not motivate the necessity of a conflict, positing it as the cause for further changes and thus inscribing Hellenism in a human temporality.

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50. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 156.

51. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 177.

52. “In Greek thought the ‘lordship of the soul’ is recognised; that lordship gives authority and divinity to human eyes and hands and feet; inanimate nature is thrown into the background. But there Greek thought finds its happy limit; it has not yet become too inward; the mind has not begun to boast of its independence of the flesh; the spirit has not yet absorbed everything with its emotions, nor reflected its own colour everywhere” (Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 164).

53. “[T]he Greek spirit, with its engaging naturalness, simple, chastened, debonair . . . is itself the *Sangrail* of an endless pilgrimage” (Pater, “Coleridge,” p. 106).

54. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 158.

55. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 177.



To account for this first decline, Pater gives the example of Greek tragedy and of Theocritus's poetry:

In Greek tragedy this conflict has begun; man finds himself face to face with rival claims. Greek tragedy shows how such a conflict may be treated with serenity, how the evolution of it may be a spectacle of the dignity, not of the impotence, of the human spirit. But it is not only in tragedy that the Greek spirit showed itself capable of thus winning joy out of matter in itself full of discouragements. Theocritus, too, often strikes a note of romantic sadness.<sup>56</sup>

What Hellenism stands for functions as an originary moment which has been repressed to reappear at different times under different guises. In Pater's account of collective and individual history, it functions as Freud's originary repression, which establishes the mechanism of repression and manifests itself as a return. To account for secondary repression, Freud posits an originary repression establishing the potentiality of the psychic apparatus.<sup>57</sup> The originary repression consists in the repression of what Freud calls the *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* which, according to the psychoanalyst H. Rey-Flaud, is the originary subjective representation whose radical disappearance establishes the play of secondary representations (or signifiers) constituting the discourse of the subject.<sup>58</sup> Again, I would like to emphasize that Pater does not announce the Freudian discovery but both thinkers account for the birth of the subject by the same logic predicated on something radically missing, a blank within the representational system that establishes it as the play of signifiers.

Defined as the originary repressed representation, Pater's Hellenism is similar in its effects to Freud's *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*, manifesting its effects in Chris-

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56. Pater, "Winckelmann," p. 178.

57. See Freud, "Repression," (1915), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth P, 1974), vol. 14. The originary repression is a concept used to theorize the distance implied by language which Lacan has conceptualized as symbolical castration supported by the Phallus.

58. "[L]a notion d'une *Urverdrängung*, qui . . . postul[e] au principe du système représentatif la valence d'une représentation singulière, originellement refoulée (donc irréductible à toute prise en charge par la conscience) pour 'fixer' la pulsion. Cette représentation, Freud l'appelle le 'représentant de la pulsion' (*Vorstellungsrepräsentanz*). C'est elle qui, arrimant la chaîne signifiante *par son défaut même*, va permettre le déploiement de ladite chaîne, c'est-à-dire tout le jeu de la combinatoire des représentations secondaires qui adviendront, à leur tour, dans l'espace du discours effectivement tenu par le sujet, comme autant de représentations du 'représentant de la représentation'" (Henri Rey-Flaud, *L'Eloge du rien* [Paris: Seuil, 1996], p. 18).

tian times characterized as times of guilt. He does not innovate when he sees a real difference between paganism and Christianity, the first being characterized by innocence, the second by guilt, but more importantly by the impossibility of complete fulfilment or *jouissance*: “I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and lo, I must die!”<sup>59</sup> Pater’s quotations may be rewritings and misquotations but they are never insignificant and this one (I Samuel 14: 43) echoes Lacan’s version of the Symbolic Law that turns every subject into a sinner and forecloses any complete enjoyment of the Thing.<sup>60</sup> Christianity is as an era where man is fully aware of mortality, in contrast with the alleged Greek ignorance. It is in such a world that Hellenism appears as an aftergrowth, especially in the Middle Ages, in a Christian world haunted by guilt which “discrediting the slightest touch of sense, has from time to time provoked into strong emphasis the contrast or antagonism to itself, of the artistic life, with its inevitable sensuousness.”<sup>61</sup> Because of the prevalence of ascetism, the Middle Ages has also allowed the return of the Hellenic spirit. First as a longing: “an aspiration towards that lost antique art, some relics of which Christian art had buried in itself, ready to work wonders when their day came,” then as a re-discovery which at the same time allows one to understand the necessity of the disappearance of the Hellenic spirit so that it may come back anew: “And now it was seen that the medieval spirit too had done something for the destiny of the antique. By hastening the decline of art, by withdrawing interest from it, and yet keeping unbroken the thread of its traditions, it had suffered the human mind to repose that it might awake when day came, with eyes refreshed, to those antique forms.”<sup>62</sup> The ordinary repression of Hellenism also generates the medieval ascetic spirit which, in turn, allows it to reappear before succumbing to Pater’s renaissance as a contagion: “When the actual relics of the antique were restored to the world, in the view of the Christian ascetic it was as if an ancient plague-pit had been opened: all the world took the contagion of the life of nature and of the senses.”<sup>63</sup> There is a dual movement of dis/apparition<sup>64</sup> as

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59. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 177.

60. Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Potter (London: Routledge, 1992). Lacan shows in this Seminar that the institution of language allowing all symbolic exchange entails the barrier to the Thing or the Supreme Good. Desire is in speech; the subject takes form in language, paying the price of a prohibited *jouissance*.

61. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 177.

62. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 180.

63. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 177.

Paterian history becomes the tension (not the opposition as in Arnold) between ascetism and sensuousness, paganism and Christianity, a tension that inscribes it into a permanent becoming.

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Hellenism appears as a moment of poise that was bound to end, as an Ur-time which, because it has ceased, has paved the way for human time. On a personal level, as Winckelmann is proof, it is also a mythical moment every subject has to undergo in order to get inscribed within the temporal scheme and thus experience the Paterian personal renaissance: "This key to the understanding of the Greek spirit, Winckelmann possessed in his own nature, itself like a relic of classical antiquity, laid open by accident to our alien modern atmosphere":<sup>65</sup> the recurrent comparison to ancient relics makes it clear that the subject possesses a locus where Pater's "Greek spirit" survives as unconscious knowledge.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, and this remains Pater's most controversial statement at the time, the Greeks were already subject to a sense of mortality and to time: "There is even a sort of preparation for the romantic temper within the limits of the Greek ideal itself," Pater writes, relying on Hegel's distinction between classical and romantic art, "For Greek religion has not merely its mournful mysteries of Adonis, of Hyacinthus, of Demeter, but it is conscious also of the fall of earlier divine dynasties. Hyperion gives way to Apollo, Oceanus to Poseidon. Around the feet of that tranquil Olympian fam-

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64. Amounting to what the French philosopher H. Maldiney describes as "systole/diastole." See H. Maldiney, *L'Art, l'éclair de l'être* (Seysssel: Comp'Act, 1993).

65. Pater, "Winckelmann," p. 175. However, and this is a shortcoming, Winckelmann failed to perceive that the Greek spirit was already subject to mortality: "Into this stage of Greek achievement Winckelmann did not enter. Supreme as he is where his true interest lay, his insight into the typical unity and repose of the highest sort of sculpture seems to have involved limitation in another direction. His conception of art excludes that bolder type of it which deals confidently and serenely with life, conflict, evil" (p. 178).

66. The same image will be used in "Denys l'Auxerrois" in 1886: "As the most skillful of the band of carvers worked there one day . . . a finely-sculptured Greek coffin of stone, which had been made to serve for some later Roman funeral, was unearthed by the masons. . . . Within the coffin lay an object of a fresh and brilliant clearness among the ashes of the dead – a flask of lively green glass, like a great emerald. It might have been 'the wondrous vessel of the Grail.' Only, this object seemed to bring back no ineffable purity, but rather the riotous and earthy heat of old paganism itself. Coated within, and, as some were persuaded, still redolent with the tawny sediment of the Roman wine it had held so long ago, it was set aside for use at the supper which was shortly to celebrate the completion of the masons' work" (Pater, "Denys l'Auxerrois," p. 56).

ily still crowd the weary shadows of an earlier, more formless, divine world. Even their still minds are troubled with thoughts of a limit to duration, of inevitable decay, of dispossession. Again, the supreme and colourless abstraction of those divine forms, which is the secret of their repose, is also a premonition of the fleshless, consumptive refinements of the pale medieval artists. That high indifference to the outward, that impassivity, has already a touch of the corpse in it; we see already Angelico and the Master of the Passion in the artistic future. The crushing of the sensuous, the shutting of the door upon it, the ascetic interest, is already traceable. Those abstracted gods, ‘ready to melt out their essence fine into the winds,’ who can fold up their flesh as a garment, and still remain themselves, seem already to feel that bleak air, in which, like Helen of Troy, they wander as the spectres of the middle age.”<sup>67</sup> Not only are the Olympians the descendants of “earlier divine dynasties” but they also herald “the fleshless, consumptive refinements of the pale medieval artists.” Against Ruskin’s pronouncements in *The Queen of the Air* (1869) on the Greeks never having “ugly dreams,” against what Pater sees as Newman’s “gracious polytheism”<sup>68</sup> (understood as a happy state, ignorant of mortality), what Greece stands for appears fully temporalized. It functions both as an originary time and as a locus of the tridimensional temporality, two dimensions that are often conflated in Pater, thus generating some misunderstanding.

It is the Hellenic origin that returned during the Middle Ages and later at the Renaissance. On the individual basis, this very return of the repressed structures Morris’s poetic career, from the ideal of monastic *rêverie* to reality, from the sublimation of signifying reality to the (re)discovery not so much of reality as that of the Lacanian Real defined as the impossible, beyond the Symbolic order and representation, confronting the subject of the unconscious to its fundamental lack.<sup>69</sup> Morris’s poetry makes the reader experience the renaissance which is but the first return of the repressed Hellenic spirit which, for its part, Winckelmann had reproduced in the

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67. Pater, “Winckelmann,” pp. 178–9.

68. Pater refers to J. H. Newman’s *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London, 1845), p. 209. See Hill, p. 428.

69. The Real should not be confused with phantasmatic reality. It is neither Symbolic nor Imaginary, but foreclosed of the analytic experience. From the beginning of his teaching, Lacan sees it in terms of constancy: “the real is that which returns to the same place” before it became that before which the subject falters, that which is refractory. “The Real is the impossible” means that it may be approached but never grasped, Lacan contends in the 1970s. See Lacan, *RSI* (1974–5, unpublished seminar) The Real is what the Symbolical order turns into the impossible for the subject of the unconscious.

eighteenth century. Hellenism is thus linked to what could be called Morris's eclectic medievalism which Pater defines by referring to "Jason" and the "Earthly Paradise," with "their medievalisms, delicate inconsistencies, which, coming into a poem of Greek subject, bring into this white dawn thoughts of the delirious night just over" (225). Medievalism imports "morsels" of what amounts to a genuine return of the repressed in a given poem, and makes one undergo the poetic experience of the Paterian renaissance which weaves together medieval *rêverie* and return to reality, which is in fact an articulation, a transition.

What may be construed as "delicate inconsistencies" (225), such as the shift between times and places (Iolchos and a pageant of the Middle Ages, the "nymph in furred raiment who seduces Hylas [being] conceived frankly in the spirit of Teutonic romance," or "Medea herself ha[ving] a hundred touches of the medieval sorceress," 225–6), are instances of this eclectic medievalism which echoes and links both the Middle Ages and the Hellenic times. This poetry deploys itself as arising from some unrepresentable origin and as the remembrance and experience of the first return of that origin: "a reserved fragment of Greece, which by some divine good fortune lingers on in the western sea into the Middle Age. And now it is below the very coast of France, through the fleet of Edward the Third, among the gaily painted medieval sails, that we pass to a reserved fragment of Greece, which by some divine good fortune lingers on in the western sea into the Middle Age. There the stories of *The Earthly Paradise* are told" (226). Both dimensions are put into tension through the discrepancy between Hellenism and ascetism, joy and sorrow: "this grace of Hellenism relieved against the sorrow of the Middle Age" (226). Hellenic sensuousness and the Middle Ages are "two threads of sentiment [which] are here interwoven and contrasted" (226), "Greek story and romantic alternating" (226), to appear at the level of what amounts to re-presentation, contrasting with a mere imaginary reconstitution.

By being a consummate practitioner of eclectic medievalism, Morris also allows his reader to experience paganism defined as one of the main ingredients of the Hellenic spirit. Paganism is for Pater, partly "the continual suggestion, pensive or passionate, of the shortness of life" or "the sense of death" (229) which the subject has to face. In *The Renaissance*, he will be more explicit, defining paganism as the originary relationship of the subject to life and death, i.e., to the Lacanian cut: "a universal pagan sentiment, a paganism which existed before the Greek religion, and has lingered far onward into the Christian world, ineradicable, like some persistent vegetable growth, because its seed is an element of the very soil out of which it springs. This pagan sentiment measures the sadness with which the human mind is filled, whenever its thoughts wander far from what is here, and now. It is beset by notions of irresistible natural powers, for the most

part ranged against man, but the secret also of his fortune, making the earth golden and the grape fiery for him.”<sup>70</sup> Pagan sentiment is a way of apprehending one’s place in the universe, that is, one’s mortality, foreclosing one’s imaginary might to replace it with Symbolic castration. Paterian paganism is one’s castration which has been originally repressed to be offset by religion defined as an “anodyne,” making one’s mortality tolerable.<sup>71</sup> Like all repressed elements, it reappeared in the Renaissance of the Middle Ages and in Morris’s poems where it is met with religion: “com[ing] across the sins of the earlier world with the sign of the cross” (226). However, religion is but one solution as Morris’s poetic activity testifies: “One characteristic of the pagan spirit the æsthetic poetry has, which is on its surface – the continual suggestion, pensive or passionate, of the shortness of life. This is contrasted with the bloom of the world, and gives new seduction to it – the sense of death and the desire of beauty: the desire of beauty quickened by the sense of death.” (226). Medievalism as a way of experiencing the past can finally be defined as a return to one’s origin which confronts the subject with its mortality. Returning to the light of day, to pursue Pater’s metaphor, is but the experience of castration and it is precisely that mere rapport that Morris typifies by his poetical activity. This time however, putting one face to face with one’s castration gives rise to “the desire of beauty” as an antidote, instead of religion. The opposition between beauty and death is the deepest in Pater’s polarized thought, and it should come as no surprise that he excerpted the last paragraphs of the 1868 essay to form the “Conclusion” to *The Renaissance*, whose aim was in part to propose the replacement of religion by beauty. The vicissitudes of this attempt have been well discussed and documented. Pater qualified the 1873 version mentioning “the love of art for art’s sake,”<sup>72</sup> but he never recanted: art functions as “an *epoche* of castration . . . aiming at discharging men of their mortality,”<sup>73</sup> as H. Rey-Flaud contends after Freud and Lacan. Along with religion, although in a different way, it makes the subject experience what founds it: its relation to the cut.

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70. Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 160.

71. “This pagan worship, in spite of local variations, essentially one, is an element in all religions. It is the anodyne which the religious principle, like one administering opiates to the incurable, has added to the law which makes life sombre for the vast majority of mankind” (Pater, “Winckelmann,” p. 160).

72. Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873), p. 213.

73. “L’œuvre d’art réalise une époque de la castration . . . visant . . . à décharger l’homme de son destin mortel” (“Les Fondements métapsychologiques de *Malaise dans la culture*,” in “Autour du *Malaise dans la culture* de Freud,” *Perspectives germaniques* [Paris: PUF, 1998], p. 16, my translation).