

# THE CONDITION TO WHICH ALL ART ASPIRES: REFLECTIONS ON PATER ON MUSIC

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## I

'ALL ART', Walter Pater famously said, 'constantly aspires towards the condition of music'.<sup>1</sup> Yet of music itself Pater tells us nothing. Not in 'The School of Giorgione', where this statement occurs, nor anywhere else in *The Renaissance*, his slight but enormously influential volume of essays on Renaissance painting, sculpture and poetry, does Pater give the reader any indication of a type of music or specific musical work. The closest we get is a remark in the essay, 'Joachim du Bellay', about the subordination of content to rhyme and meter in the *Pleiad*, a group of sixteenth-century French poets prominently represented by du Bellay and Pierre de Ronsard: 'To combine these two kinds of music [rhyme and meter] in a new school of French poetry, to make verse which should scan and rhyme as well, to search out and harmonize the measure of every syllable, and unite it to the swift, fitting, swallow-like motion of rhyme, to penetrate their poetry with a double music—this was the ambition of the *Pleiad*'.<sup>2</sup> The composer Goudimel (c. 1514–1572) is also mentioned in the essay on du Bellay, as setting Ronsard's poems to music, but there is no discussion of any of his songs. We are only told that what is 'quite in earnest' about the poets of the *Pleiad* is their eagerness for Goudimel's music, an eagerness 'of greater compass perhaps than words can possibly yield . . .'.<sup>3</sup>

That music is concerned with rhyme and meter is a slim basis indeed on which to build a theory of art (it is important evidence, nonetheless, as we shall see). But this should not surprise us, since Pater's real focus in *The Renaissance* is elsewhere: on the painting of Botticelli, Giorgione, Titian, and Leonardo, the sculpture of Luca della Robbia, and the poetry (not painting or sculpture) of Michelangelo. Why, then, does Pater speak of music at all? What kind of music does he have in mind? And how does his appeal to that music ground the insights of *The Renaissance* not only into Renaissance art but all art?

The present essay attempts to answer these questions, not by importing an aesthetic theory from elsewhere in order to explain what Pater never said but

might have meant about the condition of music, but by looking at what Pater both said and meant about the art that deeply engaged his critical attention, the art of the Italian (and French) Renaissance. Whereas Pater looked to the condition of music to illuminate Renaissance art, I shall look to Pater's criticism of Renaissance art, or at least some of it, to illuminate the condition of music. I shall proceed in my investigation on the assumption that the best way to understand what Pater *meant* by the condition of music is to understand what he actually *said* about the condition of art, a condition most perfectly exemplified by the painting of Giorgione and Leonardo.

In the opening pages of 'The School of Giorgione', Pater tells us that what is 'truly artistic' in art addresses itself neither to 'pure intellect' nor 'pure sense' but to the 'imaginative reason', that 'complex faculty for which every thought and feeling is twin-born with its sensible analogue or symbol'.<sup>4</sup> Art—exemplary art, that is—has to do not with content or form alone, not with representational subject-matter or medium of representation, insofar as these are conceivable apart from one another, but rather with the skillful blending of content and form into a single, indissoluble whole.

If art merely addressed the intellect, if it merely conveyed a content (the words 'mere' and 'merely' occur throughout the 'Giorgione' essay—three times in the opening paragraph alone), then the particular form in which art's content was communicated would be dispensable. But this, for Pater, is most emphatically not the case. The precise way in which content is expressed or represented, its particular form of sensuous embodiment, whether in painting, sculpture, poetry or music, is both *crucial and irreducible*. To understand art is above all to understand the central and ineliminable role of *form* in the expression of any content whatsoever.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing on Lessing's discussion in the *Laocoon* of the distinct capabilities and limitations of sculpture and poetry, Pater tells us that each art 'has its own peculiar and untranslatable sensuous charm, has its own special mode of reaching the imagination, its own special responsibilities to its material'.<sup>6</sup> No form of art is merely a *means*, from which it follows that each form is incapable of translation into any other. Were painting, poetry, and the like, mere means to the representation of a given subject-matter, then each could be dispensed with in favour of any other. Each would be, in Pater's words, 'as but translations into different languages of one and the same fixed quantity of imaginative thought, supplemented by certain technical qualities ...'. The truth, for Pater, is just the reverse: what addresses the intellect at the same time addresses the senses in all their concrete particularity, and form is no more detachable from content than is content detachable from form.

But if form and content are not separable, how are we to understand the 'sensuous charm' that is unique to each separate art? How can a form of sensuous embodiment even be *conceived* apart from the particular content it informs or embodies? The answer, it would seem, lies in the differing tech-

niques and media of the various arts, in the use of colour, or shape, or tones, or rhythmical words, and so on. However, Pater rejects this answer. Such things—in painting, for example, colour, and line—are for him the ‘mere communicable result of technical skill’.<sup>7</sup> They are no more capable of engaging the imaginative reason than is the ‘mere poetic thought or sentiment’ that Pater instances as pure pictorial content.<sup>8</sup> ‘True pictorial quality’ is won neither by giving prominence to technique nor by making technique subordinate to subject-matter. Only by linking technique and subject-matter, form and content, in a relation Pater calls ‘identification’ do we go beyond the ‘mere’ and get to the ‘truly artistic’ in art.<sup>9</sup>

Alongside the importance Pater places on the individuality of the various art forms, on each’s responsibility to its material, there is an even greater emphasis in the ‘Giorgione’ essay on an opposed tendency of the arts to strive after the condition of one another, a tendency referred to in German criticism as *Anders-streben* (literally: ‘other-striving’).

But although each art has thus its own specific order of impressions, and an untranslatable charm, while a just apprehension of the ultimate differences of the arts is the beginning of aesthetic criticism, yet it is noticeable that, in its special mode of handling its given material, each art may be observed to pass into the condition of some other art, by what German critics term as *Anders-streben*—a partial alienation from its own limitations, through which the arts are able, not indeed to supply the place of each other, but reciprocally to lend each other new forces<sup>10</sup>

Architecture approaches pictorial form, or, in other instances, poetry. Sculpture aspires to colour or drama. Poetry is guided by sculpture, drama, the art of engraving. Music tends towards figure. And so on. Yet, Pater tells us, apart from the strivings of these individual arts:

*All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music.* For while in all other kinds of art it is possible to distinguish the matter from the form, and the understanding can always make this distinction, yet it is the constant effort of art to obliterate it. That the mere matter of a poem, for instance, its subject, namely, its given incidents or situation—that the mere matter of a picture, the actual circumstances of an event, the actual topography of a landscape—should be nothing without the form, the spirit, of the handling, that this form, this mode of handling, should become an end in itself, should penetrate every part of the matter: this is what all art constantly strives after, and achieves in different degrees.<sup>11</sup>

All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music because it is the general aim of art to *obliterate* the distinction between matter and form, and only in music, or so it would appear, does there exist the possibility of perfect obliteration.

It is the art of music which most completely realizes this artistic ideal, this perfect identification of matter and form. In its consummate moments, the end is not

distinct from the means, the subject from the expression; they inhere in and completely saturate each other; and to it, therefore, to the condition of its perfect moments, all the arts may be supposed constantly to aspire<sup>12</sup>

We may well wonder, at this point, just which are the moments Pater has in mind. What kind of music is he thinking of? Vocal music? Instrumental music? Symphonies, chamber works, solo pieces? May we not be said to discern an intellectually detachable content in opera or in sacred music? And what about the tone poems and narrative programmes, hidden or otherwise, that interested so many nineteenth-century composers?

Given the complete absence of musical examples in *The Renaissance*, we can expect no clear answer. Yet speculation on this point is unavoidable. For it makes a difference if music's ideally consummate moments are vocal or purely instrumental, if they are part of a larger whole, a *Gesamtkunstwerk* involving drama, poetry, stage props, and the like, or are devoid of what are strictly speaking extramusical components.

There is good reason to assume, or so I shall argue, that Pater's consummate musical moments are purely instrumental, that what Pater has in mind is the so-called absolute music of the nineteenth century, exemplified by the symphonies, chamber works and sonatas of Beethoven, Schumann and Brahms. Absolute music would be ideally suited to exemplify Pater's thesis since it contains nothing extraneous to the medium of music itself, a medium consisting solely of tonally moving forms arranged melodically, harmonically and rhythmically. The form and the content of absolute music would thus appear to be identical. The assumption of absolute music is also supported by Pater's emphasis in the du Bellay essay on the *non-spoken* elements of rhythm (meter) and harmony. But mostly it is supported by the prevailing aesthetic of the nineteenth century, the aesthetic of the *absolute*, which elevated music without text, title, programme, or other extramusical component to a station far above not only all other music but all other art.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Pater's conception of the *Anders-streben* of art as the perfect identification of matter and form would itself be a reflection of the aesthetic paradigm of absolute music.

Assuming, then, that music's ideally consummate moments consist of the greatest instrumental works or parts thereof, we arrive at an essentially *negative* interpretation of Pater's thesis. According to this interpretation, the condition of music is exemplary because music alone among the arts lacks an intellectually separable subject-matter. The condition of music is exemplary because music has no representational content. Music occupies the unique position of being free of the burden of mimesis, a burden which painting, poetry and sculpture still bear (in the 1870s, at the time Pater is writing) and against which (if Pater is right) they continually struggle.

Should we conclude from the negative interpretation of Pater's thesis that music has no content? Or should we take Pater to mean, à la Eduard Hanslick,

that music's content is its own, tonally moving forms? We cannot do either of these things without creating a problem. For, as Pater clearly states, the condition of music consists not of the obliteration (or reduction) of *matter* but of the obliteration of the *distinction* between matter and form. Music's ideally consummate moments consist of the perfect *union* of matter and form, of the harmonious blending of those elements with which the senses and the intellect operate in isolation but which address the imaginative reason as an undivided whole.

Art, then, is thus always striving to be independent of the mere intelligence, to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material; the ideal examples of poetry and painting being those in which the constituent elements of the composition are so welded together, that the material or subject no longer strikes the intellect only; nor the form, the eye or the ear only; but form and matter, in their union or identity, present one single effect to the 'imaginative reason', that complex faculty for which every thought and feeling is twin-born with its sensible analogue or symbol.<sup>14</sup>

Just how are we to conceive this union of matter and form in the condition of music? With *what* are music's tonally moving forms being united? The negative interpretation of Pater's thesis, according to which music is exemplary because it *lacks* something the other arts *have*, leaves us at an impasse. Either the condition towards which all art constantly aspires is *not* music, since music apparently has no subject-matter, or else the condition of music is something *other* than the perfect identification of matter and form.

Obviously, in order to resolve this dilemma we must interpret Pater's thesis *positively*, in the sense of attributing to music a content as well as a form. We must take seriously Pater's statement to the effect that form, conceived in isolation or detached from content, is as artistically deficient as is content, isolated or detached from form. Since Pater tells us virtually nothing about music, however, either its content or its form, the grounds for a positive interpretation of his thesis are lacking. I propose to look at Pater's criticism of Renaissance art as a way of compensating for that lack.

## II

It is, to begin with, the selection and handling of Giorgione's *subject-matter* that attracts Pater's attention. The subjects of Giorgione's paintings are (when chosen freely by the painter himself) dictated by a responsiveness to form.<sup>15</sup> This responsiveness, Pater tells us, this 'subordination of mere subject to pictorial design, to the main purpose of a picture ... is typical of that aspiration of all the arts towards music.'<sup>16</sup>

In the art of painting, the attainment of this ideal condition [of music], this perfect interpenetration of the subject with the elements of colour and design, depends,

of course, in great measure, on dexterous choice of that subject, or phase of subject; and such choice is one of the secrets of Giorgione's school. It is the school of *genre*, and employs itself mainly with 'painted idylls', but, in the production of this pictorial poetry, exercises a wonderful tact in selecting of such matter as lends itself most readily and entirely to pictorial form, to complete expression by drawing and colour (p. 95)

The subjects Giorgione depicts seem not to comprise anything that could properly be called a *matter*. His 'idylls' are bizarre and disconnected, 'painted poems ... belong[ing] to a sort of poetry which tells itself without an articulated story'.<sup>17</sup> In the words of Vasari, whose description of the frescoes for the Fondaco dei Tedeschi (the Venetian offices of the German merchants' association) could well be Pater's: '[Giorgione] only thought of demonstrating his technique as a painter by representing various figures according to his own fancy ... And I for my part have never been able to understand his figures nor, for all my asking, have I ever found anyone who does. In these frescoes one sees, in various attitudes, a man in one place, a women standing in another, one figure accompanied by the head of a lion, another by an angel in the guise of a cupid; and heaven knows what it all means.'<sup>18</sup>

Pater's talk of the subordination of subject-matter is painting is evident throughout the 'Giorgione' essay, as is his emphasis on the importance of the formal or pictorial elements of colour and line. Indeed, so intent is Pater on combating the aesthetic of mimesis, according to which pictorial form is subordinate to subject-matter, that his attitude towards the content of art appears at times to be completely dismissive:

... [the] earlier Venetian painters ... never seem for a moment to have been so much tempted to lose sight of the scope of their art in its strictness, or to forget that painting must be before all things decorative, a thing for the eye, a space of colour on the wall, only more dexterously blent than the marking of its precious stone or the chance interchange of sun and shade upon it.<sup>19</sup>

If one wanted to read Pater as a formalist, one would do well to stick to passages like this, in which subject-matter is seen as no more than a means to the pictorial end of decoration or design, where content is treated as a mere excuse for the development and display of form. But there is more to Pater's understanding and appreciation of Renaissance art than the 'subordination of mere subject to pictorial design'.

Giorgione's paintings may not tell an 'articulated story', they may not have a definite, intellectually detachable subject-matter; but they do have content. They have *ideal* content. In Pater's words, Giorgione's paintings are like 'ideal types of poetry', in which there is a 'suppression or vagueness of mere subject, so that the meaning reaches us through ways not distinctly traceable by the understanding ...'.<sup>20</sup> Pater calls this meaning 'ideal' because it is not—indeed,

cannot be—representationally fixed. The ‘ideal’ meaning of Giorgione’s paintings is intimated rather than indicated, suggested rather than described. It is addressed neither to the intellect nor to sense but to the imaginative reason, that ‘complex faculty for which every thought and feeling is twin-born with its sensible analogue or symbol’.<sup>21</sup>

The ideality of the school of Giorgione is for Pater akin to ‘the highest sort of dramatic poetry’:

[in] that it presents us with a kind of profoundly significant and animated instants, a mere gesture, a look, a smile, perhaps—some brief and wholly concrete moment—into which, however, all the motives, all the interests and effects of a long history, have condensed themselves, and which seem to absorb past and future in an intense consciousness of the present. Such ideal instants the school of Giorgione selects, with its admirable tact, from that feverish, tumultuously coloured world of the old citizens of Venice—exquisite pauses in time, in which, arrested thus, we seem to be spectators of all the fullness of existence, and which are like some consummate extract or quintessence of life.<sup>22</sup>

The profoundly animated moments of Giorgione’s figures—their gestures, looks and smiles—are too much, too rich, too fine, too fleeting to play the role of an intellectually detachable content. Such ‘symbols’ or ‘sensible analogues’ *undermine* the function of representation rather than *subserve* it—not, however, by eliminating all else in favour of colour and line but by *using* colour and line to point to an ideal content (the fullness of existence, the extracted quintessence of life) that literally defies representation.<sup>23</sup>

Leonardo da Vinci, Pater tells us in another essay in *The Renaissance*, struggled with the problem of the ‘transmutation of ideas into images’, with the relation between ‘reason and its ideas, and the senses, the desire of beauty ...’.<sup>24</sup> Leonardo struggled with sensuous representation because the scope of his ideas was too broad, because he had to contain within the narrow compass of the representational ‘those divinations of a humanity too wide for it, the larger vision of the opening world, which is only not too much for the great, irregular art of Shakespeare ...’. Like Giorgione, Leonardo ruled over ‘the mere subject’, bending it ‘dexterously to purely artistic ends’. He was ‘the most profane of painters’, despite his handling the most sacred of subjects (*The Last Supper*, *The Virgin and Saint Anne*), because these subjects provided only a ‘pretext for a kind of work which carried one altogether beyond the range of ... conventional associations’.<sup>25</sup> Leonardo’s subjects, sacred and secular alike, were used ‘not for their own sake, or as mere subjects for pictorial realisation, but as a cryptic language for fancies all his own’.<sup>26</sup>

The following, widely quoted description of the *Mona Lisa* is the most remarkable passage in all of Pater’s criticism.<sup>27</sup>

The presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon



which all 'the ends of the world are come',<sup>28</sup> and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! All the thoughts and experiences of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias. She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants, and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary, and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea.<sup>29</sup>

Leonardo's painting symbolizes the idea of humanity by its expression of not one experience but ten thousand, of all the thoughts and experiences of the world, of perpetual life—not as dead, abstract, detachable idea, but as sum total of a humanity lived, felt, sensuously embodied.<sup>30</sup> Lady Lisa's long and complex past is to her as the pure sound of music, just as it is to us the changing lines and colours of her body, the sensuous surface of a beauty wrought out from within upon her flesh, a beauty expressed but by no means exhausted by that flesh, extending far beyond the sensuous surface of Leonardo's painting to encompass strange thoughts, fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. To gaze on *La Gioconda* is, for Pater, at least, to see etched and moulded in a mere outward form—a thing for the eye, a space of colour on the wall—all in the way of human desire that was, is, and ever will be.

### III

Having before us some choice examples of Pater's criticism, let us again inquire into the condition of music. What is this great *Anders-streben* of art? What are music's ideally consummate moments such that Giorgione, Leonardo, and the other artists that occupy Pater's attention in *The Renaissance*, strive to attain them?

We have seen that the paintings of Giorgione and Leonardo have not only representational content but ideal content as well. In the representational sense, the *Mona Lisa* and Giorgione's painted idylls have as their subject-matter a real woman, La Gioconda, and a group of strangely situated figures, respectively. In the ideal sense, each has as its subject-matter a humanity embodied



in fleeting and fantastical images, a wholly imaginary humanity that defies all attempt at definition or conceptual closure.

What is to prevent us, then, from attributing to music—to great music, that is, to its consummate moments—what Pater attributes to the painting of Giorgione and Leonardo? May we not speak of an ideal content in music? Beethoven certainly did. He called that content a ‘poetic idea’. And while Beethoven was perhaps the first and surely the greatest composer to speak of absolute music this way, he was by no means the only one. The notion of a poetic idea, distinct from and independent of representational content, and having more to do with *feeling* than with looks, sounds or other sensible properties, was altogether typical of the romantic idealism of the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

In attributing an ideal content to music, we have provided a *positive* interpretation of the thesis of the identification of matter and form, and so resolved Pater’s dilemma. In music as well as in the other arts there is a possible *union* of matter and form.

Both the negative and the positive interpretation of Pater’s thesis are required to explain the condition of music. The negative interpretation is required in order to safeguard the autonomy of art, an autonomy signified by music’s freedom from representational constraint. The positive interpretation is required in order to block the move that divorces autonomous art from life, the move that collapses autonomy into formalism.

Pater’s criticism shows that the ‘identification’ of matter and form in the condition of music is to be taken not *logically*, as the substitution of one term for another, but *aesthetically*. The ideal matter of music or any other art is revealed not *as* form but *through* form, or more precisely, through the *imaginative perception* of form. When Pater says that the end of music is not distinct from the means, he means not that end and means are identical but that music’s end is perceived through musical means alone.<sup>32</sup> Music is the condition towards which all the other arts constantly aspire because music’s ideal content is perceived *entirely* and *only* through its own, tonally moving forms. Painting, sculpture, and poetry have still to contend with representational subject-matter, but music’s communication of an ideal content requires nothing of the sort. The condition to which all art aspires is that of *aesthetic self-sufficiency*.

The question of whether music speaks *through* its form or merely *of* its form, whether music’s tonally moving forms point to an extramusical meaning or merely signify themselves, has long been debated in the history of musical aesthetics. In that debate, Pater has been enlisted on the side of formalism, on the side of those who see music’s consummate moments not as the aesthetic sufficiency of form to content but as the logical reduction of content to form—on the side, that is, of those who would deny abstract art any share of meaning that is not itself abstract.<sup>33</sup> I have argued, to the contrary, that the truly artistic—that which for Pater gives art or any other object aesthetic value—

concerns not only form but *ideal matter*, a matter neither reducible to form nor detachable from it but communicable *through* form, and, in music's exemplary condition, communicable through form alone.

#### IV

I end by offering a brief assessment of Pater's place in and importance for the history of philosophical aesthetics, neither of which has so far been sufficiently appreciated. In doing so I go back to Kant, whose *Critique of Judgement* provides the impetus for the formalist turn in aesthetics of the past two hundred years.

The imaginative thinking characteristic of aesthetic experience is for Kant and Pater exactly similar. Kant's aesthetic ideas, like Pater's ideal content, contain a wealth of imaginative material (partial and undeveloped representations [*Teilvorstellungen*]) too vast and too fragmentary to constitute a determinate object of the understanding (Pater's intellectually detachable subject-matter).<sup>34</sup> But whereas Pater focuses on the *content* of aesthetic experience, Kant focuses on its *form*. It is the general activity of the imagination, rather than its specific content on a given occasion of reflection, that interests Kant, the free play of the imagination as such, rather than the actual material with which imagination operates. Aesthetic judgement, for Kant, consists in a universally communicable feeling of delight both caused by and signifying the general agreement or formal accord of the imagination and the understanding. Thus the validity of aesthetic judgement concerns only the *form* of aesthetic experience and not its *content*—a form communicable only as feeling, moreover, and not in words.

Pater's criticism, his careful attention to and articulation of art's matter in all its particularity, stands in sharp contrast to Kant's focus on the generality of aesthetic experience. And it makes us wonder if Kant has not purchased that generality at too great a price. In the history of philosophical aesthetics, Pater is the first fully to articulate—against the explicit backdrop of Kant, whom Pater not only read but reflected on extensively, and in the spirit of Hegel, whose project Pater explicitly endorses and takes one step further—a full fledged phenomenology of the aesthetic.<sup>35</sup> Pater's phenomenological aesthetics, with its emphasis on the 'facts' of imaginative perception, serves importantly to remind us that aesthetic judgement concerns not just 'significant form' but a content whose perceptual particularity is both more communicable and less universal than Kant and the many who have followed him would have liked to think. It reminds us that art theory must account for critical practice, a practice as diverse and as vital to human interests as art itself.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance Studies in Art and Poetry*, edited and with an introduction by Adam Philips (Oxford and New York Oxford U P., 1986), p 86 All references to Pater, unless otherwise indicated, are to this edition of *The Renaissance* Apart from the statement just quoted, Pater is seldom discussed today among philosophers of art An important exception is Richard Wollheim see 'Walter Pater as Critic of the Arts', in *On Art and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA and London Harvard U.P., 1974), pp 155-176
- <sup>2</sup> Pater, op cit., p 107
- <sup>3</sup> Pater, op cit., p. 108
- <sup>4</sup> Pater, op. cit., p 88 The term 'imaginative reason' is Matthew Arnold's 'The poetry of later paganism lived by the sense and understanding, the poetry of medieval Christianity lived by the heart and imagination But the main element of modern spirit's life is neither the senses and understanding, nor the heart and imagination, it is the imaginative reason' From Arnold's 1864 essay, 'Pagan and Medieval Religious Sentiment', quoted in Walter Pater, op. cit., p 166 See Harold Bloom's introduction in *Selected Writings of Walter Pater*, edited and with an introduction and notes by Harold Bloom (New York Columbia U.P., 1974), for commentary on Pater's terminological relation to Arnold
- <sup>5</sup> Meyer Schapiro, the art critic and historian, clarifies the point here made by distinguishing content from subject-matter: 'In a representation every shape and color is a constituting element of the content and not just a reinforcement. A picture would be a different image of its object and would have another meaning if its forms were changed in the slightest degree So two portraits of the same person, done with different forms, are different in content, though identical in subject It is the specific representation together with all the ideas and feelings properly evoked by it that makes the content' From 'On Perfection, Coherence, and Unity of Form and Content', in *Selected Papers*, Vol 4 (New York George Braziller), pp 41-42. Nevertheless, Schapiro and Pater differ in that Schapiro regards the unity of form and content as characteristic of all art, and in a sense, then, as trivial, whereas for Pater the unity of form and content is a standard of artistic perfection (of that in art which is 'truly artistic') I shall continue to use 'content' and 'subject-matter' interchangeably at this point in the discussion, however, in order not to pre-empt Pater's own way of making the distinction.
- <sup>6</sup> Pater, op cit., p 83
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid
- <sup>9</sup> Pater, op. cit., p 88
- <sup>10</sup> Pater, op cit., p 85.
- <sup>11</sup> Pater, op. cit., p 86.
- <sup>12</sup> Pater, op cit., p 88.
- <sup>13</sup> For discussion of the evolution of this aesthetic, see Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans Roger Lustig (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), John Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language* (New Haven and London: Yale U P., 1986), and Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1992)
- <sup>14</sup> Pater, op. cit., p 88
- <sup>15</sup> I should note that Pater mistakenly attributes at least two of Titian's paintings, the *Fête Champêtre* and the *Concert*, to Giorgione
- <sup>16</sup> Pater, op. cit., p 90
- <sup>17</sup> Pater, op cit., p 95.
- <sup>18</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1965) pp. 274-275
- <sup>19</sup> Pater, op. cit., p 89
- <sup>20</sup> Pater, op cit., p 87
- <sup>21</sup> The attribution of an ideal content to works of art is wholly consistent with Pater's writing, not only in *The Renaissance* but in the late and important essay, 'Style':  
If music be the idea of all art whatever, precisely because in music it is impossible to distinguish the form from the

substance or matter, the subject from the expression, then, literature, by finding its specific excellence in the absolute correspondence of the term to its import, will be but fulfilling the condition of all artistic quality in things everywhere, of all good art

Good art, but not necessarily great art, the distinction between great art and good art depending immediately, as regards literature at all events, not on its form, but on the matter . . . It is on the quality of the matter it informs or controls, its compass, its variety, its alliance to great ends, or the depth of the note of revolt, or the largeness of hope in it, that greatness of literary art depends, as the *Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *Les Misérables*, *The English Bible*, are great art (in Uglow, pp 88–89)

Critics have been puzzled and distressed by the ending of 'Style' Bloom sees the emphasis on matter as a 'repeal', motivated by guilt, of Pater's earlier position in *The Renaissance* (Bloom, loc cit xxv) René Wellek regards it as a complete 'revocation' of the 'aestheticism' of Pater's earlier writings, as a 'recantation at the expense of any unified, coherent view of art', a relinquishing of 'insight into the unity of matter and form' In René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750–1950*, Vol 4 (New Haven and London Yale U P., 1965), p 395 But see Jennifer Uglow's Introduction to *Walter Pater Essays on Literature and Art* (London: J M Dent and Sons Ltd, 1973), xvi, and F C. McGrath, *The Sensible Spirit Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (Tampa University of Florida Press, 1986), for readings that make the ending of 'Style' consistent with Pater's earlier view—especially McGrath, for whom the ending is not only consistent with *The Renaissance* but 'the climax and clearest exposition' of Pater's theory of art (p. 201) 'Style' is reprinted in numerous editions of Pater's work, including Uglow's.

<sup>22</sup> Pater, op. cit., pp 95–96.

<sup>23</sup> The following passage, one of the most striking in the 'Giorgione' essay, shows how

easy it is to mistake Pater for a formalist: 'In its primary aspect, a great picture has no more definite message for us than an accidental play of sunlight and shadow for a few moments on the wall or floor is itself in truth, a space of such fallen light, caught as the colours are in an Eastern carpet, but refined upon, and dealt with more subtly and exquisitely than by nature itself' The key words here are 'primary aspect' and 'definite' Light, shadow and colour, as opposed to a well-defined subject-matter, are what constitute painting in its primary aspect It is clear from the very next sentence, however, that there is more to painting than its primary aspect 'And this primary and essential condition fulfilled, we may trace the coming of poetry into painting, by fine gradations upwards; from Japanese fan-painting [to] Titian' (p 85)

<sup>24</sup> Pater, op cit , p 72

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Pater, op cit , p 78

<sup>27</sup> Solomon Fishman calls it the most remarkable piece of art criticism in the English language See *The Interpretation of Art* (Berkeley and Los Angeles University of California Press, 1963), p 52, also Bloom, loc cit , xviii

<sup>28</sup> The phrase is from *I, Corinthians*, 10:11, as noted by the editor of *The Renaissance*

<sup>29</sup> Pater, op cit , pp 78–80

<sup>30</sup> Pater's indebtedness to Hegel is evident in this passage, as it is elsewhere in *The Renaissance*, see, in particular, the essay on Winckelmann

<sup>31</sup> For an interesting discussion of the extramusical in Beethoven's instrumental music, the string quartets in particular, see Leon Botstein, 'The Patrons and Publics of the Quartets: Music, Culture, and Society in Beethoven's Vienna', in Robert Winter and Robert Martin (eds.), *The Beethoven Quartet Companion* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), pp 77–109

<sup>32</sup> Pater's identity thesis, as I am here interpreting it, anticipates R G Collingwood's discussion in *The Principles of Art*.

- <sup>33</sup> That the condition of music, although non-representational, is not itself purely musical is a point that was clearly grasped by Wellek, loc. cit , pp 391-392
- <sup>34</sup> Aesthetic ideas strive towards the boundless intelligibility of pure reason while remaining within the intuitive bounds of sense, thus functioning in Kant's philosophical system as an all-important bridge between the noumenal and the phenomenal See Section 49 of the 'Analytic of the Sublime' in *The Critique of Judgement*, trans J C Meredith (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1952), pp 175-182
- <sup>35</sup> For Pater's criticism of Kant, see the early essay 'Coleridge's Writings', in Uglow, op. cit , pp 1-30, and for his indebtedness to Hegel, see the essay 'Winckelmann' in *The Renaissance*, pp 114-149