Walter Pater's corrupt Heraclitus

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Abstract

The *Conclusion* that Walter Pater appended the first edition of his master work *The Renaissance: Studies on Art and Poetry* (1873) earned him a bad reputation for having corrupted an entire generation of young people to the point that he felt obliged to suppress this text in the second edition. But he once again included it in the third and fourth editions, following the publication (1885) of his historical novel *Marius the Epicurean.* The original version of his *Conclusion* was influenced *lato sensu* by the philosophy of Heraclitus and nothing suggests that, after including it in the last two editions with "some slight changes", Pater had abandoned the philosophy of the great pre-Socratic philosopher. Does Pater's inconsistency represent a paradox or perhaps a contradiction? This brief work —still in progress— analyzes the reasons for the initially negative reception of Pater's text and suggests a hypothetical framework—relying on brief passages taken from *Marius the Epicurean* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *The Critic as Artist II* and *De Profundis* written by Pater's most outstanding disciple Oscar Wilde'—for analyzing how, from the postulates of Aestheticism and Heraclitean philosophy, a Victorian Christian could also embark in the new ideological direction marked by Pater's *Conclusion*.

Keywords: Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, Heraclitus, Protagoras, classical tradition, Greek philosophy

Walter Horatio Pater (1839-1894) was a prominent English figure in the European Aestheticism movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This movement held that Art, whose sole aim is to create beauty, is its own justification, needing to fulfil no political, religious or ethical purpose. Its emergence was a reaction against the prevailing utilitarian philosophies and the perceived 'ugliness' of the industrial era. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) set down its philosophical principles in the eighteenth century when he proclaimed the autonomy of aesthetic criteria with respect to moral and utili-

tarian considerations and to those relating to pleasure. This idea was adopted and developed by Goethe (1749-1832), for example, in Germany, and by Coleridge (1772-1834) and Carlyle (1795-1881) in England. In France it became popular thanks to Madame de Staël (1766-1817) and Théophile Gautier (1811-1872), and to the philosopher Victor Cousin (1792-1867), who in 1818 coined the motto '*l'art pour l'art*' ('*art for art's sake*'). In England, the Pre-Raphaelites had sown the seed of Aestheticism since 1848. Works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882), Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) and Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) express the yearning for an ideal Beauty through a conscious medievalism. In the field of illustrations, the most prominent figure was Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898), showcased in the review *The Yellow Book*. Among the painters, probably the most distinguished figure was James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903), the man who raised to its highest expression the ideal of cultivating the most refined sensibility. On the other hand, Aestheticism was severely criticized by such prestigious figures as John Ruskin (1819-1900) in England and Lev Tolstoi (1828-1910) in Russia, for whom Art was something truly moral and useful, that is, representing 'Art for truth's sake'.

Born in London, Walter Pater was an art and literary critic,[1] essayist and fiction writer. His life and academic activity took place mainly at Oxford, first as a student at *Queen's College* and later as a lecturer in classics and philosophy at *Brasenose College,* where he was offered a *classical fellowship*.[2] He was an expert in modern German philosophy, well familiar with contemporary research on mythology and anthropology. He often visited Italy, France and Germany and stood out in Italian Renaissance studies.[3] He collected his essays published in various reviews in several well-known books, such as *Imaginary Portraits* (1887)*, Appreciations* (1889) and *Plato and Platonism* (1893), not to mention the publication of his successful historical novel *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). In any case, the best known of his books was undoubtedly *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, with chapters devoted to Pico della Mirandola, Botticelli, Luca della Robbia, Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Giorgione, Du Bellay and Winckelmann.[4] Oscar Wilde,

1. On this particular aspect of Pater's work, see, e.g.: Coste 2010 and Inman 1996.
2. On the classicist and aesthetic Walter Pater, see, e.g.: Martindale et al. (edd.) 2017.
3. On anything related to his biography, see, e.g.: Donoghue 1995, Levey 1978 and Wright 1907.
4. For an exhaustive analysis of this novel, see, e.g.: Barolsky 1987.

undoubtedly his most advanced disciple, confessed that it was the book that had most influenced him, although in certain areas he felt the urge to go beyond his master, so that his personal life truly reflected the aesthetic ideology which inspired him.

This book was published in four editions, in 1873, 1877, 1888 and 1893. In the Victorian era in which Pater was born and died (Queen Victoria reigned between 1837 and 1901), some of the chapters caused considerable controversy. This was the case with the one devoted to Winckelmann, in which the aesthetic temperament, of both Winckelmann (1717-1768) himself and the Greek art with which this German historian and archaeologist identified, was clearly associated with homoerotic sensibility. Nevertheless, it was the *Conclusion* that he added to those chapters which raised a great scandal, causing him to be accused of immorality and corrupting an entire generation of young people, and to eliminate the offending element from the second edition. He included it once again in the two last editions, along with a footnote in which he wrote the following:

> This brief 'Conclusion' was omitted in the second edition of this book, as I conceived it might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall. On the whole, I have thought it best to reprint it here, with some slight changes which bring it closer to my original meaning. I have dealt more fully in *Marius the Epicurean* with the thoughts suggested by it.

Needless to say, after reading this footnote, as the accurate inquirers we need to be, we should evaluate whether these changes, while few in number, might be not so slight as Pater suggests. Later on, I shall take up this question, but for now let us read the quote from Heraclitus (ca 540-480 CE) that Patter used as an ideological frontispiece to his controversial *Conclusion*. It deals with the first part of fragment 6A, so often quoted, of the Diels-Kranz (*DK*) edition of the pre-Socratic philosophers[5] which we find in Plato's *Cra-*

5. Ed. 1960. Pater does not specify the edition of Heraclitus's fragments he follows. Giles Whiteley (in MARTINDALE et al. 2017, Part 4, 264-65) writes: «Close lexical borrowing suggests that Pater consulted this text (i.e., Schleiermacher's *Herakleitos der Dunkle,* 1807). Certainly, Schleiermacher's later work on hermeneutics was influential on Pater, who would take out *Geschichte der Philosophie* (1839) from Queen's College Library in 1861, and demonstrates a general appreciation of *Der Christliche Glaube* (1830-1) in the unpublished manuscript on "Art and Religion" ». He also explains that Hegel worked with Schleiermacher's *Herakelitos der Dunkle* (1807) and Heinrich Stephanus's *Poesis Philosophica* (1575) editions.

tylus:[6] λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει, «Heraclitus says somewhere that everything moves forward and nothing remains»,[7] but the two following sentences do not appear: καὶ ποταμοῦ ῥοῇι ἀπεικάζων τὰ ὄντα λὲγει ὡς δὶς ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης, «and, adopting the current of a river as an image of what exists, he says that you could never enter the same river twice». It is an A-fragment and we are therefore obliged to mistrust it but we fortunately also have B-fragments, considered literal quotations, such as fragment B 12, transmitted by Arius Didymus (I BC) and preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339 AD) in his *Praeparatio Evangelica* XV, 20, in which we read: ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ (DK B12, 41.42), «on those who enter the same rivers always flow different waters», which at least would confirm that the image of the current or flux of a river playing a significant role in illustrating that 'change', is present always and everywhere, a notion that the philosopher of Ephesus conceived as the most salient feature of a cosmos ruled by a unifying and cohesive *Lógos*.

We have available many accurate commentaries on Heraclitus's fragments[8] but, needless to say, their analyses go far beyond what Pater adopted as an intellectual reference and source of inspiration. In other words—among many other considerations—he felt no compulsion to pronounce judgement on the 'permanent identity' of a river despite the flux which—inasmuch as it is its essence—seems to be dragging it away, or on whether the fluidity of its being definitely rules out any pretension to a 'permanent and unchanged identity'. We should rather ask ourselves—perhaps naively—why, as the result of a *Conclusion* influenced by Heraclitean wisdom, Pater was considered

According to him, Schleiermacher and Hegel focus on the divine and universal *Lógos* working as a measure or rational rhythm rather than on the flux, so that Heraclitus's philosophy of the flow as presented in Pater's *Conclusion* would be opposed to them. I will not deny that, when we read the *Conclusion,* the emphasis is placed on the *Lógos*, but he does not deny either its supremacy—how could he do it? I would say rather that he does not deny it but he places emphasis on the flux as being the first sensory indication of how *Lógos* operates. In any case, all the data here relate to the 1873 edition but Whiteley (263) writes: «Pater engaged with Heraclitus not only through classical texts, and particularly Diogenes Laertius' *Lives*, but also from a number of other sources, most significantly Ingram Bywater's edition», *Heracliti Ephesii Reliquae* (1877). Later on, in 1889, the edition with translation by Bywater-Patrick appears. See also n. 10.

6. 402 a; cf. B 91. 12.
7. The translations are mine.
8. As an example of exhaustive commentary, see, e.g.: Fronterotta 2013.

to be corrupt, whereas for example, during the second and third century AD, the Fathers of the Church themselves, truly esteeming the value of the reflections of Heraclitus, transmitted them in their texts, since these reflections spoke of the pre-eminence of a *Lógos* that, *mutatis mutandis,* the Church Fathers also preached. Indeed, these Heraclitean notions can be found in the *Refutation of all Heresies* by Hippolytus of Rome (170-253 AD), or in the *Stromata* by Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD); also in Greek authors such as Plutarch (46-120 AD) and Sextus Empiricus (ca 160-ca 210 AD) and in Stoic writers such as Epictetus (55-135 AD) or the emperor Marcus Aurelius (121-180 AD). This fact, moreover, is highly significant bearing in mind that Heraclitus is a true source of inspiration for that Hellenistic and imperial philosophy, i.e. Stoicism, so influential on Western Ethics throughout the centuries. And, last but not least, we should not forget that Stoicism represents one of the chief episodes of the intellectual and spiritual pilgrimage of Marius the Epicurean towards Christianity, a faith with which he eventually comes to identify .[9]

Why, then, were the logical inferences of Heraclitus's philosophy, read and interpreted by Pater,[10] perceived as a real threat to Victorian morality? What so essentially malignant can be found in his fragments that even a highly qualified teacher felt obliged to self-censor? Probably agreement would be general if we chose to view Victorian moral codes as firm, stable, indisputable values.[11] Pater, confirming an evident, already inexorable turn-about, opens his *Conclusion* in the following manner: «To regard all things and principles

9. On *Marius the Epicurean*, see, e.g.: Chandeler 1985; Ward 1966, 117-174 and Cruzalegui 1998, 456-466.

10. «Pater approaches Heraclitus through the prism of German philosophy, and so his contribution to contemporary English classicism must be understood as always double: a contribution guided both by a scrupulous engagement with the original sources and by a broad and sympathetic appreciation of German philosophy. Pater probably read Ferdinand Lassalle's *Die Philosophie Herakleitos* (1858), Jakob Barnays's *Die Heraklitischen Briefe* (1869), and Paul Robert Schuster's *Heraklit von Ephesus* (1873), all of which Bywater had consulted. From Schuster, he would meet an empiricist Heraclitus, from Lassalle an idealist one; in British scholarship, from Georges Henry Lewes's *Biographical History of Philosophy* (1846), he would meet a positivist one. He may also have encountered the work of Gustav Teichmüller on Heraclitean 'perspectivism', so influential on Nietzsche». (Whiteley 263).

11. In this respect, see, e.g.: Clements; Higgins 2010; Rauch 2001 and Smith, 1996; on Victorian temper: Buckley 1978 and Houghton 1985; on Victorians and Greece: Jenkyns 1980 and Turner 1981, and on Platonism in the English nineteenth century: Cruzalegui 1998.

of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought». No specific names are cited in his diagnosis, so we could frankly add unassisted that, once having read Charles Darwin (1809-1882) or Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), nothing remained certain and unquestionable.

Pater first approaches the outward world and then, following his aesthetic creed and the Heraclitean image that inspires him, he asks us to think of that pleasant moment «of delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat» in order to realize that the whole of physical life is but a «combination of natural elements to which science gives their names». He mentions as examples quick lime, delicate fibres, and elements such as phosphorus, and the very fact of specifying that they are present not only «in the human body» but also «in places most remote from it», seems to call on us to appreciate more greatly those mixed or combined entities—material entities perhaps?—than others which might be deemed pure and perfect—shall we call them ideal entities?—regardless of whether they are real or imagined. In other words, if I may be permitted to make use of the following reference, we should replace that pride in being truly clever and witty that was proclaimed in the well-known choral oration in Sophocles's *Antigone*[12] with the certainty of being mere matter, as analysed and given a name by science. Indeed, according to Pater: "Our physical life is a perpetual motion of them" and in the end, the inward power nourishing us is the same force that causes iron to rust and corn to ripen. Thus, there exists a Power or universal *Dýnamis* that permeates the entire cosmos and, once more following Heraclitus, he asserts that: «All those elements are broadcast, driven in many currents». We are born, we eat and we die. But, even when we are dead and buried, Aestheticism saves us, so to speak, from tragedy, since, ignoring the existence of weeds and the putrefaction of corpses, Patter invites us to consider that: «The springing of violets from the grave are but a few out of ten thousand resultant combinations». And by the end of the paragraph devoted to the outward world, Pater has already surrendered to the undeniable power of one of the most successful of Heraclitus's images. By no means denying the physical nature of the first principle, but rather seeing it as the most subtle matter, the philosopher of Ephesus wrote that (B 30 *DK*): «This world (*kósmon*), the same for all things, was done by neither a god nor a human being, but there was always, there is and there will be an ever living fire (*pŷr aeízōon*), with

12. Verses 332-375.

measures of it kindling, and measures going out (*haptómenon métra kaì aposbennýmenon métra*)». Well then, the skilful teacher that Pater certainly is adapts the image, diverting his attention from the *archḗ* towards men and women, pronouncing the following: «This at least of flamelike our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways». In strict correspondence with what its etymology indicates, the followers of Aestheticism, the artistic movement or doctrine that surrendered to the benefits of the *aísthēsis* or sensory perception, must begin with attentive observation of the outward world, so that the human mind, as the final receiver of the information—the mind of scientists, above all—makes all sorts of logical inferences and reaches many conclusions.

In the first paragraph, Pater has already mentioned the scientific habit of naming and classifying but, continually taking as a referencing Heraclitus's 'river, flux or current', he now wants to write about an *aísthēsis* which is infinitely more intense and subtle, that of 'the inward world of thought and feeling', where «the whirlpool is still more rapid, the flame more eager and devouring». Attentive observation of currents permits us to discover shore-side movements where «water flows downhill indeed, though in apparent rest», but the discovery that we now are invited to contemplate is not this calm flux of water but 'the race of the midstream', that is, «a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought». Intellectually and emotionally immersed in the river, experience, he adds, «seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action». Therefore, from a true opposition to any sort of restraint, particularly any Victorian restraint, this mental and emotional *empeiría* causes each object to get lost 'in a group of impressions–colour, odour, texture'.[13] From the very beginning, Pater asks us to realize that language seems to give 'solidity' to objects, but an attentive mind

13. In *Marius the Epicurean*, we read: «…he learned that the object, the experience… is really… the chief point for consideration in the conduct of life, these things were feeding also the idealism constitutional with him—his innate and habitual longing for a world… fairer than that he saw». And when he reads Aristippus's texts: «… his theory that things are but shadows, and that… never continue in one stay, might indeed have taken effect as a languid, enervating… nihilism… with this happily constituted Greek, who had been a genuine disciple of Socrates… It became the stimulus towards every kind of activity, and prompted a perpetual, inextinguishable thirst after experience» (For *Marius the Epicurean*, I have followed "The World's Classics" edition 1986).

reduces them to «impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them». He still does not dare to express his opposition to the dangerous 'solidity' of Victorian moral codes, by no means prone to any sort of revision, flux or current dragging them along, but one already perceives the vindication of an inalienable human right when he specifies that: «The whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind».

Once again, he finds it unnecessary to cite a source, probably because he trusts that readers will realize to whom he is referring. However, in *Marius the Epicurean,* he is far more explicit[14] and, while the young Roman travels in search of an answer to his existential doubts, he reads not only Heraclitus but also Protagoras (485-411 BC), the father of Western relativism. Indeed, Aristotle writes in his *Metaphysics*:

> Protagoras said that man is the measure of all things, by which he meant simply that each individual's impressions are positively true. But if this is so, it follows that the same thing is and is not, and is bad and good… because often a given thing seems beautiful to one set of people and ugly to another, and that which seems to each individual is the measure.[15]

And I do not think it wrong to say that, interpreting him almost literally, Pater incorporates the great sophist's thesis in the *Conclusion* without distorting it:

> Experience, already reduced to a group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.

In any case, given his evidently Platonic temper in many other respects—which, however, he permeated with sensuality—I suspect that this 'solitary prisoner' is inspired by the Platonic prisoners of the image of the cave, now exempting him from rejecting those inner shadows.[16] We renounce the light

14. Later on, I will specify this.
15. *Metaphysics* 11, 6, 1062b 13; translated by Tredennic 1969.
16. On Walter Pater's Platonism, see, e.g.: Lee 2012 and Cruzalegui 1998, 435-454.

of everlasting and indisputable Truths, and gain in its place the dream, appearance and shadows of a personal world. Nevertheless, at the same time we realize that those impressions of an individual mind—in accordance with what he hastens to point out—'are in perpetual flight' and limited by infinitely divisible time, so that 'all that is actual in it' is «a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend». Consequently, we should rather say that «it has ceased to be than that it is». 'Perpetual flight', 'being and not being', that is to say, Heraclitus and Protagoras in a perfect communion, not even discarding the possibility that Pater is proposing here to see men and women as mere threads in the hands of a more philosophical Penelope—Heraclitean rather than merely astute—, since what is real in our life is like «a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream», «a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by», but also «that strange, perpetual weaving and un-weaving of ourselves».

It is quite evident, then, that the unstoppable current of time and life irretrievably drags us away and therefore we certainly must intensify our personal experience. Pater begins the third paragraph in a very commanding way: «*Philosophiren*, says Novalis, *ist dephlegmatisiren, vivificiren*. The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, startle it to a life of constant and eager observation». This is how the text reads in the last two editions but, in the first one (1873), between *philosophy* and *culture*, he had also included *religion*,[17] so that a real conflict was already detectable in the Victorian era between those who viewed religion as a scrupulous commitment to a wide range of norms and rules and others who, despite being slightly 'startled', devoted themselves to 'experiencing' the world. It must be thus: given that the goal is not the fruit of experience but experience itself, at every moment «some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us—for that moment only». Pater now takes shelter under the aura of the romantic poet Novalis and his lyrical 'I' arising from his poetic and philosophic soul that permitted him to understand finiteness and infinity as a unity, as well as to grasp the living, changing and at once everlasting Nature that surrounds us. It is philosophy or 'love of wisdom', and the fact of having known how to culti-

17. «The service of philosophy, and of religion and culture as well, to the human spirit, is to startle it into a sharp and eager observation». The 1873 *Conclusion* is available in: http://www.ajdrake.com /etexts/texts/Pater/Works/ren_1873.pdf. For all the passages of this edition I will follow, then, this pdf.

vate us (*colo* > culture) as tirelessly speculative humans [18] that will keep us 'alive' and 'non-phlegmatic', ever eager to experience all sorts of passions and emotions, whether visual or intellectual. Be careful, however, because they all are momentary; they are fleet and demanding an ever-attentive, non-distracted receiver, not only pleased to experience these emotions during their brief moment but also aware that a current, their current, will carry them away. Pater states: «A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life». Thus he sees quite clearly that the immensity of Life necessarily upsets us, and all good aesthetic men and women should be aware that it is not enough to 'feel' (*aisthánesthai*), we must fine-tune our senses; otherwise, how will we manage «to be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?».[19]

Pater's words are clear enough to not require further illustration, but I will now cite, a few paragraphs of *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* written by Oscar Wilde, undoubtedly Pater's most famous disciple, who in fact went far beyond him in order to practice a true aesthetic way of life. Lord Henry Wotton, intellectual and spiritual mentor of the young Dorian—who plays in this novel the literary role of Wilde—opens his mind and gives him a bit of advice:[20]

> I believe that if one man were to live out his life fully and completely, were to give form to every feeling, expression to every thought, reality to every dream, I believe that the world would gain such a fresh impulse… and return to the Hellenic ideal… But the bravest man amongst us is afraid of himself. The mutilation of the savage has its tragic survival in the self-denial that mars our lives. We are punished for our refusals. Every impulse that we strive to strangle

18. Not mere erudition which was so belittled by Heraclitus: «Learning many things does not teach understanding; otherwise, it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and Xenophanes and Hecataeus as well» (B 40 *DK*).

19. The hyperbole inherent in this attitude can be easily noted, for instance, in this passage of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*: «From the corner of the divan of Persian saddle-bags on which he was lying, smoking, as was his custom, innumerable cigarettes, Lord Henry Wotton could just catch the gleam of the honey-sweet and honey-coloured blossoms of a laburnum, whose tremulous branches seemed hardly able to bear the burden of a beauty so flame-like as theirs; and now and then the fantastic shadows of birds in flight flitted across the long tussore-silk curtains that were stretched in front of the huge window, producing a kind of momentary Japanese effect… The sullen murmur of the bees… The dim roar of London was like the bourdon note of a distant organ» (Wilde 2003, 18).

20. I deal with this more fully in Gilabert 2005.

> broods in the mind and poisons us… The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it… Yes, Mr. Gray… Live! Live the wonderful life that is in you! Let nothing be lost upon you. Be always searching for new sensations. Be afraid of nothing… A new Hedonism, that is what our century wants. You might be its visible symbol.[21]

After this exhortation conceived by a person whom Victorianism hastened to punish, the urgency of the recommendations Pater includes in the fourth paragraph becomes even more pressing. According to him: «To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life». Thus it matters not that our eyes perceive the flame as something bright and moving; we speak in the end about the flame of a worthy life, about the secure basis or foundation of a successful *modus vivendi*, so that, as aesthetic admirers of the brightness of hard gems, we can also see this flame as something firm, solid and hard, a true guarantee of being able to turn the hedonistic dialogue with the outward world into an ecstatic experience, that is to say, into something absolutely antithetical to the Victorian 'mutilation and self-denial'. Pater assures us that 'our failure is to form habits', whereas, if we left aside any stereotyped world, we should not favour the roughness of the senses. A true aesthetic rejects it 'while all melts under our feet', and opts instead to grasp:

> any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend.

Acting differently, 'on this short day of frost and sun', would mean 'to sleep before evening'. In effect, just as during a winter day one can experience the cold of the frost at dawn and the heat at noon, we also should feel obliged to perceive in people around us all that proclaims the great universal *Dýnamis* which nourishes us rather than a metaphorical evening or premature darkness. In fact, he wants to replace his previous recommendations with orders; in his opinion, we must gather «all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch». There are so many things to see and touch and, besides, they are so fleeting that there is no time 'to make theories' or, what would amount

21. Wilde 2003, 28-31.

to the same thing, to build a corpus or prison of ideas, fixed and indisputable, which would become both our intellectual and spiritual castration. Here is his thesis: «What we have to do is to be forever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions» and, by clearly suggesting that our intellect is often lazy and that we can feel tempted to definitely end our speculative efforts, he finds it necessary to not give in to complacency of any sort, «never acquiescing», he adds, «in a facile orthodoxy of Comte, or of Hegel, or of our own».

Pater lacks neither will nor conviction, but the power of those who believe that they are the real owners of the Truth is highly intimidating. He asserts that, as both points of view and instruments of criticism: «theories or ideas… may help us… "Philosophy is the microscope of thought" ». Nevertheless: «The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves».

Here are, then, both his vindication and his self-censorship,[22] since in 1873, in addition to the 'theories or philosophical ideas', the 'religious' ones could also help us. Therefore, it does not seem that a few years previously religion was a real problem for him provided, of course, that it did not become the sort of intellectual perversion which consists in imposing any kind of 'abstract morality', a concept that, fearlessly or as a real challenge, he included in the first edition but that, in the two last ones, he felt obliged to turn it into a mere 'abstract theory'.[23]

The last paragraph of *Conclusion* leaves aside in part the previous tone of admonition, so that, with the help of confessions of others, he can confess to his readers and explain the cause and nature of his *metánoia,* or intellectual and artistic conversion. He follows the example of Rousseau when, in the sixth book of his *Confessions*, he describes the awakening of his literary sense. His education had brought him closer to pessimism and death than to the energy which is peculiar to any young man or woman, to the extent of believing himself 'smitten by mortal disease'. However, when Rousseau grew old, despite the negative predisposition that had paralyzed him: «He

22. On the evolution of Walter Pater's thought, see, e.g.: SHUTER 2005.

23. This is the entire paragraph of the 1873 edition: «Theories, religious or philosophical ideas… may help us… "*La philosophie c'est le microscope de la pensée*". The theory, or idea, or system, which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract morality we have not identified with ourselves, or what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us».

asked himself how he might make as much as possible of the interval that remained». And his conversion took place because of the intellectual excitement «which he found just then in the clear, fresh writings of Voltaire». Therefore, keeping this in mind, one cannot be surprised that Pater needed to denounce any sort of castrating 'abstract theory'—or even better, the now excised 'abstract morality' of the first edition—which demands sacrificing the right to 'experience' and to 'prove' at any time, whereas we should be always aware of the brief instant to which a human life contracts. It is quite certain that Rousseau (1712-1778) often faced up to other enlightened men and questioned the ideals of the Enlightenment era but, if we prefer to return to the poet Novalis, whom Pater has quoted before, it is quite clear that he attained 'vivification' thanks to the works of Voltaire (1694-1778), that is, a true symbol of the Enlightenment era, a true free thinker and a strong defender of tolerance against any sort of religious fanaticism.

In this brief literary review, Pater makes use of French Romanticism by adding a quotation taken from *Le dernier jour d'un condamné* (1829) by Victor Hugo (1802-1885): «*We are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve–les hommes sont tous condamnés à mort avec des sursis indéfinis*». Heraclitus's initial sentence used as a frontispiece, presiding over the *Conclusion*, might by now seem remote to the matter at hand. But we shall see that it is perfectly germane to the theses of Hugo and Pater. In truth our existence has its interval and: «Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among "the children of this world," in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time».

It is quite certain that 'the children of this world', clearly referring to the *Gospel of Saint Luke* 16. 8,[24] inasmuch as they are devoted to the things of the world that they consider their main *télos* or goal, are here negatively contrasted to 'the children of the light', those good men truly aware of the future celestial immortality they strive to be worthy of. Pater, by now vindicating the expansion of the brief interval of the time humans have available to them, aligns himself with the latter and, although he knows perfectly well that he will be criticized at any rate, he proclaims the finesse and wisdom—he dare not say 'morality'—of certain 'children of this world', the followers of Aes-

24. «The children of this age (*hoi huioí toû aiônos toútou*), in dealing with their own kind, are more shrewd than the children of the light (*hypèr toùs huioùs toû phōtós*)» (the translation is mine following the Greek text by NESTLE-ALAND, 1993, 27th ed.).

theticism, accustomed to spending that interval in the cultivation and enjoyment of Art.[25] In effect, Art justifies itself and saves us from wasting a single pulsation of our brief existence. Consequently, we might think that, to meet the demands of the Victorian morality that surrounds and watches him, he has clearly condemned those who devote themselves to passions. But the reverse is the case. For the end of his *Conclusion* he has reserved what we could call the 'aesthetic redemption' of passionate men and women. He does not hesitate to affirm that: «Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity»—in the first edition he had written: «the sorrow of love, the political or religious enthusiasm, or the enthusiasm of humanity», and we have already explained why he prefers to eliminate now any sort of reference to religion. However, he feels that he must warn them: «only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness». Of course, the critics will never consider them 'the children of the light' given that they place the enjoyment of the moment before renunciation of the world and its temptations. It does not matter: Pater ends his C*onclusion* by reminding us that 'new' creed paradoxically derived from the 'ancient' Heraclitean awareness or the everlasting, changing and fluid nature of a coherent *Phýsis* or *Kósmos* since it is clear evidence of a wise and supreme *Lógos*:

> Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.

The great Victorian translator of Plato and master of Walter Pater, Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893), maintained that his pupil was a 'demoralizing

25. The following reflection by Wilde extracted from a lecture on 'Beauty' delivered to the Art students of the Royal Academy at their Club in Golden Square, Westminster, on June 30, 1883 is highly significant: «For we who are working in art cannot accept any theory of beauty in exchange for beauty itself, and, so far from desiring to isolate it in a formula appealing to the intellect, we, on the contrary, seek to materialize it in a form that gives joy to the soul through the senses. We want to create it, not to define it. The definition should follow the work: the work should not adapt itself to the definition. Nothing, indeed, is more dangerous to the young artist than any conception of ideal beauty: he is constantly led by it either into weak prettiness or lifeless abstraction: whereas to touch the ideal at all you must not strip it of vitality. You must find it in life and recreate it in art» (Wilde 2016).

moralizer'.[26] His experience of Christianity and faith certainly was complex and controversial,[27] but it is also true that his success as a result of the 1885 publication of his historical novel *Marius the Epicurean*, in which a young Roman from Antonins' era discovered himself as an *anima naturaliter christiana*—but not before having discarded the philosophies of Heraclitus, Protagoras, Aristippus of Cyrene and Marcus Aurelius—eventually seemed to redeem him from his reputation as immoral and corrupt. However, three years later, on the occasion of the third edition of *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (1888), Pater included once more that controversial *Conclusion* and, despite some minor yet highly significant changes, one cannot conclude that he was abominating the logical inferences of Heraclitus's philosophy. On the contrary, he lays emphasis on them, thus adhering to Heraclitus's thought. In fact, it is precisely in *Marius The Epicurean* where we read:

> The "doctrine of motion" seemed… to make all fixed knowledge impossible. The swift passage of things… might indeed be the burning of the divine fire: but… too swiftly for any real knowledge of them to be attainable. Heracliteanism had grown to be almost identical with the famous doctrine of the sophist Protagoras, that the momentary, sensible apprehension of the individual was the only standard of what is or is not, and each one the measure of all things to himself. The impressive name of Heraclitus had become but an authority for a philosophy of the despair of knowledge.

Therefore, should the fact that the Victorian society forgave him despite its strong defence of both fixed rules and ethical codes be considered a paradox or even a flagrant contradiction? Or should we rather think that somehow Pater succeeded in bringing Victorian readers closer to a more sensual and sensitive—that is, aesthetic < *aísthēsis*—experience of Christianity?[28] After all, Marius the Epicurean:

> … had apprehended the Great Idea… and the sense of a friendly hand laid upon him amid the shadows of the world… Must not all that remained of life be but a search for the equivalent of that Ideal, among so-called actual things—a

26. In this respect, see, e.g.: Levey 1978, 136-144, and also Tucker 1991.

27. See, e.g.: Donoghue 1995, 23-31.

28. On Aestheticism and Walter Pater's aesthetic philosophy, see, e.g.: Martindale et al. 2017; Cheeke 2016; Lyons 2015; Hext 2013; Whiteley 2010; Brake; Higgins; Williams 2002 and Lütkemeier 2001.

> gathering together of every trace or token of it, which his actual experience might present?

Pater writes 'Idea' and 'Ideal' with initial capital letters and places Marius 'amid the shadows of the world', that is to say, Plato and his cave—there is no doubt—are a useful reference to introduce an earthly correction, sensitive and sensual, of the most ideo-centric and metaphysical Christianity.[29] Indeed, Christianity eventually seduces and convinces Marius because It does not ask him to leave this world (or cave), in the end is almost as worthy as the Idea, but It calls on him to both 'experience' it and 'feel' it here and now. Rather than the pleasant adoration of a distant God, day after day he will feel: «a friendly hand laid upon him» or, in other words, the fraternity, solidarity, sympathy and communion he found in Christian communities:

> It was Christianity in its humanity, or even its humanism, in its generous hopes for man, its common sense and alacrity of cheerful service, its sympathy with all creatures, its appreciation of beauty and daylight.

Later on, the persecutions of Christians took place and their life entered the darkness of catacombs, but Pater writes: «The genuine capacity of the catholic church…was also truly at work, in that earlier "Peace", under the Antonines—the minor "Peace of the church" », which had to be distinguished «from the final "Peace of the church", commonly so called, under Constantine». Afterwards, «Saint Francis… the voice of Dante, the hand of Giotto… did but re-establish a continuity». However, «The greater "Peace" of Constantine… does but establish the exclusiveness, the puritanism, the ascetic gloom». It was a true church for a moment because it had:

29. In fact, Pater thinks that this urge has been felt throughout the centuries following Christ and that it was already perceived in the Middle Ages. In *The Renaissance*…, he writes: «One of the strongest characteristics of the outbreak of the reason and the imagination, of that assertion of the liberty of the heart, in the middle age, which I have termed a medieval Renaissance, was its antinomianism, its spirit of rebellion and revolt against the moral and religious ideas of the time. In their search after the pleasures of the senses and the imagination, in their care for beauty, in their worship of the body, people were impelled beyond the bounds of the Christian ideal; and their love became sometimes a strange idolatry, a strange rival religion. It was the return of that ancient Venus, not dead, but only hidden for a time in the caves of the Venusberg, of those old pagan gods still going to and fro on the earth, under all sorts of disguises» (PATER 1980, 18-19).

> That element of profound serenity in the soul of her Founder, which reflected the eternal goodwill of God to man, "in whom", according to the oldest version of the angelic message, "He is well-pleased".

Needless to say, to guide Victorian society towards a more aesthetic and sensual experience of Christianity was not an easy task, but the great success of *Marius The Epicurean* opened the way. In any case, I began this discussion by citing Heraclitus and I shall also conclude it by returning to the philosopher of Ephesus. I shall do this by referring once again to a few reflections by Pater's great disciple, Oscar Wilde, another admirer of Heraclitus's philosophy, who in *The Critic as Artist II*— let us now bear in mind everything that Pater has already told us—writes the following:

> The true critic… will seek for beauty in every age and in each school, and will never suffer himself to be limited to any settled custom of thought or stereotyped mode of looking at things. He will realise himself in many forms, and by a thousand different ways, and will ever be curious of new sensations and fresh points of view. Through constant change, and through constant change alone, he will find his true unity. He will not consent to be the slave of his own opinions. For what is mind but motion in the intellectual sphere?[30]

Thus, how can a Christian in the Victorian era embrace such an Heraclitean thought? If anyone does so, there is no doubt that remorse might harass them, but Wilde's method of neutralizing this pressure is none other than to proclaim—as he did with conviction and admiration in the famous epistle sent to his beloved Lord Alfred Douglas from Reading gaol in *De Profundis*—the artistic and genuine Heraclitean temper of the great reformer of Judaism: Jesus of Nazareth:[31]

> …out of his own imagination entirely did Jesus of Nazareth create himself… He was the denial as well as the affirmation of prophecy. For every expectation that he fulfilled there was another that he destroyed… He felt that life was changeful, fluid, active, and that to allow it to be stereotyped into any form was death.[32]

30. Wilde 2003, 1144-45. On Wilde and Heraclitus, see, e.g.: Hext, 2018, 195-207.
31. I deal with this more fully in Gilabert 2005.
32. Wilde 2003, 1033-35.

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APPENDIX

Conclusion (following the 1893 text):
Λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει

To regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought. Let us begin with that which is without–our physical life. Fix upon it in one of its more exquisite intervals, the moment, for instance, of delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat. What is the whole physical life in that moment but a combination of natural elements to which science gives their names? But those elements, phosphorus and lime and delicate fibres, are present not in the human body alone: we detect them in places most remote from it. Our physical life is a perpetual motion of them–the passage of the blood, the waste and repairing of the lenses of the eye, the modification of the tissues of the brain under every ray of light and sound– processes which science reduces to simpler and more elementary forces. Like the elements of which we are composed, the action of these forces extends beyond us: it rusts iron and ripens corn. Far out on every side of us those elements are broadcast, driven in many currents; and birth and gesture and death and the springing of violets from the grave are but a few out of ten thousand resultant combinations. That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours, under which we group them–a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it. This at least of flame like our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways.

Or if we begin with the inward world of thought and feeling, the whirlpool is still more rapid, the flame more eager and devouring. There it is no longer the gradual darkening of the eye, the gradual fading of colour from the wall–movements of the shore-side, where the water flows down indeed, though in apparent rest–but the race of the mid-stream, a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought. At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflexion begins to play upon these objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like some trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions–colour, odour, texture–in the mind of the observer. And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a

group of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world. Analysis goes a step farther still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. To such a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines itself down. It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off–that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves.

Philosophiren, says Novalis, *ist dephlegmatisiren, vivificiren*. The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive to us, —for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit is relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the very brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. What we have to do is to be

for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy of Comte, or of Hegel, or of our own. Philosophical theories or ideas, as points of view, instruments of criticism, may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass un-regarded by us. 'Philosophy is the microscope of thought'. The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves, or of what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us.

One of the most beautiful passages of Rousseau is that in the sixth book of the Confessions, where he describes the awakening in him of the literary sense. An undefinable taint of death had clung always about him, and now in early manhood he believed himself smitten by mortal disease. He asked himself how he might make as much as possible of the interval that remained; and he was not biased by anything in his previous life when he decided that it must be by intellectual excitement, which he found just then in the clear, fresh writings of Voltaire. Well! we are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve–*les hommes sont tous condamnés à mort avec des sursis indéfinis*: we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among "the children of this world," in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion–that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.