

Pater's 'Winckelmann': aesthetic criticism and classical reception

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Pater's 'Winckelmann': Aesthetic Criticism and Classical Reception

Pater did not derive his understanding of classical culture exclusively from the direct study of Greek and Roman sources, but rather from observing how the classical 'original' is constantly modified through time, as it is appropriated by successive ages: the passing of time transforms not only the materiality of antiquity, as remains are lost and found, broken, worn away by the elements or restored by archaeologists and textual scholars, but also its significance and value. It was only at a relatively advanced stage of his career as professional classicist that Pater started publishing work that deals with classical subject matter directly, in the essays on classical mythology of the late 1870s. Before then, in the early writings that are still the most widely discussed by literary scholars, Pater's handling of antiquity took place in mediated form, notably through the work of artists of the Renaissance. For such an allusive writer, though, this seeming distance from the Greek and Roman world is anything but an expression of lack of interest. If anything the remote object, glimpsed rather than fully revealed through the texture of Pater's prose, appears more desirable, enticing and productive than what is closer to hand.

For instance, in the early essay on William Morris, Pater describes the ancient world as a dream or echo 'heard across so great a distance only as through some miraculous calm, subdued in colour and cadence'.¹ The transformation of antiquity into a disembodied sound implies no diminution in value; on the contrary, the process described here should be read in conjunction with Pater's famous observation in 'The School of Giorgione' that '[a]ll art constantly aspires towards the condition of music' (*Ren.*, 106): material loss confers aesthetic distinction. Morris's poetry is praised for capturing the echoes of this vanishing voice, transfiguring its forms and renewing its effect without becoming antiquarian. The best form of classicism is realised in work that, like Morris's, is aware of its belatedness and eclecticism: 'the choice life of the human spirit is always under mixed lights, and in mixed situations'.² In *The Renaissance*, Pater brings to light this transitional world in 'Two Early French Stories', where he glimpses 'the taste for sweetness [that] becomes the seed for the classical revival' in the very heart of the Middle Ages (*Ren.*, 2). In the other essays, classical antiquity is revealed to the reader in similarly surprising places, such as Botticelli's depiction of a 'cadaverous' Venus in a Gothic landscape, which according to Pater gives 'a more direct inlet into the Greek temper than the works of the Greeks themselves even of the finest period' (*Ren.*, 45, 45-6); and in Michelangelo's portrait of Adam in the Sistine Chapel, which for Pater is a hybrid between 'the young men of the Elgin marbles' and a satyr (*Ren.*, 59). The Renaissance for Pater is neither a precisely defined historical period nor a simple return to antiquity as a set of models and formal rules for artists (and a canon of texts for writers). It is, rather, a *mode* of reception – a way of understanding and desiring the classical past not as dead but as alive, alluring and pregnant with creative possibilities for the modern mind. The Renaissance occurs when modernity is simultaneously shaped and challenged by antiquity.

Nowhere are these dynamics of reception explored in more detail than in 'Winckelmann', an essay that seems at first a peculiar addition to the book because it brings the Renaissance right up to the middle of the eighteenth century. This chronological eccentricity enabled Pater to build a bridge

between the Italian Renaissance and the German eighteenth century, showing an affinity between two neoclassical ideals. Winckelmann was moreover attractive to Pater because he was, like himself, primarily a scholar rather than an artist. More than any of the other figures discussed in *The Renaissance*, Winckelmann brings together the important parallel strands Pater develops in the book of, on the one hand, defining and promoting 'aesthetic criticism' and, on the other, studying the 'Hellenic element' as a powerful underground current in cultural history that periodically breaks to the surface in order to affect the present (*Ren.*, 158). In outlining Winckelmann's achievement Pater's essay becomes a celebration of 'the authority of the Hellenic tradition, its fitness to satisfy some vital requirement of the intellect' (*Ren.*, 158). Winckelmann is important because his passion is the spark that ignites German philhellenism; at the same time he is the prototype of the classicist as aesthetic critic and thus an important precursor for Pater himself.

More immediately, though, Pater presents Winckelmann as an antecedent of Goethe. The towering presence of Goethe tends to overshadow Winckelmann in places, as when Pater claims that '[t]he aim of a right criticism is to place Winckelmann in an intellectual perspective, of which Goethe is the foreground' (*Ren.*, 181). By establishing an intellectual relationship between Winckelmann and Goethe, the essay traces the evolution of Hellenism from the eighteenth century into the nineteenth, portraying their relationship as a crucial episode in the classical tradition. Even though the two never met, Winckelmann helped Goethe to find the classical world. As much as Winckelmann's own scholarship, therefore, the relationship between the two becomes the model for an orientation towards the classical past: rather than promoting a series of intellectual habits and constraining influences, the encounter with antiquity generates new forms of knowledge and culture.

The framework in which Winckelmann will be established as an exemplary aesthetic critic is set out in the 'Preface'. Here, Pater distinguishes between two different orientations to beauty. While the first seeks 'to define beauty in the abstract, to express it in the most general terms, to find a universal formula'; the second strives '[t]o define beauty [...] in the most concrete terms possible', to find 'the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it'. The latter approach, which Pater privileges as 'the aim of the true student of aesthetics' (*Ren.*, xix), involves a reference to the self that is both hedonic and sensual:

in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly [...] What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence and under its influence? (*Ren.*, xix-xx)

Aesthetic criticism is therefore a project of self-discovery and self-formation: a development which begins from the acknowledgement in oneself of 'a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects' (*Ren.*, xxi) and strives over time to articulate, refine and deepen those responses.

These considerations go some way towards explaining why Pater structures this work around a series of engaging personalities, penning a series of critical portraits that pay attention to the individual circumstances of his subjects' intellectual development but also to psychological and

emotional details, often including seemingly trivial episodes. In 'Winckelmann', Pater does not only find his subject's refined, yet still sensual and concrete, language of connoisseurial appreciation worthy of admiration. He also commends Winckelmann's biography as a paradigm of the aesthetic critic's continual striving for self-education, integration and harmonisation through the senses and the intellect. The first half of Pater's essay traces Winckelmann's life story from his impoverished childhood in Prussia and his early encounters with the beautiful Greeks in their literature, through his first exposure to genuine antiquities in Dresden and his eventual arrival in Italy, where, bathed finally in 'the happy light of the antique', he experienced 'a sense of exhilaration almost physical' (*Ren.*, 142). Pater figures Winckelmann's biography as an 'Odyssey': a *nostos*/homecoming. It is Winckelmann's intuitive and sensual appreciation of Greek beauty in all its media (literature, material objects and life), that reveals his 'native affinity to the Hellenic spirit' and renders him proof of the continuing, generative and nourishing potential of the Hellenic in modern culture.

In several of his Renaissance studies Pater draws on Vasari, whose *Lives of Artists* was a well-established source in art-historical writing. But his choice to organise the first part of his essay around an account of Winckelmann's life references a different tradition. Pater takes up a strand of Winckelmann's German reception which had tended to lay an emphasis on his life story rather than his scholarship as such, making extensive use of his letters, which had appeared in a number of editions since the eighteenth century.³ In treating Winckelmann's biography as the story of the progressive realisation of a remarkable individual's innate affinity towards the Hellenic, Pater's essay betrays its genealogy in the tradition of the *Winckelmannsrede* – speeches celebrating Winckelmann himself and the scholarly disciplines to which his work had given rise – that had arisen in German universities and archaeological institutes since the 1830s. Pater certainly knew at least one specimen of the genre: Otto Jahn's address delivered in Greifswald in 1843 and reprinted in his *Biographische Aufsätze* of 1866, which was one of the two works under review in the first publication of Pater's essay (the other was G.H. Lodge's partial translation of the *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*).⁴ He may also have been aware of some of the examples composed by Eduard Gerhard, founding secretary of the German Archaeological Institute and director of the sculpture department of the Prussian Royal Museum. This tradition in turn informed the monumental, hagiographic biography of Winckelmann composed by Carl Justi, the first volumes of which appeared, like Jahn's *Aufsätze*, the year before Pater's essay. The conventions of the *Winckelmannsrede* – which became increasingly formulaic as the century progressed - likewise involved a focus on Winckelmann's life, portrayed as the ardent, and ultimately successful, strivings of an exemplary character to realise its inner affinity with the Hellenic. But while Winckelmann's German panegyrists located the telos of this development in his foundation of a new scholarly discipline and educational ideal – *Altertumswissenschaft* – for Pater, the telos seems to be a figure of the next generation of culture heroes: Goethe.

Goethe's own account of Winckelmann's life, published at the very beginning of the nineteenth century, in fact forms the single most important intertext for Pater's essay.⁵ Pater's assessment of Winckelmann is focalised through Goethe throughout, from the initial assessment of him as providing 'an abstract type of culture, consummate, tranquil, withdrawn already into the region of ideals, yet retaining colour from the incidents of a passionate intellectual life' (141), to the account of Winckelmann's murder which draws on Goethe's autobiographical reflections in *Dichtung und*

Wahrheit, to Pater's lament that Winckelmann's untimely death may have deprived German literary history of 'one of those famous friendships, the very tradition of which becomes a stimulus to culture, and exercises an imperishable influence' (157). It is therefore appropriate to look back behind Pater's essay and its immediate, scholarly predecessors to Goethe's essay, which in any case provided the template for the later appreciations. Goethe's essay is pervaded by ambiguities which were to prove productive for Pater's elucidations of the character of the aesthetic critic and of the revivifying potential of the Hellenic in modernity.

Goethe's essay was published in 1805, as the first of three 'Skizzen zu einer Schilderung Winckelmanns' ('Studies towards a portrait of Winckelmann') appended to an edition of Winckelmann's letters to his childhood friend, Hieronymus Dieterich Berendis.⁶ The status of the essay as *parergon* to a letter collection is significant, for both in the essay itself and in his general introduction to the volume, Goethe privileges an author's private correspondence as providing a unique window onto his or her thoughts, feelings and desires:

Letters are among the most important monuments an individual can leave behind him. Just as, when talking to themselves, persons endowed with lively imaginations sometimes picture an absent friend as present, with whom to share their inmost thoughts, so in the same manner a letter comprises a form of conversation with the self. For often the friend to whom one is writing provides more the occasion for, than object of, the letter. What cheers or saddens, oppresses or concerns us, comes from the heart, and as enduring traces of a particular existence or condition such pages are the more important for posterity, the more the writer has considered only the immediate moment and the less he takes notice of posterity.⁷

For Goethe, 'Winckelmann's letters have this advantageous character (diesen wünschenswerthen Charakter) throughout', in that they provide an authentic monument of an exemplary individual's innermost feelings and strivings.⁸ The three 'sketches' are presented as a guides or initial notes to the correspondence, and the introduction to Goethe's essay sharpens the themes of exemplarity and monumentality in relation to the letters:

The memory of remarkable men, like the presence of major works of art, periodically stimulates the spirit of reflection. Both exist as legacies to every generation, the former in the shape of deeds and posthumous fame, the latter through their continued reality as ineffable creations. All men of insight know very well that the only worthwhile approach is to contemplate each as an individual whole: nevertheless, we repeatedly try to extract some meaning from them with the help of reflection and words.

We have a particular incentive to do so when new information comes to light on such subjects; and accordingly, our renewed reflections on Winckelmann, on his character and achievement, will not seem inappropriate at a time when the letters which have just been published throw a clearer light on his outlook and circumstances.⁹

For Goethe, Winckelmann's letters perform this memorializing function by virtue of their author's lack of self-awareness or self-consciousness – his unconcern, even as he sat down to his desk, with thoughts of posterity or even of the addressee who formed the pretext for his writing exercise. This

contestable interpretation enables Goethe to privilege Winckelmann's letters *above* his published writings, for in the latter he did write with a self-consciousness, a sense of status and an eye for posterity. It also sets up a particular, hierarchical relationship between Goethe the commentator or editor and Winckelmann the subject or author. Goethe insinuates that the commentator is able to bring to light new meanings in the author's expressions and pronouncements, the true significance of which escaped the author himself.¹⁰ It is as furnishing the raw materials for such transformative interpretation that Goethe recommends the serious and prolonged study of Winckelmann's letters in chronological order, going so far as to provide an index to all previous published editions of his correspondence as an indispensable aid for 'anyone who wishes to obtain an unobstructed view of such a character' ('demjenigen, der Lust hat einen solchen Charakter unmittelbar anzuschauen').¹¹ Yet at other points in his introduction, the primary conceit is not so much the Italian traveller gazing out over the Roman campagna as the artist twisting his model into a series of expressive poses after the manner of a neoclassical art theorist such as Charles le Brun:

If this excellent man, who had educated himself in isolation, was reserved in society, serious and cautious in life and action, on the page he nonetheless felt his full natural freedom and often portrayed his inner emotions without reservation. We see him worried, fearful, confused, doubting and hesitant; elsewhere cheerful, excited, confident, bold, fatalistic to the point of cynicism, but throughout a man of upright character, trusting in himself, who – though external circumstances presented him with a number of choices – for the most part chose the best path, up to the time of that last, rash, unfortunate step, which cost him his life.¹²

Goethe's framing of Winckelmann's letters thus raises questions about the relative agency of subject (or 'artwork') and critic ('editor' or 'artist'), and provides an element of hierarchical distancing to counterbalance the dominant tone of admiration. It is unsurprising that scholars have been unsure what to make of Goethe's essay: although it has for the most part been treated as a profession of classicising faith and an anti-Romantic *Streitschrift*, some recent discussions have emphasised instead how Goethe's treatment tends to contain Winckelmann, confining him to his own age – 'sein Jahrhundert' – even as it praises him.¹³

Pater picks up on both sides of Goethe's treatment. He paints an intimate portrait of the young Winckelmann's 'painful apprenticeship' (*Ren.*, 142) in eighteenth-century Germany, where he spent solitary nights reading Herodotus and Homer and his sleep was troubled by nightmares of the *Odyssey*. He brings Winckelmann close to his readers with a moving psychological description of his desire for a different life nurtured by classical studies, so that the arrival in Rome marks, in a sense, the onset of his real life. Like Goethe, Pater cites Winckelmann's letters to create a sense of emotional proximity, relying on Winckelmann's readiness to articulate his frustrations and desires in correspondence. For instance, Pater cites a letter in which Winckelmann seems to confess his feeling of alienation in Rome, caught between the sense of familiarity with the classical heritage of the city that he had acquired through his studies and the foreignness of the actual place: 'I am one of those whom the Greeks called *opsimatheis* – I have come into the world and into Italy too late' (*Ren.*, 150).¹⁴ For Pater, as for Goethe, the letters disclose a temperamental and psychological attitude to antiquity that is the most precious legacy of Winckelmann for modern students.

Pater presents Winckelmann's uniqueness – what makes him, paradoxically, both eccentric and central to the culture of his age – in essentialist terms: he speaks of 'Winckelmann's native affinity to the Hellenic spirit' and glosses this inborn sentiment as a form of 'enthusiasm' and 'bodily temperament' (*Ren.*, 152). Throughout the essay Pater contrasts images of light and colour in order to portray Hellenism and passion as the twin elements that shaped Winckelmann's life and that might at first glance seem incompatible. While Hellenism 'is the principle pre-eminently of intellectual light' – a definition that emphasises elements of distance and abstraction –, 'our modern culture' is characterised by its predominance of colour, by which Pater means sentiment (*Ren.*, 151). Winckelmann, as a Hellenist, is instinctively attracted to light; yet Pater seems particularly keen to recover those traces of colour that insinuate themselves inside Winckelmann's legacy. Winckelmann's letters make 'with their troubled colouring, an instructive but bizarre addition to the *History of Art*, that shrine of grave and mellow light around the mute Olympian family' (*Ren.*, 154). And, paraphrasing Goethe, he characterises Winckelmann as a tranquil, classicising figure, who nonetheless 'retain[ed] colour from the incidents of a passionate intellectual life' (*Ren.*, 141). Pater's evocations of colour recall the technique of late nineteenth-century literary impressionism, which has obvious affinities with the method of aesthetic criticism, while also glancing back to the rhetorical tradition which relates colour to expression and passion. By insisting on Winckelmann's passion, Pater is arguing for the rehabilitation of the body and its instinctual drives in approaches to antiquity. In Pater's essay the human body, as represented in classical statues, becomes a site of meanings occluded by Christian history, which Winckelmann is able to recover thanks to his unembarrassed close observation: 'he catches the thread of a whole sequence of laws in some hollowing of the hand, or dividing of the hair' (*Ren.*, 155).

Writing at a time when British classical scholarship was embracing the 'scientific' method, Pater goes against this trend, revaluing an eighteenth-century ideal of amateurism based on a sentimental approach to the object. Winckelmann's capacity to be 'moved' by 'the buried fire of ancient art' is what makes him repeat in Pater's eyes the spirit of the early Renaissance (146); just as his geographical migration from a dark and frozen North to the 'happy light of the antique' (142) makes him the embodiment of Enlightenment – an idea Pater would later develop in his imaginary portrait 'Duke Carl von Rosenmold', also set in the German eighteenth century. The stress on Winckelmann's deep-seated emotional response to antiquity is clearly connected to the definition of aesthetic criticism that Pater had set out in the 'Preface' to *The Renaissance*: Winckelmann illustrates the imperative to abandon 'abstract theory' in favour of a critical practice based on 'the exercise of sight and touch' (*Ren.*, 147). Hellenism and aestheticism are interlocked in a mutually reinforcing relationship: while ancient Greece discloses to the moderns a tradition of integrating the senses and understanding in pursuit of a balanced ideal of culture, aestheticism reveals the importance of seeking knowledge of antiquity through the senses. An intensified vocabulary of sensual impression, especially of touch, punctuates Pater's descriptions of Winckelmann's practice as a classical scholar. Winckelmann is shown handling not only statues but even 'the words [...] of Greek poetry, stirred indeed and roused by them, yet divining beyond the words some unexpressed pulsation of sensuous life. Suddenly he is in contact with that life, still fervent in the relics of plastic art' (*Ren.*, 146). '[H]e feels after the Hellenic world, divines those channels of ancient art, in which its life still circulates' (*Ren.*, 158). Antiquity comes to life under Winckelmann's receptive touch, as alert to 'pulsations' as the idealised aesthetic subject of *The Renaissance's* 'Conclusion'.

In line with Goethe and the tradition of the *Winckelmannsrede*, Pater is not worried about Winckelmann's mistakes in attribution. He repeats Goethe's comparison of Winckelmann to Columbus as someone whose 'science was often at fault' (*Ren.*, 154) but nonetheless succeeded in effecting an enormous advancement in knowledge. He admits that later critics have questioned the authenticity of some of Winckelmann's 'most significant examples of Greek art' and that Winckelmann, working on Roman collections, was without realising it only glimpsing Greek works through later copies (*Ren.*, 155). Consequently, Winckelmann set too much store on Hellenistic grace over the authentically classical, 'severe and chastened grace of the *palestra*' (*Ren.*, 155). Pater suggests that modern critics could now correct Winckelmann's mistakes but, for now he is uninterested in taking on this role systematically. He would later tackle this question in the essays on archaic Greek art, which Elizabeth Prettejohn studies in this volume. At present he is more interested in elucidating the mechanism through which a tradition of classical art is transmitted to subsequent ages – capturing the sound of the 'echo', as he puts it in the essay on Morris, which gains a distinctive and haunting quality just as it loses intensity with each repetition. If Roman art constitutes a 'turbid medium' (*Ren.*, 155) through which authentic Greek works survive into later ages, the modern classicist should accept discoloration and muddiness as part of the organic mutation of the classical matter through the centuries. The value of Greek antiquity is not per se but as a stimulus to the present, whether it be the historical present of the Romans, the eighteenth century or Pater's own time.

Yet, like Goethe, Pater also introduces an element of distance in the essay via a series of revisions. The insistence on colour that we have already seen could be read as a corrective, which Pater deploys with characteristic indirectness, to canonical receptions of Winckelmann's downplaying of polychromy in his discussions of classical sculpture.¹⁵ Pater addresses this question explicitly, speaking of the 'unfixed claim to colour' that sculpture had since its earliest days in archaic Greece (169). Pater also expands and corrects the canon of Winckelmann's art history by praising the Parthenon frieze, which Winckelmann had not seen, as the 'single product only of Hellenic art [that] were to be saved in the wreck of all besides' (*Ren.*, 174). The Parthenon Marbles were fundamental in forming a new, romantic taste for the antique that eventually superseded eighteenth-century classicism. Pater underlines this history by referring to the figures depicted on the frieze as a 'beautiful multitude' – a quotation from Keats (*Endymion* III, 818) that is perhaps meant to highlight the affinity between the poetic celebrations of the Elgin Marbles by Keats and some of Winckelmann's own ephrastic descriptions of ancient sculpture. Their inclusion prepares the ground for what is in fact Pater's most severe critique of Winckelmann: his inability to detect 'a sort of preparation for the romantic temper' in Greek art and culture more generally, entirely committed as he was to an ideal of 'exquisite but abstract and colourless form' (*Ren.*, 178). The alternative to this model is Goethe, who will capture a more comprehensive, earthly and sensual relation to antiquity in his *Roman Elegies*.

Here and extensively in the course of the essay Pater bases his revisions of Winckelmann on Hegel's *Ästhetik* – a work on which Jahn had also drawn. Pater paraphrases Hegel when he argues that '[t]he placid minds even of Olympian gods are troubled with thoughts of a limit to duration, of inevitable decay, of dispossession' (*Ren.*, 179):¹⁶ this is the same 'touch of the corpse' (*Ren.*, 179) in the ancient sculptural nude that Botticelli would capture in his paintings of classical myth. The very materiality of the ancient object has been changed by the history of its reception: looking back to

Greece from our modern vantage point, we can now see in the gods that once seemed so fair and above history 'a premonition of the fleshless, consumptive refinements of the pale, medieval artists' (*Ren.*, 179). The concept of 'refinement' brings back the theory of reception as refinement put forward in the essay on Morris: in the Winckelmann essay the medieval saints of Fra Angelico and his contemporaries reveal to Pater latent meanings that are dormant in the classical object until they are brought to light by a later artistic culture, no matter how different that culture might appear to be on the surface.

To return to Pater's German sources, three themes in the handling of Winckelmann's life had proved particularly problematic for his hagiographic biographers. The first was class: Winckelmann's transition from the humblest of backgrounds to association with princes. Second was his religious conversion, widely understood by contemporaries as an impious act undertaken for material gain. Finally, in the eighteenth century as now, the homoeroticism of many of the paeans to Greek beauty contained in Winckelmann's writings fuelled rumours about his life, particularly once his murder by Francesco Arcangeli appeared to confirm deeply held cultural prejudices that associated homosexuality with sin, violence and punishment.¹⁷

Goethe's essay is notable for its frank treatment of all three of these themes, deriving them from Winckelmann's profound – and profoundly 'ancient' – need for friendship and beauty. Winckelmann's preference for male friendship betrays his truly antique nature, for one of the greatest differences between ancient and modern times is that '[r]elations with women, which have become so tender and spiritualised in our era, scarcely rose in antiquity above the most basic necessity.' 'The passionate fulfilment of affectionate duties, the bliss of inseparability, the sacrifice of oneself for another' occurred only 'in an relationship between two youths'. Winckelmann's unashamed pursuit of male friendships is once again proof of his unselfconscious Hellenism, that remarkable naivety which drove him to 'transform all the worthy people he sought into friends on this model'.¹⁸

Winckelmann conceived his relationships with his patrons in similar fashion. Goethe emphasises this point in his discussion of the impressions of contemporary Roman society presented in Winckelmann's letters:

Although he did not at first feel wholly at ease in society – ill-prepared as he was by his earlier way of life – a feeling of his own worth soon made up for lack of training and practice, and he very quickly learned to behave as circumstances required. His pleasure in associating with distinguished, rich, and famous people, and his delight at enjoying their esteem are always conspicuous; and as regards ease of social relations, he could not have found a more favourable environment than that of Rome.

He himself observes that prominent people there, particularly in clerical circles, live on a relaxed and familiar footing with members of their households, however ceremonious they may outwardly appear; but he failed to observe that this familiarity is in fact a disguise for the oriental relationship between master and servant. All the southern nations would find it infinitely tedious if they had to sustain that constant reciprocal tension to which the northerners are accustomed in their domestic relations [...] the southerner likes to have periods of relaxation, and those around him benefit accordingly.¹⁹

Yet, viewed in another perspective, these comments of Goethe's show what is limited or mistaken in Winckelmann's outlook. Winckelmann's partisanship for the Hellenic leads him to mistake the 'ease' of hierarchical social relations in Rome for a genuinely free and equal companionship on the ancient model, just as he pursues heroic friendships with (sometimes) unworthy men in ignorance of the superior erotic, spiritual and affective potential of heterosexual partnerships in modernity. Goethe punctures these illusions, demonstrating his superior understanding of social and intimate relations.

Like Goethe, Pater smooths over these potentially problematic areas. He pays little attention to class, but devotes several pages to Winckelmann's religious conversion, noting Goethe's argument that Winckelmann was a pagan at heart and finally absolving Winckelmann's insincerity 'at the bar of the highest criticism' (*Ren.*, 149) – that is, from the point of view of a secularist modern criticism that values intellectual integrity above religious morality. It is the 'problem' of homosexuality that interests Pater most, and in treating this issue he expands on Goethe, adding material that is not present in his account. A prominent example is Pater's quotation of two substantial extracts from Winckelmann's 'letter on taste' to Friedrich Reinhold von Berg – a correspondent not mentioned by Goethe in his list of the noblemen to whom Winckelmann acted as cicerone. In fact this is a 1763 published essay entitled 'Abhandlung von der Fähigkeit der Empfindung des Schönen in der Kunst, und dem Unterrichte in derselben' ('Essay on the Capacity of the Sentiment for the Beautiful in Art, and on Instruction in it'), in which Winckelmann declares his attraction to Berg and speaks of male beauty as 'the supreme beauty' of Greek art (*Ren.*, 153). The fact that Pater presents as a letter what is actually an aesthetic treatise written in letter form (*Sendschreiben*) underscores, on the one hand, his insistence on the correspondence as a source of privileged knowledge about Winckelmann while, on the other, it introduces a certain euphemistic quality, for the more personal correspondence with Berg published after Winckelmann's death, evoked but occluded in the text, is more explicit in its handling of erotic intimacy. By interpolating this material into his account, Pater wants to endorse this type of eros as foundational to the practices of connoisseurship. Another passage from Winckelmann's 'Abhandlung', which occurs between the two that Pater quotes, presents the intellectual desire for antiquity as a bodily drive: 'In early youth, this capacity, like every inclination, is wrapped in dark and confused emotions and announces itself like a fleeting itching in one's skin, the actual location of which one cannot find to scratch. It is to be sought sooner in well-formed boys than in others, because we commonly think as we are made, but is to be sought less in form than in character and temperament: a soft heart and tractable senses are signs of such a capacity.'²⁰ The Berg correspondence shows that 'temperament' at work, providing Pater with evidence that Winckelmann's tendency to form 'romantic, fervent friendships with young men' (*Ren.*, 152) repeats classical models of male intimacy, and developing that 'temperamental' affinity with Hellenism that constitutes Winckelmann's distinction. Pater is on dangerous territory here: his argument might be read as normalising Winckelmann's homosexual leanings or, even, as an elevation of homoeroticism into a marker of intellectual distinction – the foundation of Winckelmann's ability to achieve a privileged insight into the ancient world.²¹ The direct quotation, which brings Winckelmann's voice into the text in almost unmediated form, is also a clever strategy to insert a sense of distance between critic and subject – something that goes against the principles of Pater's aesthetic criticism and that, for that reason, bespeaks Pater's uneasiness in the handling of this subject.

In Goethe's essay this subtle distancing reaches its climax in the section entitled 'Rome'. For both Goethe and Pater this is, of course, the pivotal point in Winckelmann's biography: when the Hellenic plant, transferred back into ancient soil, could finally take root and flower. Goethe's description does not disappoint:

Winckelmann was now in Rome, and who could be more worthy than he of feeling the effects which that great experience is capable of producing on a truly receptive nature? He saw his wishes fulfilled, his happiness assured, his hopes more than satisfied. He saw his ideas in corporeal form around him as he wandered in amazement through the ruins of a gigantic age; the greatest glories ever produced by art stood out in the open air; he could look up at such wonders of art as freely as at the stars in the heavens, and every private treasure-house opened its doors for a modest fee. The newcomer crept around unnoticed like a pilgrim, and visited the most splendid and sacred monuments in inconspicuous dress; he did not yet permit any individual impression to take hold of him, the whole acted upon him in infinitely varied ways, and he could already feel in anticipation that harmony which would eventually arise for him out of the many often seemingly hostile elements. He saw and contemplated everything, and, to complete his satisfaction, he was mistaken for an artist, a role in which all of us would at heart be happy to appear.²²

But what follows undercuts this picture. Instead of Winckelmann's own words, Goethe approvingly quotes a letter addressed to him from Rome by Wilhelm von Humboldt.

Rome is the place where, in our view, the whole of antiquity is fused into one, so that what we feel about the ancient poets or political constitutions seems, in Rome, more than just a feeling: we see it with our own eyes. Just as Homer cannot be compared with other poets, so also is it impossible to compare Rome and its surroundings with any other place. It is true that most of this impression derives from ourselves rather than from the object; but it is not just the sentimental thought of standing where this or that great man once stood – it is as if we were powerfully transported into a past which, if only through a necessary illusion, strikes us as nobler and more sublime than the present. We cannot resist this force even if we wish to, because the derelict state in which the present inhabitants have left the country and the incredible mass of ruins themselves lead our eye in that direction. And since this past appeals to the inner sense in a grandeur which is beyond the reach of envy, and in which one is more than happy to participate, if only in the imagination (for we cannot conceivably do so in any other way), and since at the same time the loveliness of forms, the grandeur and simplicity of the figures, the richness of the vegetation (which is not, however, as luxuriant as in the regions further south), the definition of the outlines in the translucent medium, and the beauty of the colours transport the outer sense into a realm of universal clarity – our enjoyment of nature here is a pure aesthetic pleasure without a trace of desire. Everywhere else, it is coupled with contrasting ideas, and our pleasure becomes elegiac or satirical. But of course this is only our subjective impression. Tibur seemed more modern to Horace than Tivoli does to us, as his *Beatus ille, qui procul negotiis* proves. But it is also merely an illusion if we ourselves wish we were citizens of Athens or Rome. For we must

view antiquity only from a distance, purged of base reality, purely as something of the past.²³

The force of Goethe's preamble, focalised through the enthusiastic Winckelmann, is very different from that of Humboldt's words. When Goethe endorses Humboldt's conclusion that 'it is merely an illusion if we ourselves wish we were citizens of Athens and Rome', this judgement cannot fail to modify our response to Winckelmann's fantasy that '[h]e saw his ideas in corporeal form around him as he wandered in amazement through the ruins of a gigantic age'. And when Goethe approvingly cites Humboldt's characterisation of the Roman prospect as furnishing 'a pure aesthetic pleasure without a trace of desire', this undercuts his prior portrayal of Winckelmann's erotic and tactile orientation to antiquity. By contrast with Humboldt's refined and self-reflective standpoint, Winckelmann's unselfconscious and urgent, imitative relation to the Roman cityscape might appear less a Pygmalionesque bringing of the past to life through a kiss than a Quixotism. Just how far Goethe intended to establish Winckelmann as exemplary therefore remains problematic; despite its panegyric aspects, the essay creates a distance between the practice of Goethe and his subject and a hierarchy, in which Winckelmann functions as an artistic model for Goethe's plastic powers as much or more than a life to be emulated.

Pater understood the profound importance of Goethe's distancing from Winckelmann and presented it as a key event in the evolution of the classical tradition. In the essay he shows Goethe following Winckelmann's footsteps in Rome, where he finds 'the stimulus of Winckelmann's memory ever active' (*Ren.*, 151) but also charts his independent evolution beyond the master he was never to meet. In Pater's eyes, Winckelmann's passionate life was crucial for Goethe because it reproduced the Greek ideal of self-fashioning seen in the ancient sculptures. But Goethe also detected what Pater calls Winckelmann's 'narrow perfection' and used Winckelmann's integrity as a negative example, from which he developed into his own, superior model of a general culture (*Ren.*, 147).

Winckelmann, with his intense focus on the 'unity and repose of the highest sort of sculpture', failed to see those elements of Greek culture in which Pater sees 'a sort of preparation for the romantic temper' (*Ren.*, 178). But Goethe combined Hellenism and Romanticism in a way that proved generative for nineteenth-century culture. The Hellenism embodied by Winckelmann translates itself into 'a watchful, exigent intellectualism' in Goethe (*Ren.*, 182). This evolutionary argument with which Pater concludes the essay should not, however, blind us to his positive evaluation of Winckelmann as a revolutionary figure: he reminds us that 'that note of revolt against the eighteenth century, which we detect in Goethe, was struck by Winckelmann' (*Ren.*, 181). While he elevates Goethe's general culture above Winckelmann's connoisseurship as a more evolved model of classical knowledge, Pater also salvages Winckelmann as an example, explaining his uniqueness and value to late nineteenth-century readers. Winckelmann demonstrates better than any other 'Renaissance' figure that Hellenic culture is not 'a lost art' (*Ren.*, 181) to the modern world. He is the hero of Pater's vision of 'the classical tradition' and a precious medium through which moderns can still see 'the reflected, refined light' of the classical world.

¹ Pater, [unsigned review], *Westminster Review* (October 1868), 300:12, p. 307.

² Ibid.

³ Notably *Freundschaftliche Briefe: 1747-1768*, volumes 10-11 of *Johann Winckelmanns Sämliche Werke*, ed. Joseph Eiselein, 12 vols (Donauöschingen, 1825-35); and *Winckelmanns Briefe*, 3 vols, ed. Friedrich Förster (Berlin, 1824), the latter as an addition to the 'Weimar' edition edited by Karl Ludwig Fernow. See Martin Disselkamp, *Die Stadt der Gelehrten: Studien zu Johann Joachim Winckelmanns Briefe aus Rom* (Tübingen, 1993).

⁴ 'Winckelmann' was originally published anonymously in the *Westminster Review* in January 1867.

⁵ Stefano Evangelista, 'The German Roots of British Aestheticism: Pater's "Winckelmann", Goethe's Winckelmann, Pater's Goethe', in *Anglo-German Affinities and Antipathies*, ed. Rüdiger Görner (Munich, 2004), 57-70, pp. 61 ff.; Lene Østermark-Johansen, *Walter Pater and the Language of Sculpture* (Farnham, 2011), p. 73.

⁶ Goethe, *Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert in Briefen und Aufsätzen* (Tübingen, 1805). The volume also contained essays by Friedrich August Wolf, Karl Ludwig Fernow and Johann Heinrich Meyer.

⁷ Goethe, *Winckelmann*, pp. xi-xii. Although the full volume has not been translated into English, Goethe's biographical essay is translated by H.B. Nisbet in *German Aesthetic and Literary Criticism: Winckelmann, Lessing, Hamann, Herder, Schiller, Goethe* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 236-58. We use, and refer to, Nisbet's translation whenever possible; translations from other parts of the volume are our own.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Goethe, *Winckelmann*, p. 389 (Nisbet, p. 236).

¹⁰ Goethe's position here seems to anticipate some understandings of Freudian psychoanalysis, as well as Auerbach's influential characterisation of figural interpretation. See Jonathan Lear, *Love and its Place in Nature* (New Haven and London, 1990); Erich Auerbach, 'Figura', in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Minneapolis, 1984 [1938]), pp. 11-76.

¹¹ Goethe, *Winckelmann*, pp. 471-2.

¹² Goethe, *Winckelmann*, pp. xii-xiii.

¹³ See especially Volker Riedel, 'Zwischen Klassizismus und Geschichtlichkeit. Goethes Buch "Winckelmann und sein Jahrhundert"', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 13 (2006), 217-42; Harald Tausch, 'Die Winckelmann-Rezeption in der klassisch-romantischen Moderne um 1800', in Martin Disselkamp and Fausto Testa, eds, *Winckelmann-Handbuch* (Stuttgart, 2017 forthcoming).

¹⁴ Winckelmann to von Riedesel, 2 June 1767; German text in Walther Rehm, ed., *Johann Joachim Winckelmann Briefe. Dritter Band: 1764-1768* (Berlin, 1956), 268. This letter, first published in 1777 and reprinted in Eiselein's *Freundschaftliche Briefe*, is one of a number in which Winckelmann discusses his desire to travel to Greece. Its addressee, Johann Hermann von Riedesel, was one of the young men to whom Winckelmann offered aesthetic education among the sites of Rome. On Winckelmann's activities as a cicerone, see Jeffrey Morrison, *Winckelmann and the Notion of Aesthetic Education* (Oxford, 1996). Winckelmann wrote this letter in German, and not in French, as Pater claims in his essay.

¹⁵ This is particularly evident in the 'Weimar' edition of Winckelmann's works, which is likely the one Pater used; see Billie Andrew Inman, *Walter Pater's Reading: A Bibliography of his Library Borrowings and Literary References, 1858-1873* (New York and London: Garland, 1981), p. 119. For Winckelmann and polychromy, see Oliver Primavesi, 'Artemis, Her Shrine, and Her Smile: Winckelmann's Discovery of Ancient Greek Polychromy', in Vinzenz Brinkmann, Oliver Primavesi,

and Max Hollein, eds, *Circumlitio: The Polychromy of Ancient and Medieval Sculpture* (Frankfurt am Main, 2008), pp. 24-76.

¹⁶ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, transl. T. M. Knox, 2 vols (Oxford, 1975), I, p. 485: 'The blessed gods mourn as it were over their blessedness or their bodily form. We read in their faces the fate that awaits them [...].'

¹⁷ See Lionel Gossman, 'Death in Trieste', *Journal of European Studies* xxii (2002), 207-40.

¹⁸ Goethe, *Winckelmann*, pp. 398-9 (Nisbet, pp. 239-40), section titled 'Freundschaft'.

¹⁹ Goethe, *Winckelmann*, pp. 433-4 (Nisbet, p. 255), section titled 'Gesellschaft'.

²⁰ Winckelmann, 'Essay on the capacity for the sentiment for the beautiful in art, and on instruction in it', in *Essays on the Philosophy and History of Art*, ed. and tr. Curtis Bowman, 3 vols (London and New York, 2005), I, xxi-xxvii, p. xxv.

²¹ Winckelmann himself had claimed as much in the 'Abhandlung': 'Moreover since human beauty, in order to be known, is to be grasped in a general concept, I have noticed that those who attend only to the beauties of the female sex, and are touched little or not at all by the beauties in our sex, possess the sentiment for the beautiful in art but little in an innate, general, or lively fashion. The same will be lacking in these people with regard to the art of the Greeks, since the greatest beauties of their art are more of our sex than of the other.' ('Essay', p. xxvi)

²² Goethe, *Winckelmann*, pp. 407-8 (Nisbet, p. 244).

²³ Goethe, *Winckelmann*, pp. 408-9 (Nisbet, p. 245).