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Hypocrite Lecteur: Walter Pater, Henry James and Homotextual Politics

Reconstructing gay literary history requires a certain kind of Jamesian "double consciousness:"¹ the critic must attempt a politicized recovery of both the intertextual dynamics that constitute a homosexual tradition, as well as the anxieties that problematized writers' responses to their textual collaborators in "gender treachery."² The homosexual writer's fearful impulse to disguise his affiliation with what might *potentially* be construed by a homophobic public as a gay literature often produced, especially in the nineteenth century, a Janus-faced discourse which signals both affinity and distance. This marked tendency to undermine allusive gesture by an explicit denial of the homotextual source prompted Robert K. Martin to observe that "artistic influence might often be called 'the debt that will not speak its name'" (15). The function of the gay literary historian is to trace not the anxiety of influence but rather *the influence of anxiety*, the strategies of the closet (self-repression, disguise, the distancing from and dismissal of the feared prior text) which were subverted by a contrary desire for an affiliation marked by allusion, repetition, and other forms of intertextual gesture.

The theory of anxiety set forth in this article owes much to Harold Bloom's concept of "intra-poetic relationships as parallels of family romance" (8); the exigencies of the Victorian closet required that gay writers enact (or *appear* to enact) *clinamen*, the corrective "swerve" from the fraternal text, and *kenosis*, the "movement towards discontinuity with the precursor" (14). However, in order to politicize anxiety, I focus less

on gay writers' misreadings than on their accurate recognition of the received homotext and their dualistic, yet often simultaneous, impulses of reinscription and repudiation of source material. My argument responds to a recent crisis in gay literary theory, instigated by the debate in *Critical Inquiry* (Spring and Summer 1989), between Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and David van Leer, over the epistemology of the closet and the "panic" attending masculine desire. Following the lead of van Leer, I wish to reappropriate "homosexual panic" from Sedgwick's larger theory of the gender system and relocate it among homosexually-defined writers. The unacknowledged debt of Henry James to Walter Pater is a useful site for this resituation of panic and for an examination of the historically-specific structures of anxiety.

In his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873), Walter Pater offered not only an explicit celebration of homoerotic desire, but also both a theory and a lexicon of male homosexual visibility. Pater's location of desire in the gaze, I maintain, was substantially reinscribed in James's theory of impression-reception. Pater is made present in several of James's early texts—in his travel writing, literary criticism, and fiction. Yet, as I shall demonstrate, Pater was an enormously problematic figure for James, whose distancing strategies arose from his fear of association with "decadent" homosexual writers. I also wish to indicate the relevance of Pater's and James's rhetoric of visibility to feminist politics: their subversion of the "phallic gaze" redefines the mode of gay visibility as essentially receptive, and constructs a sympathetic affinity between the marginalized self and the disempowerment of women. In feminizing the gaze, James signals the *pater* of his text in a web of allusion that suggests a far more complex operation than an unconscious lexical sharing. It is possible that James, writing *across* his anxiety, deliberately controlled these intertextual moments in order to select and constitute a gay readership. In any case, James's position was a politically *implicated* one; the presence of Pater in James's writing is very much like the relationship constructed between reader and author at the conclusion of *The Burial of the Dead* through Eliot's quotation from Baudelaire: James is a *hypocrite lecteur*, who can conceal neither his likeness to, nor his fraternity with, "[son] semblable, [son] frere" (line 76).

I. Engendering Anxiety

In the 1870s and 1880s, James articulated with increasing specificity his representational imperatives: the commitment to visual experience, the tracing of the modes and consequences of impression-reception. Gradually, his affinity with the Paterian adventure of visual discrimination became more obvious. As Richard Ellmann has observed, Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* "not only offered the aesthetic movement a purpose—it also offered a vocabulary" (212). Why, then, was the presence of a Paterian discourse in the Jamesian text hazardous? In *The Renaissance*, Pater's overt celebration of male-centred desire—a desire which is manifested not just in explicit homosexual relationships, but in ways of seeing, varieties of longing, and modes of conceiving history itself—was undoubtedly read "straight" by the cautious Henry James. By "straight," I mean that James was undeceived as to Pater's homotextual motive, and that his response was one of fear: fear of engagement, fear of affiliation, fear above all of *detection*.

Anxiety generates competing impulses. By focussing on James's deployment of the tactics of repudiation, which were undermined by his borrowing of a Paterian lexicon, I hope to recover the historically-specific grounds for his anxiety and its discursive production. The anxiety of the homosexual writer is never simple: to survive within patriarchal culture, the marginalized writer attempted to purchase belletristic respectability by policing his text, removing traces not just of homoerotic desire, but of connection with writers who were even suspected of homosexual orientation, regardless of the "subjects" of their texts. By what desire, what discursive mechanism was that silence disrupted and affiliation signalled? In other words, how did they write *across* their own panic? Historians have pointed to the moral panic within heterosexuality occasioned by sensational legal proceedings against homosexuals;³ such panic found expression in renewed or confirmed homophobia. In order to write gay literary history, it is necessary not merely to redefine "panic" and relocate it among homosexuals, but to call into question its meaning and function in recent gender theory.

The recovery of specific sites of panic—its relocation within homosexual experience as opposed to the wider system of sex-gender regulation—signals the divergent agendas of feminist and gay literary scholarship, a recognition precipitated by David van Leer's recent deconstruction

of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's feminist account of the regulatory functions of homophobia.⁴ According to Sedgwick, homophobia is the necessary condition of male entitlement, and the male homosexual panic which all men experience is exploited by patriarchy to regulate the system of male solidarity and thus to ensure its power. Because, she argues,

the paths of male entitlement, especially in the nineteenth century, required certain intense male bonds that were not readily distinguishable from the most reprobated bonds, an endemic and ineradicable state of . . . male homosexual panic became the normal [male] condition" (*BC* 151).⁵

Men are caught in a double bind, between prescribed male bonding and proscribed homosexual desire. Homophobia thus provided patriarchy with a leverage by which to control the bonds of men who were not part of the distinctly homosexual subculture: "Not only must homosexual men be unable to ascertain whether they are to be the objects of 'random' homophobic violence, but no man must be able to ascertain that he is not (that his bonds are not) homosexual" (*BM* 89). From the perspective of homotextual work written *within* the homosexual margin, a limitation of Sedgwick's work becomes evident: her concern is not particularly with homosexual experience. Rather, by tracing "the ideological tentacles . . . by which nonhomosexual-identified men were subject to control through homophobic blackmailability," she unpacks "the entire male homosocial spectrum, and its effects on women" (*BM* 90).

While Sedgwick's investigations of panic uncover the mechanism by which heterosexual men are controlled and manipulated into homophobic positions, homosexual experience itself remains an unopened site; indeed, it becomes little more than a trope. The point of a gay reading of Sedgwick is not to deny the utility of her theoretical paradigms (which have been genuinely enabling), but rather to open that occluded site; surely the gay man's panic over what *is* proscribed and the heterosexual man's fear about what might *potentially* be misconstrued are fundamentally different kinds of anxiety. As David van Leer has pointed out, "it is one thing to claim that the motives and effects of oppression extend beyond the realm of the oppressed; it is another to say that the object of oppression is not the oppressed but society as a whole" (599).

The point of my negotiation with Sedgwick—my point of departure—is to open that occluded site of anxiety experienced by nineteenth-century homosexual writers. In examining the specific moments of the influence of anxiety, it is necessary not simply to reorient the investigation of panic from the system of oppression to the oppressed, but more importantly to analyse the relationship between this relocated panic and the *responsive* discourse by which the homosexual writer constructed a presence.⁶ Walter Pater's strategic response to a panicked and stifled academic career was to expose the structures of opposition by which homosexual culture realized itself in the Renaissance; this history was inscribed both *within* and *across* the conventions of "straight" discourses of history, aesthetics, perception. Henry James's responses were more complex: fear of affiliation with a received homotext prompted an initial silence, which was subverted—constructively and perhaps intentionally—by an unremitting habit of allusion, reiteration, reinscription of the feared text. The texts produced by both Pater and James reveal the influence of anxiety, are in fact *records* of that anxiety, and are proof that the response to panic is complex and tortuous.

II. Oculocentrism: Unmasking Affiliation

Because James's affiliation with Pater is signalled through a shared lexicon of visuality, I shall examine the ways in which gendered anxiety shaped both the deployment and the discursive production of the homosexual gaze. The multiple desires of closeted gay writers—to appreciate/appropriate the male body, to suggest the possibilities of pleasure, to ally themselves with the historical and literary body of homosexuality, *to write themselves into the world*—are most usefully theorized as an affirmative energy, a will-to-power. As these desires erupt into discourse, they subvert a narrative stance which might be described as the intentional, self-protective silence born of panic. If the agency of desire finds a site in optical engagement, a play of the eyes by which the subject signals his response to the solicitation of the visible world, then the homotext is a matrix of competing functions: the speculative "I" in the text peers through and undermines the protective mask of reticence and evasion. Yet, the functions of eye and mask are not thoroughly dichotomous. As Jeffrey Meyers has argued,

the clandestine predilections of homosexual [writers] are both an obstacle and a stimulus to art, and lead to a creative tension between repression and expression. The [texts] become a raid on inarticulate feelings, and force the authors to find a language of . . . obliqueness and indirection. (1)

According to Stuart Kellogg, "the condition of being a stranger makes homosexual writers keen observers of the world around them, indeed doubly keen, for a false step can be literally fatal in an antihomosexual environment" (7). Accommodating both desire and anxiety, perceptual activity is at once expressive, receptive and apprehensive; "to apprehend"—to seize and to fear—denotes activities that co-exist uneasily.

The most important word in the shared lexicons of Pater and James is *impression*, which denotes, simply, the mark upon the perceiving sensibility. Pater argues, in the preface to *The Renaissance* (1873), that the goal of the aesthetic critic is "to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly" (xix). James, in "The Art of Fiction" (1884), asserts that "impressions *are* experience, just as . . . they are the very air we breathe" (53); since "all life solicits" the writer, "the province of art is . . . all observation, all vision," which demands that the artist possess "a capacity for receiving straight impressions" (59). Their shared commitment to the transparent, objective, "straight" impression, to the illusion of a centred perceiving subject, arises from an anxious desire to give the marginalized gazer interpretative control over transitory phenomena. But, like "apprehension," "impression" signals not merely pleasurable response, but the wariness of potential terror. John Carlos Rowe is helpful in this connection: the impression, he argues, "is always an act of physical violence, a 'pressing into or upon' . . . that marks a seizure and enslavement." This impression, this noun which cannot suppress its verbal origin, constitutes a moment in which "language finds its own origins . . . its necessity as a system of defenses" (192-4). The defensive implications of impression-reception can be detected in Pater's and James's autobiographical writings, where a disturbing, apprehensive strain underlies the pleasures of watching.

Both Pater's *The Child in the House* (1878) and James's *A Small Boy and Others* (1907) trace the education of perceptual sensibility, "the discovery of our powers" (*Child* 226), the "education [that] avails for the intelligence [by stirring] some subjective passion" (*Small Boy* 17). Pater

reconstructs "two streams of impressions, the sentiments of beauty and pain—recognitions of the visible, tangible, audible loveliness of things, as a very real and somewhat tyrannous element in them—and of the sorrow of the world. . . ." Thus, alongside or beneath the pleasurable reception of "bright colour and choice form—the sweet curvings, for instance, of the lips of those who seemed to him comely persons" there exists "an almost diseased sensibility to the spectacle of suffering" (*Child* 228). This dualistic layering of beauty and tyranny, read by the susceptible eye as "this pressure . . . of the sensible world" (*Child* 233), finds a curious analogue in James's "watching" of his younger self "watching," in which the elder James apprehends the loneliness in store for the sentient child, already aware of the bleakness of the world and the inevitability of human suffering:

I . . . watch the small boy dawdle and gape again, I smell the cold dusty paint and iron as the rails of the Eighteenth Street corner rub his contemplative nose, and, feeling him foredoomed, withhold from him no grain of my sympathy. He is a convenient little image or warning of all that was to be for him, and he might well have been happier than he was. For there was the very pattern and measure of all he was to demand: just to *be* somewhere—almost anywhere would do—and somehow receive an impression or an accession, feel a relation or a vibration. (*Small Boy* 16-17)

Although it is not my wish to essentialize homosexual modes of visual engagement, I am struck by the conjunction of passivity and apprehension which informs both Pater's and James's discourses on visuality. If fearful receptivity may be said to constitute a residue which mitigates—or perhaps dismantles—the pleasure of seeing, then surely the will-to-power, the Freudian phallic gaze, is a mode of control not readily available to these homosexual men. Toril Moi summarizes Freud's argument concisely: Freud

links the act of seeing to anal *activity*, which he sees as expressing a desire for mastery or for the exercise of power over one's (libidinal) objects. . . . Thus the gaze enacts the voyeur's desire for sadistic power, in which the object of the gaze is cast as its passive, masochistic, feminine victim. (180)

This is usefully supplemented by Jane Gallop's trope, *oculocentrism*, a privileging of sight over the other senses, which, she argues, "supports and unifies phallogocentric, sexual theory. . . . every viewing of the subject will have always been according to phallogocentric standards."

I have argued, at the outset of this section, that the location of desire in the eyes is a will-to-power, and there are moments in James's writing which corroborate these feminist readings of Freud. Certainly, his prefaces to the New York edition articulate strategies of authorial control that are phallogocentric: the author, he confesses, is "addicted to seeing 'through'—one thing through another, accordingly, and still other things through *that*" (1168). But such phallogocentric boastings of controlling the seen object are merely intentionalist illusions, themselves born of a profoundly anxious desire. Seeing in James's texts is always hazardous and often impotent: the spectator's desire for the power born of knowledge is more often than not frustrated by the resistance of visually-apprehended signs to decoding. Anxiety is thus compounded. Furthermore, in the light of my investigations of the connections between impression and apprehension, it seems evident that the perceiving homosexual subject is, to use the terms of Freud's analysis, feminized: he becomes the passive, masochistic victim, not the controller but the controlled.

My revisionist appropriation of oculocentrism may seem to have reached an impasse: on the one hand, I maintain that the location of homosexual desire(s) in optical perception constitutes a masculine desire for power which subverts an evasive, fearful narrative stance; on the other, I argue that apprehension "feminizes" the gaze, or subverts the subversion. The way out of this potential impasse is to refer the argument to homosexual experience and to return to the extraordinarily useful trope of the mask. I am struck by the analogy between the textual representation of the impression, the expressive/apprehensive functions of the textualized eye, and the strategies of *cruising*, an essentially optical procedure of negotiating sexual contact within the homosexual subculture. In all contexts, especially those that are dangerously "straight," the gay man extends or responds to sexual invitation through an oblique direction of his gaze. To stare directly is both rude and potentially dangerous; the operation is one of subtle hesitation, in which the flickering visual attention signals interest, availability, and the fear of rejection or violence. This apprehension is at once expressive of the subject's fear and

responsive to the visual signals returned by the object. The negotiation concludes with either a mutually averted gaze or an intensified duration of optical contact, followed by the deployment of other, more direct communicative gestures. Crucially, it is *only* at this point that the face becomes expressive, ceases to be a blankly disinterested mask.

The subtle play of glances *through* the mask of repression is the essential mode of the homotext, the operation by which the writer may be said to cruise the reader and thus to construct his receptive community. According to Roland Barthes, the act of cruising the reader opens in the text a potential "site of bliss."⁷ From the perspective of gay literary history, it is highly significant that Pater's contemporaries frequently relied upon the metaphor of the mask to define his textual reticence. George Moore observed in 1904 that Pater's "instinct was never to show himself to the world except in a carefully considered attitude and light," but conceded that "in writing . . . the social mask dropped a little" ("Avowals" 109-10). Arthur Symons remembered in 1906 "the timid and yet scrutinising eyes, . . . the whole outer mask, in short, worn for protection and out of courtesy" (123-4). The function of the metaphor in Symons's discourse is more complex; he seems to have recognized both the gendered implications of the mask, and the fact that a mask is not simply an erasure or a concealment of personality: to the extent that it is a *construction*, it arises from desire even while it disguises its origins. Therefore, he concludes, the very evasions of Pater's inscriptions are "moulded upon the inner truth of nature like a mask moulded upon the features which it covers" (124).

James's contribution to the trope of the mask serves two contradictory functions: he respects its intent to preserve personal secrecy, yet James also "unmasks" Pater's presence. Writing to Edmund Gosse in 1894, shortly after Pater's death, he corroborates Gosse's protective memorial essay—in which Gosse asserts that Pater "retreated, as into a fortress, and enclosed himself in a sort of solemn effeminancy" (Gosse 195)—noting how "negative and faintly-grey he, after all telling, remains! . . . He is the mask without the face." Yet, James asserts that Pater can "show you, in the darkness, where you can strike a light: he shines in the uneasy gloom" (*Letters* 492). Because James relies upon a lexicon of illumination—the images that Pater privileged in his admiration of the Renaissance, Hellenism, and indeed all manifestations of human dignity—he may be

read, by Gosse and by other members of the homosexual community, as acknowledging affiliation. Indeed, the subtlety and indirection of James's discourse—his reliance upon shared images rather than explicit statement—responds *in kind* to Pater's signals and respects the discretion of the homosexual subculture. James, in effect, has been cruised, and we who decode the signals, who participate in the field of discursive strategy, are cruised, centred, affiliated.

If Henry James's relation to Pater was that of *hypocrite lecteur*, he had good reasons to avoid more explicit affiliation: to be associated with Pater was to invite the label of "aesthete," which the popular imagination readily translated as "homosexual" (Seiler xxvii). Perhaps the most useful index of Pater's dangerous reputation is the thwarting of his academic career by the Oxford establishment. Indeed, the obstacles that prevented Pater's advancement are evidence of Sedgwick's theory that male homosocial bonding operates by strategies of exclusion and disempowerment of the homosexual. Pater took up a classical fellowship at Brasenose College in 1864, and as Michael Levey points out, his career had "already ended" (93). When *The Renaissance* was attacked by John Wordsworth, Pater missed a routine promotion. When he stood for a Professorship of Poetry in 1876, he was forced to withdraw by Benjamin Jowett, Master of Balliol, who threatened to disclose some incriminating letters that Pater had written to an undergraduate. The threat of exposure was a permanent stifling of Pater's academic ambition, for even Jowett's biographer concedes that he was widely regarded as "an unscrupulous enemy" (Faber 380). Finally, according to Harold Bloom, Pater's "ultimate bitterness" came in 1885, when Ruskin resigned as Slade Professor of Fine Art and Pater's candidacy was rejected (Bloom, "Introduction" xvi). It seems reasonable to assert that Pater was defined as homosexual and therefore excluded from the paths of male heterosexual entitlement; as Levey concludes, "the most pervasive and most fundamentally damaging aspect of Pater's Oxford reputation" was "that there was something corrupting about him and his morals" (100). Pater's reputation was a consequence of his social and literary persona, the effeminate, reserved, mask of the aesthete; his persecutors degraded the stereotypical "homosexual," ironically, by turning a blind eye to the real site of homosexual desire, the gaze: for Pater's use of "aesthete" derives from the Greek *aisthetes*, one who perceives. Yet if the mask was subjected to indignities, the gaze

was comparatively free to inscribe, however covertly, its operations. Just as we must recover Pater from the stereotype, we must locate the gaze across the mask.

III. Writing the Homotext

In his early essay on William Morris, Pater establishes a connection between proscribed physical desire and visual sensuousness: he detects in medieval poetry a current of desire that is "defined by the absence of the beloved, choosing to be without hope . . . barren, extravagant, antinomian. It is the love . . . for the chevalier who never comes" (302); such "a passion of which the outlets are sealed," he asserts, "begets a tension of nerve, in which the sensible world comes to one with a reinforced brilliance and relief" (302-303). Here Pater articulates what would become the recurrent theme of his essays on Winckelmann, Leonardo, Botticelli, Pico della Mirandola, and Michelangelo, published between 1867 and 1871 and gathered into *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* in 1873: the antinomian struggles of writers and artists to represent their proscribed desires, their strange and intense modes of seeing, their challenges to authority. Together, they reveal the subversive currents of energy that, for Pater, constituted Renaissance humanism, "its intimacy, its languid sweetness, its rebellion, . . . its care for physical beauty, its worship of the body" (TR 4).

Richard Dellamora has traced both the role of explicit homoeroticism in Pater's cultural interpretations and the implicit thematic analogies which connect his explorations of heterosexual and homosexual rebellion;⁸ Dellamora's analysis supports my view of *The Renaissance* as an essentially gay reading of history. If we investigate the evolution of Pater's homotext, it seems apparent that his argument found its origin and its centre in the essays on Winckelmann and Leonardo, the earliest and most explicitly gay acts of criticism. Winckelmann's writings on Greek sculpture recover for Pater "the happy light of the antique" (TR 142), a harmonious world in which "the mind has not yet learned to boast its independence of the flesh" (TR 164). While the ostensible point of Pater's essay is to celebrate the perfect union of idea and form in Greek art—"the sensuous form" which "saturates and is identical" with "the motive" (TR 164), a theme he would reinscribe in his 1877 essay, "The School of Giorgione"—the focus returns obsessively to Winckelmann's struggles

with authority and his male-oriented desire. Winckelmann, who received "nothing but an attempt at suppression from the professional guardians of learning" (TR 143), was drawn to Greek sculpture because "'its supreme beauty is rather male than female'" (TR 153); Pater explicitly centres Winckelmann's work in his overt homosexuality, arguing that his "romantic, fervid friendships with young men . . . perfected his reconciliation to the spirit of Greek sculpture" (TR 152). Pater intimates that Winckelmann's writings employed strategies of negotiation with the dominant culture, which enabled him to articulate the potential of homoerotic desire while working within the conventional discourses of art history. Winckelmann is thus constructed as an affiliated lens, a fraternal eye, which brings into focus the "victorious fairness" (TR 164) of historicized homosexuality, both "the buried fire" (TR 146) of ancient Greece and the eighteenth-century recovery of it through "the exercise of sight and touch" (TR 147).

In shifting his gaze next to Leonardo, Pater continues the work of affiliation, of connecting his own recoveries with an antinomian, subtle gay tradition. The elementary forces in Leonardo's life "of brilliant sins and exquisite amusements" (TR 85-86) were "curiosity and the desire of beauty" (TR 86). Again, while the apparent purpose of the essay is to reconstruct "Leonardo's strange veil of sight" (TR 87), Pater returns compulsively to the subversive Leonardo, in whose painting "the ostensible subject is used, not as a matter for definite pictorial realisation" (TR 93), but rather as "the pretext for a kind of work which carries one altogether beyond the range of its conventional associations" (TR 94). Both *within* and *across* the ostensible subject of the painting, whether sacred or profane, Leonardo discovers a "cryptic language for fancies all his own" (TR 97), and thus inscribes a code in the "text," which like Pater's own coded gaze, can be read and historicized. The prime example of this cryptic language is *La Gioconda's* "unfathomable smile, always with a touch of something sinister in it" (TR 97). This creature of Leonardo's thought is constructed by Pater as the muse of history itself, as the ultimate expression of Leonardo's own curiosity, for she "is expressive of what . . . men had come to desire" (TR 98), that is, *knowledge* of desire itself. Mona Lisa is valorized as the phallic mother, for "as Leda, [she] was the mother of Helen of Troy, and as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary," the embodiment of history's secrets, "the secrets of the

grave" (TR 99). Like Winckelmann, the Mona Lisa provides Pater with the opportunity to construct a lens, which is also the point of intersection of multiple gazes: Leonardo's on the secrets of the past, la Gioconda's expressive gaze at Pater, Pater's responsive, cruising gaze at both. The crucial operation here seems to be a subtly suggested affinity between Leonardo's and Pater's own discovery of a muse whose knowledge of history they partially share, and whose mysterious, coded expressions they reinscribe. The interplay of gaze and mask in Pater's text, as in Leonardo's painting, generates its own knowing smile.

The imaginary portraits that eventually became *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* are gathered into an orbit of reinscription, for the subversive energies of these historical figures find structural analogues and a centre in the lives of Winckelmann and Leonardo. The revisionist agenda of Pater's homotext declares itself in the preface, where the commitment to "know[ing] one's impression as it really is" (TR xix) departs from Matthew Arnold's insistence that the aesthetic criticism is bound by an imperative "to see the object as in itself it really is." Pater's privileging of the perceiving subject and the complex act of seeing over the apprehended object undermines orthodox prescription, and metonymically signals an intention to rewrite history from an optically-centred gay perspective. Thus Pater's opposition to the heterosexually-defined moral aesthetic of Arnold and Ruskin finds historical analogues in, for example, the revolt of Abelard ("the true child of light, the humanist," oppressed by "the adherents of the poorer and narrower culture," TR 6), the high dignity of Pico (who, in "counterpoise to the increasing tendency of medieval religion to depreciate man's nature," rehabilitated "the body, the senses, the heart, the intelligence," TR 31), and so on. Cumulatively, Pater's gay historiography fosters a sympathetic *affiliation with* the subject's struggle, as opposed to the patriarchal *appropriation of* the cultural object.

In the early 1870s, the focus of Henry James's literary production was closely allied with Pater's: working primarily in the discourses of travel sketch and art criticism, James attempted to "read" the visible text of history and to express his sense of the past. His struggle to find both a perspective on Europe and a voice capable of authorizing/valorizing the subjective impression was rendered problematic by two kinds of exclusion. The first arose from James's commitment to an American point

of view on an alien culture; the second stemmed from his privileging of Ruskin and Arnold, who represented a mode of discrimination hostile to James's temperamental affinity with sensuous engagement. As a result of the tensions between identification/alienation, appreciating/evaluating, James's early texts employ divergent strategies of representation and betray ideological fissures that invite deconstruction. The fissures that reveal most about James's competing impulses are the sites of Paterian allusion, intertextual moments when Pater is given or made present in James's text only to be withdrawn and replaced by another authority. The function of Paterian references in James's writing is illuminated by Patricia Clements's exploration of Pater's own complex gestures of affiliation and detachment with the "decadent" Baudelaire. The solid textual evidence required by the critic always has to be won against the will of the writer, Clements argues; allusion and the manipulation of sub-text are "careful and consciously cultivated defenses and delicately controlled instruments of meaning" (80-81). James's inclusive gestures toward Pater, like Pater's toward Baudelaire, are made in conjunction with strong detachment and rejection. The fissure is opened up, I suggest, by gendered anxiety: the homosexual writer's desire for affiliation is countered by his fear of detection, resulting in paradoxical signals and conflicting alignments.

James's correspondence in the early 1870s provides evidence of his anxious reading of Pater. He writes to William James from Florence in May, 1873, that he "saw Pater's *Studies* in the English bookseller's window, and was inflamed to think of buying it and trying a notice. But it treats of several things I know nothing about" (391). Even this early reference contains James's dual impulses of identification and detachment: his allusion to the Paterian metaphor of the flame—which signifies, in the Conclusion to *The Renaissance*, an intense receptivity to aesthetic impressions—is given only to be withdrawn by feigning ignorance of Pater's "several" themes. James's claim of ignorance is belied by the fact that he had been writing art criticism for several years. Even more curious is the disappearance—whether by accident or suppression—of James's review of *The Renaissance*. In November of 1873, James wrote to his father, "You might mention . . . to T. S. Perry . . . that I lately sent him two reviews—Howell's *Poems* and Pater's *Studies*" (411). James's reviews of Howells was printed in *The Independent* in January, 1874, but

the review of Pater was never published and the manuscript has vanished. Again, this is curious: given the consistent demand for James's essays by the American periodical press and his dependence upon this source of revenue, it seems possible that James himself suppressed the review to erase or avoid any evidence of public affiliation with Paterian aesthetics.

The most useful intertextual evidence of James's initial response to Pater is contained in two travel essays written for Perry's *Independent* and entitled "Florentine Notes" and "Old Italian Art." Published in May and June of 1874, they were reprinted as sections three and four of "Florentine Notes" in *Transatlantic Sketches*, 1875, and extensively revised for *Italian Hours*, 1909. The first is a description of the Pitti Palace collection; James's highly subjective interpretation of a Botticelli Madonna coincides with and reenacts Pater's. The process inscribed in both texts is the gay male writer's distinctly sympathetic identification with the mother as the victim of patriarchal exploitation. Their shared reading of Mary's subjection runs counter to traditional male perspectives on motherhood which deny the woman's voice and limit her agency. Julia Kristeva argues that the male discourses of science and theology are "not concerned with the subject, the mother as site of her proceedings;" the woman's body, she continues, is constructed to serve as a "filter . . . a thoroughfare, a threshold where 'nature' confronts 'culture.' To imagine that there is someone in that filter—such is the source of religious mystifications . . . the fantasy of the so-called Phallic Mother" (Kristeva 238-38). Pater and James conceive a person in that filter, but because their "mystifications" recognize *not* the mother's power but rather her own recognition of her disempowerment, and Botticelli's recognition of that, they construct not a phallic mother, but rather a subject position similar to their own.

Botticelli's sympathy for the woman as subject is traced by Pater as "the real matter of the picture through the veil of its ostensible subject" (TR 39). Pater links the Madonnas, who "shrink from the pressure of the divine child, and plead in unmistakable undertones for a warmer, lower humanity" (47) to the Uffizi Venus's "sorrow . . . at the thought of the whole long day of love yet to come" (46). All of Botticelli's representations of "profane and sacred persons" are infused with "a sentiment of ineffable melancholy, . . . saddened perpetually by the shadow upon them of the great things from which they shrink" (43). Pater's reading stresses

Mary's consciousness of patriarchal exploitation; she resists the "intolerable honour" (45). Pater's summary interpretation of Botticelli's various yet uniformly sentient Madonnas provided James's essential source:

Hardly any collection of note is without one of these circular pictures. . . Perhaps you have sometimes wondered why those peevish-looking Madonnas, conformed to no acknowledged or obvious type of beauty, attract you more and more, and often come back to you. . . . For with Botticelli she too, though she holds in her hands the "Desire of all nations," is one of those who are neither for Jehovah nor for His enemies; and her choice is on her face. The white light on it is cast up hard and cheerless from below, as when snow lies upon the ground. . . . Her trouble is in the very caress of the mysterious child, whose gaze is always far from her, and who has already that sweet look of devotion which men have never been able altogether to love. . . . (44)

James borrows Pater's informal term of "circular picture" to describe the *tondo* of the Madonna and child in the Pitti Palace; more significantly, the Paterian references—the coldness suggested by "white light," the resentment expressed by the "peevish Madonna," and the "ineffable melancholy" of the composition—are carefully woven into James's representation of

one of the frequent circular pictures of the great Botticelli—a Madonna, chilled with tragic prescience, laying a pale cheek against that of a blighted Infant. Such a melancholy mother as this of Botticelli would have strangled her baby in its cradle to rescue it from the future. (*Sketches* 288-9)

Yet much of James's activity in the remainder of this essay and in its companion text, "Old Italian Art," is to inscribe his anxiety arising from this intertextual alliance. Pater's position is given, then qualified, then explicitly dismissed. James initially shares Pater's commitment to discriminating the subjective impression, to realizing it distinctly: he confesses that his interpretation of Botticelli "depends vastly on one's mood—as a traveller's impressions do, generally, to a degree which those who give them to the world would do well more explicitly to declare" (293). This note of impatience with subjective readings signals an imminent detachment from the Paterian position, and James's discourse

subsequently opens the fissure between self and *pater*. The paradox of identification and withdrawal finds a convenient analogue in James's assertion that "we have our hours of expansion and contraction; so it is that in museums we are alternate radicals and conservatives. On some days we ask but to be somewhat sensibly affected; on others, Ruskin-haunted, to be edified" (295). James replaced "edified" with "spiritually steadied" in 1909, but preserved the collision between Pater and "sensible affection" on the one hand, and Ruskin and moral instruction on the other.

If James undermines his Paterian source in this essay, he denies it altogether in the next, which, incidentally, contains the single explicit reference to Pater in James's entire canon. But again, the strategies of denial betray a paradoxical identification through James's reinscription of the key words of Pater's lexicon:

It is difficult to speak adequately, perhaps even intelligibly, of Sandro Botticelli. An accomplished critic (Mr. Pater in his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*) has lately done so, on the whole more eloquently than conclusively. . . . Putting aside whatever seems too recondite in Mr. Pater's interpretation, it is evidence of the painter's power that he has furnished so fastidious a critic so inspiring a theme. . . . Alone among the painters of his time, he seems to me to possess invention. (298-9)

In revising this passage for *Italian Hours*, James deleted the derogatory adverbs that suggest Pater's privileging of stylistic elegance over interpretative conclusiveness, but maintains his focus on Botticelli's *invention*, a concept that is quite possibly derived from Pater's view of Leonardo's career as "one prolonged rapture or ecstasy of invention" (*TR* 97).

It might be objected that James's visual reading of Botticelli through the lens of Pater's text provides slim evidence of genuine influence or dialogue; I would counter that objection by pointing out, first, that this intertextual moment is proof that James read Pater in the early 1870s; secondly, that James's contradictory responses of identification and detachment reveal an anxiety whose structure would be repeated; and finally, that this is but one instance of how Pater shaped James's representations of gender. I believe that many of James's imaginary portraits of women's experience have strong affinities with Paterian

sources: Christina Light, Claire de Cintré, Isabel Archer, to name but three of James's exploited female characters, share the sentience of Botticelli's Madonnas in their struggles to articulate the conditions of their disempowerment. And James's powerful women, like Pater's *Gioconda*, have as their germinal principle the sinister smile of knowledge, "expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire" (*TR* 98); one thinks immediately of Madame Merle, Kate Croy, Charlotte Stant.⁹

Especially in James's early fiction, male friendship is both latently sexual and intensely gynophobic. Pater's Winkelmann, who has known "many young men more beautiful than Guido's archangel" (*TR* 152), who with noble motive "fingers those pagan marbles with unsinged hands, with no sense of shame or loss" (177) might find an object of desire in Roderick Hudson, the beautiful sculptor of James's 1875 novel. Richard Ellmann argues that James recognized Pater's covert celebration of homosexuality, that he "took alarm, that he heard the incriminating footfalls, that he wished to inscribe himself as neither aesthetic nor homosexual." James's fear prompted him, says Ellmann, to represent gay men "negatively under the guise of aesthetes" (211). Ellmann's reading is profoundly homophobic; he grasps James's fear, but not the more complex *structures of anxiety*, the dual impulses of identification and detachment, that I have explored here. For Roderick Hudson is both immensely attractive and immediately recognizable as Paterian. His visual susceptibility—"the vivacity of his perceptions, the audacity of his imagination, the picturesqueness of his phrase . . . his unfailing impulse to share every . . . impression with his friend"—renders him a Paterian ideal and gives Rowland Mallett a comradeship which is "a pure felicity, . . . interfused with a deeper amenity" (226). Roderick's theories of the plastic relationship between impression and execution constantly betray their Paterian source. Pater's insistence that human experience is "the passage and dissolution of impressions," is defined by "that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves" (*TR* 188), is reinscribed in Roderick's speculations about the impermanence of intense visual apprehensions.

What becomes of all our emotions, our impressions . . . ? There are twenty moments a week—a day, for that matter, some days—that seem supreme, twenty impressions that seem ultimate. . . . But others come

treading on their heels and sweeping them along, and they all melt like water into water. . . . (224)

Roderick, like the heroes of Pater's Renaissance, defines himself as "a Hellenist," who "care[s] only for perfect beauty" (242). To distance himself from Pater's celebration of irresponsible Hellenism and its gendered implications, James satirizes Hudson as weak and irresponsible. Again, what is of importance is not simply the web of affiliating allusion or the distancing strategies, but their anxious interplay. James's dialogue with Pater does not end with *Roderick Hudson*, nor do his indecisive, anxious modes of representing visuality; the sinister irresponsibility of Gilbert Osmond finds a counterbalance in the absorbed, negatively capable gaze of Lambert Strether.

In addition to the *figural* gendering of visuality, James increasingly draws from Pater a *theoretical* lexicon which enabled him to link the artist's impression-reception to his production. I have already suggested the Paterian base of "The Art of Fiction;" the affiliation becomes explicitly marked in their evaluations of Flaubert. Pater began to construct an anti-figural, transparent theory of representation in his 1877 essay, "The School of Giorgione," where he argues that in "consummate" works of art, "the end is not distinct from the means, the form from the matter, the subject from the expression; they inhere in and completely saturate each other" (*TR* 109). Pater represents the artist's struggle to achieve the perfect identification of matter and form as art's constant aspiration "towards the condition of music" (106). The ability of representative signs to become "what [they signify]," Pater argued in his 1888 essay on "Style," "depends upon the original unity, the vital wholeness and intensity, of the initiatory apprehension or view." This struggle reaches its perfection in the work of Flaubert, who "might perhaps rank as the martyr of literary style" (*Appreciations* 22, 27). James never ceased to insist that fiction have moral resonance, but increasingly emphasized fiction's imperative to represent visual susceptibility. If this requirement finds early articulation in "The Art of Fiction," it merges with Pater's discourse in James's own writings on Flaubert. In 1893, even while criticizing Flaubert for the paucity of his fictional themes, he applauds "those firm thin plates of gold which constitute the leaves of his books" (312); Flaubert, he concludes, stands "as one of the *martyrs* of the plastic idea" (313). This point of intersection with Pater's text expands in his

1902 evaluation of Flaubert, where Pater's definition of the "consummate" work of art is reinscribed: Flaubert, "confers" on the "sufficiently vulgar elements" of *Madame Bovary*, James insists,

a final unsurpassable form. The form is in *itself* as interesting, as active, as much of the essence of the subject as the idea, and yet so close is its fit and so inseparable its life that we catch it at no moment on any errand of its own. . . . The work . . . is ideally *done*, and . . . it shows that in such doing eternal beauty may dwell. (325)

My concern in juxtaposing these readings of Flaubert is not merely to demonstrate the shared lexicon and theoretical argument, but rather to suggest that the "martyrology" of James and Pater subtly articulates their own subject-positions of marginalized otherness. Obviously, James and Pater find analogues for their own struggles with language in Flaubert's strenuous quest for formal perfection. Less obvious is the homosexual writer's paradoxically ascetic commitment to representing sensual experience: Flaubert's solitary anguish is perhaps a heterosexual equivalent of their own closeted desires, and together they confront the anti-aesthetic bias of bourgeois culture by the play of the textual eye, at once the site of desire and the strategy of "normalizing" desire's imperatives.

It is apparent that recovering acts of reading and reinscription within gay literary history requires more than source-hunting. Grasping the systole/diastole structures of anxiety—the fear of detection which accompanies and constrains the impulse to affiliation, the subtle interplay of mask and gaze—is necessary if the gay critic is to reappropriate and historicize homosexual panic. For this panic is not merely a useful trope in understanding the oppressive mechanisms of the larger gender system; its experience by gay men has profoundly affected both the construction of a gay literary history and its willful concealment. To argue that this history has been suppressed solely by a homophobic academy is politically naïve; homosexual writers themselves have contributed to its occlusion. So in James's complex and contradictory dialogue with Pater, as in Roland Barthes's autobiography, there are two texts:

Text I is reactive, moved by indignations, fears, unspoken rejoinders, minor paranoid, defenses, scenes. Text II is active, moved by pleasure.

But as it is written, . . . Text I becomes active too, whereupon it loses its reactive skin. (43)

The function of the gay critic, I maintain, is to remove this defensive mask, this "reactive skin" of the text.

My intention in this article has been not merely to subvert traditional and homophobic modes of reconstructing literary history, but to supplement the spoken with the unspoken, to give panic a structure and a voice. Alice Walker argues that "each writer writes the missing parts to the other writer's story" (49); the same might be argued of the function of criticism. In recovering the *pater* of James's text, one can recuperate a buried continuity, reconstruct an obscured context, and appropriate for one's political consciousness the historical experience of anxiety. As James observes in his preface to *In the Cage*, "to criticise is to appreciate, to appropriate, to take intellectual possession, to establish in fine a *relation* with the criticised thing and make it one's own" (1169). For James's rewriting of Pater is not merely the inscription of a visually-situated desire that had no other site; it is, perhaps more importantly, the act of constructing a meaningful relation between the received text and one's own experience.

NOTES

1. At the outset of *The Ambassadors*, James stresses the dualistic impulses and allegiances that characterize the perceptions of his hero. Lambert Strether, he writes, "was burdened . . . with the oddity of a double consciousness. There was detachment in his zeal and curiosity in his indifference."
2. In the futuristic America of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* homosexuals are convicted of "gender treachery" and executed.
3. Weeks, in *Sex, Politics and Society* observes of momentous events like the Oscar Wilde trial that "Perhaps even more important than the individual persecutions were the outbursts of moral panic. . . . The Wilde trials were in effect labelling processes of a most explicit kind drawing a clear border between acceptable and abhorrent behaviour." Yet, "the new public salience of homosexuality" created "a new sense of identity amongst many homosexual individuals" (103).
4. The debate is contained in *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989). It was instigated by David van Leer's "The Beast of the Closet: homosociality and the Pathology of Manhood," 587-605; sustained in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's response, "Tide and Trust," 745-57;

and concluded with van Leer's "Trust and Tide," 758-61. In response to van Leer's accusations that Sedgwick's epistemology of the nineteenth-century closet is naïve, and that her argument's "disenfranchisement of homosexuals" is "homophobic" (603), Sedgwick argues that van Leer's "border-policing" opens a "crisis in a conscientious discursive community" (746). His rupture of the fabric of trust, Sedgwick continues, leads van Leer to exclude a feminist contribution to gay studies, to "recast virtually every question internal to, as well as surrounding, gay male identity, history, theory, politics, and definition, precisely as the question of 'woman' and her proper place (outside)" (756). The value of van Leer's deconstruction resides in its implicit concern that a feminist agenda was required to empower homotextual work, to give it academic currency. Subsequent quotations from the *Critical Inquiry* articles are noted parenthetically in the text; quotations from Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* are signalled with the abbreviation *BM*, while those from Sedgwick's "The Beast of the Closet: James and the Writing of Homosexual Panic" are signalled with the abbreviation *BC*.

5. In Sedgwick's discourse, "homosocial" denominates the entire continuum of same-gender relations; "male homosexual panic"—the "straight" man's fear that his bonds will be perceived as homosexual—occupies a space opened by the radically disruptive function of homophobia in the fabric of male relations. According to Sedgwick, this becomes clear when the structure of men's relations is contrasted to that of women's: she celebrates an "intelligible continuum of aims, emotions and valuations [which] links lesbianism with the other forms of women's attention to women." See *BM* 2.
6. According to Foucault, "the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence and literature of a whole series of discourses on . . . homosexuality . . . made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged . . ." (*History of Sexuality* 101). Italics mine.
7. Barthes explains the textual strategies of cruising in *The Pleasure of the Text*: "Does writing in pleasure guarantee—guarantee me, the writer—my reader's pleasure? Not at all. I must seek out this reader (must 'cruise' him) *without knowing where he is*. A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader's 'person' that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire . . ." (4).
8. In his essay published in *Browning Institute Studies*, Dellamora argues that "Pater's affiliation with Winckelmann" was based on a shared "sense of constraint in an impoverished and unsympathetic northern environment . . . heightened by . . . sexual difference" (64). Dellamora extends his analysis of how implicit homoeroticism plays a role in Pater's cultural interpretation in his essay published in *Literary Visions of Homosexuality*: Pater "saw homoerotic interpretation as a means of affiliation whereby homosexuals in different times and places may confirm their experience and use it as a means of access to alien cultures" (148).
9. Although no literary relationship has been more *suppressed*—erased or depoliticized—than that of James and Pater, a few critics have acknowledged a limited

connection, usually with the aim of asserting James's satiric correction of Pater (a move that Bloom might call "tessera"). Djwa limits Pater's influential work to the hyperbole of the Conclusion to *The Renaissance* and argues that Isabel Archer's education teaches her "the danger of divorcing 'impressions' from 'truth' and 'experience'" (83). Both her reduction of Pater to "aestheticism alone" (73) and her insistence that James's revision of Pater is ironic are serious misreadings. Lynda S. Boren detects a similar repudiation of Pater: without exploring the politics of gender, she locates the sources of "those sinister, archetypal innuendos that [characterize] Madame Merle" in Pater's "persistent rapture on the Mona Lisa" (100). She argues too that James "attacks the esthetics of Pater's philosophy" through his construction of Gilbert Osmond. Tintner asserts that James rejected the "egotism and antihumanism" at the "center of [Pater's] single-minded aestheticism" (159). The work of these critics provides recent instances of an academic constant: the determination to re/press James into the service of heterosexist canonicity by exaggerating his abhorrence of a (misconstructed) Paterian amoral aesthetic. Their tacit determination to see James's anxiety as a "right," necessary and uncomplicated repudiation of a "narrow" aesthetic (an aesthetic inextricably associated with homotextual modes of seeing), misrepresents James's problematic responses.

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