Andrew Eastham

Aesthetic Afterlives

Irony, Literary Modernity and the Ends of Beauty

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In memory of Mamie Issott

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

Walter Pater

R	*The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980)
Ap	*Appreciations* (London: Macmillan, 1910)
MS	*Miscellaneous Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1910)
GS	*Greek Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1910)
PP	*Plato and Platonism* (London: Macmillan, 1910)

Henry James

PL	*The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Geoffrey Moore (London: Penguin, 1984)
Am	*The American* (London: Penguin, 1995)
TM	*The Tragic Muse*, ed. Philip Horne (London: Penguin, 1995)
WD	*The Wings of a Dove*, ed. John Bayley (London: Penguin, 1986)
GB	*The Golden Bowl*, ed. Virginia Llewellyn Smith (Oxford: Oxford, 2005)

Others

A	G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)
DG	Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. Robert Mighall (London: Penguin, 2003)
H	Vernon Lee, *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, ed. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Broadview, 2010)
Notebooks	*The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*, ed. Margaret Scott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997)
Stories	Katherine Mansfield, *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Penguin, 1981)
WL	D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love*, ed. Mark Kinkead-Weekes (London: Penguin, 2000)

R	D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, ed. Mark Kinkead-Weekes (London: Penguin, 1995)
B	Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London: Penguin, 1962)
T	Samuel Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: Picador, 1979)
DW	Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986)

Introduction

Victorian Aestheticism was both a radical insistence on the transformation of contemporary life and a ghostly afterlife of an imaginary Hellenic ideal. It was both a heightened consciousness of aesthetic modernity and its negation. Modernist culture was equally riven, between a primitivist affirmation of vitality that rejected fin de siècle Aestheticism as the manifestation of degeneracy and a model of cosmopolitan existence; detached, urbane, capable of maintaining its powers of discrimination within a culture of fragments. This cosmopolitan consciousness was one of the cultural legacies of Victorian Aestheticism that Modernism had considerable difficulty in acknowledging. In its rush to blast all vestiges of the Victorian, it was frequently blind to its own status as an afterlife of fin de siècle sensibility and form. Victorian Aestheticism, in contrast, saw itself from the outset as belated, looking back to the models of classical Greece, Renaissance Italy and German Romanticism for an ideal of literary form and an image of an aesthetic life, realized as an aspiration towards a music that had not yet been invented. Yet this same aspiration persisted in the twentieth century, where it became more spectral, a reminiscence of a forgotten culture, anxious of its own grounds while still reanimating the ideal of beauty, now visible as an apparition or relic of the Victorian era.

Aesthetic Afterlives is an account of this cultural legacy which gives a fundamental role to Walter Pater's work and influence. *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) was for Oscar Wilde the 'golden book' that carried the possibility of a renaissance of beauty within and against the conditions of the nineteenth century. In spite of Pater's deep association with the visual culture of the Renaissance and his famous statement that '*all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music*',[1] the elliptical prose of *The Renaissance* set a model for literary modernity both in style and philosophy. From his earliest work, a position of epistemological scepticism informed a 'relative spirit', an openness towards fragile and evanescent impressions and a suspicion towards habitual identities.[2] But Pater's most famous statements had by their very nature a tenuous afterlife in which the face, outline and identity of their author was prone to disappear. His 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance* attempted to recuperate the ideal of beauty according to its transience and ephemerality. Faced with an onslaught of dissolving impressions, aesthetic subjectivity is itself 'a tremulous

wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream', as if the artistic personality is inspired to compulsively mimic the transient forms of modernity, incorporating its flux until it is close to dissolution, playing dead in order to accentuate the drama in which it is re-formed. What this consciousness retains is 'a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by' (*R*, 188), and Pater would continually return to this idea of the aesthetic personality, art work and moment of beauty as relics, ghosts or spectral forms. Angela Leighton has commented suggestively on the inner contradiction of this metaphor; 'even that potentially hard and fast relic (relics are usually durable) is on the way out, like the moments it tries to commemorate'.[3] But Pater's emphasis on decomposition and disappearance was also part of a refusal to be bound to Victorian moral and sexual identities and even to the object of art as a stable and consistent form. This was the moment where aesthetic subjectivity declared its independence and announced itself as the source of a more liberal mode of life, freer than art itself. Yet such a radical act of separation would be the source of a melancholia that is felt throughout this account of Aestheticism's afterlives. The more acute the sense of transience, the greater the need for a protective wall to isolate aesthetic subjectivity from the process of decomposition. It was in this recoil from the expansive and fragile realm of aesthetic sensation that a more refined, distant and attenuated model of the aesthetic personality emerged, but this was a defensive formation as much as a necessary assertion of freedom. When the vision of art's emancipation congealed into the performance of detachment, a compulsive irony became Aestheticism's most discernable legacy.

In the history of Aestheticism's afterlives, a struggle emerges between the necessary defence of an autonomous and detached aesthetic realm and a contrary affirmation of beauty as an uncontainable force of transient life. Pater's evocation of 'birth and gesture and death and the springing of violets from the grave' (*R*, 186) was revived unconsciously, in a quite different way, in the vision of aesthetic modernity that Adorno evoked in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970). Almost a century after Pater's aesthetic carpe diem, Adorno described artistic beauty according to the analogy of fireworks, the prototype of all incandescent appearance, 'a script that flashes up, vanishes, and indeed cannot be read for its meaning'.[4] Fireworks achieve the condition of music, in the sense that they are transient bursts that exist for that moment in the air, but they also resemble more than any artistic media the state of an apparition. Aestheticism was always concerned with afterlives, apparitions and spectres of historical moments. Its own moment appeared to be a script that flashed upon the Victorian fin de siècle and quickly vanished, partly though the disciplinary measures meted out on Wilde and partly through its incorporation into the spectacle of consumer society. But its afterlife has often been most acute in the literature that has attempted to reject or contain it. *Aesthetic Afterlives* is a narrative of a disenchantment and persistence in which an original affirmation

of aesthetic renaissance is quickly hindered by doubt; yet it continues to weave the afterimage of a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it.

The history of Victorian Aestheticism can be read as an evolutionary narrative towards the self-conscious declaration of aesthetic independence we find in Pater's 'Conclusion'. While it drew its theoretical bearings from German idealism, its cultural vision was rooted in an English cultural revival: the sensuous vision of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and John Ruskin's attempt to prescribe a regeneration of both artistic and spiritual work. Ruskin's gothic ideal of organic community was ultimately tied to a conservative model of a hierarchical community, but it contained a passionate critique of alienated labour that would set the model for William Morris's socialist vision of Arts and Crafts. In Ruskin's and Morris's work, craft was the emancipation of sensuous enjoyment in everyday life. More generally it promised what Rancière has called a 'politics of the redistribution of the sensible' – a politics predicated on aesthetic possibilities, since, in Stendhal's sense, beauty is the promise of happiness, the progressive realization of that ideal aesthetic state that Schiller had imagined in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1794). Yet both Ruskin and Morris denied what had been central to Schiller's vision of aesthetic education: that art must retain an autonomous sphere for the emancipation of play. Ruskin's and Morris's vision of the fate of art was a gradual shrinkage of its exclusive sphere so that its better qualities leaked out into the life-world by osmosis, while Schiller's idealist vision of aesthetic education demanded a gradual expansion of the sphere of autonomous art, so that all human activity might be a manifestation of the play-drive.[5] It should be clear that in spite of their quite different concepts of culture, these two visions meet each other at their ideal destination; Morris's *Nowhere* and Schiller's 'aesthetic state' are both utopian projections where the tension between an autonomous aesthetic sphere and the practicality of the life-world has been abolished, either by the conquest of art over life or by life's transformation on the model of artistic play. The circularity of these two aesthetic theories is perhaps what generated the increasing need for a vision of art in modernity that was equally utopian but more alert to the agonistic quality of art's condition. What was needed was a more subtle dialectics that did not look directly towards what might be thought of in Hegelian terms as the *Aufhebung* of art into life[6] but which, tarried with the negative, realized that art's promise of sensuous renewal would be experienced as an oblique and threatened possibility.

If the art object was increasingly tending to assert its own formal autonomy or abstraction as a bulwark against the contemporary, the aesthetic personality was more susceptible to the contradictions and shocks of modern life. Pater's earliest statements were acutely aware of this fragility, and the aesthetic life that he promoted inherited the fractured nature of modernity at the same time as it cultivated a state of receptivity. In his first public statement, the lecture 'Diaphaneitè' given to Oxford's Old Mortality Club in 1864, Pater affirmed a

'transparency of nature', a 'breadth and generality of character' that was open both to the shock of modernity's inchoate sensations and the pregnant possibilities of a 'forgotten culture', such as that of ancient Greece.[7] Like Matthew Arnold before him, Pater was acutely aware of the threats to the ideal Hellenic nature he was promoting; the aesthetic personality he called 'Diaphaneitè' was among those 'evanescent shades' (*MS*, 248) who must seem like a 'relic from the classical age, laid open by accident to our alien modern culture' (*MS*, 251). This aesthetic afterlife would be 'confused, jarred, disintegrated in the world' (*MS*, 249), and paradoxically, the more it achieved a 'clear crystal nature', the more its dissonance with modernity was felt. Yet in spite of this agonistic sense of the fate of art, Pater already had a vision of the aesthetic personality as a utopian possibility, and at this stage he was confident enough to pronounce that 'a majority of such would be the regeneration of the world'.

The blithe generality of Pater's utopian declaration mimics the idealism of another extraordinary first statement of aesthetic intent: the 'Earliest System Programme of Idealism' (1796), written at the high moment of German Romanticism:

> I am now convinced that the highest act of Reason, the one through which it encompasses all Ideas, is an aesthetic act, and that *truth and goodness only become sisters in beauty*. The philosopher must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet. Men without aesthetic sense is what the philosophers-of-the-letter of our times [*unsre Buchstabenphilosophen*] are. The philosophy of spirit is an aesthetic philosophy.[8]

This was likely to have been the statement of the young Hegel, but its origins are suggestively obscure. While written in Hegel's hand, it is generally thought to be a summary and affirmation of thoughts exchanged between Schelling, Hölderlin and Hegel himself. In *The Literary Absolute*, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe argued that the fragmentary nature of Hegel's juvenilia is representative of Romanticism's legacy and form.[9] For a movement that based its cultural ideal on the fragmentary condition of Greek poetry and sculpture, the 'Earliest System Programme' has a suggestive incompleteness which defies its claims to system.[10] In the *Athenaeum* project of the late 1790s Friedrich von Schlegel had promoted the ideas of total irony, fragmentary form and limitless play. In the most transient of cultural moments and the most condensed possible form, Schlegel articulated and performed a concept of literary modernity. This was based on the infinite freedom expressed in Romantic poetry, but its formal context was uniquely capacious and adaptable. Its traces are apparent in the most diverse of literary afterlives in English: in the hyperbolic Romantic self-consciousness of De Quincy's *Confessions* and Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, in Pater's cultivation of aesthetic prose, in Wilde's construction of an aesthetic personality based on epigram and ironic performance, in the fragmentary

form of modernist poetry and in the young Samuel Beckett's vision of the 'abysses' of a literature based on silence and provocation. The condition of Romantic irony was present at the inception of literary Aestheticism, but the critical reactions that it inspired had already been pre-empted in a moment of aesthetic reaction that will be fundamental to this account of Aestheticism: Hegel's critique of Romantic irony.

There is a certain historical irony in the young Hegel's association with the Romantic vision of aesthetic modernity that is typical of narratives of maturation and disavowal, but it comes to light precisely in the way that Hegel came to revive and demonize Romanticism's own concept of irony. In the introduction to his *Aesthetics* (1830),[11] Hegel turned on the primary figures of German Romanticism as the representatives of aesthetic egotism, what he saw as a spurious belief in the capacity to form the world through individual artistic will. If rhetorical irony performs the subject's subjective detachment from the statement or gesture, what Hegel saw in Romantic irony was the transcendental form of the raised eyebrow. 'Irony' was his word for the all encompassing aesthetic subjectivity that Schlegel had promoted and embodied, and with this hyperbolic and overdetermined identification of a literary trope, Hegel defined an epistemology, a moral condition and a style of being. This was the point where irony became a concept, not just a rhetorical strategy, and following this overdetermined logic, Kierkegaard would later claim that Socrates was the primal scene of world irony, effectively inventing self-conscious subjectivity as we know it.[12] Kierkegaard made these claims in his earliest work, *The Concept of Irony* (1841). This was a doctoral thesis which he later disavowed as a manifestation of rabid Hegelianism, and much of it reads like either a brilliant extended footnote or a blank pastiche of Hegel's narrative of aesthetic modernity.

In Hegel's *Aesthetics*, irony is the defining gesture and ultimate value of Romanticism. According to this diagnostic of decadence, irony is the dangerous supplement that he was forced to contain – a seed planted by Kant and nurtured by Fichtean subjectivism until it finally bloomed as a hothouse flower in the work of Friedrich von Schlegel. Schlegel's mode of Romantic irony effectively combined an aesthetic of impersonality and poetic detachment with an ideal of unconstrained play,[13] but Hegel saw this detachment as a flagrant refusal of social and ethical commitments. In what we might take as an early and prototypical critique of Aestheticism as a dehumanizing principle, Hegel associated Romantic irony with 'living as an artist and forming one's own life artistically' (*A*, 65), but in such a way that the ironist always remained detached from his elaborate performances. Irony was a moral danger in so far as this performance of detachment replaced the organic body of the community with absolute subjectivity, and Hegel rejected the 'quiescence and impotence' (*A*, 66) of the ironist as a 'source of yearning and a *morbid* beautiful soul' (*A*, 67). This sense of irony as morbid detachment and impossible desire was inherited from Goethe's parodic narrative of the

Beautiful Soul in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, and there is a clear trajectory here from 'Goethe to Gothic' (adopting Camille Paglia's phrase).[14] This gothic dimension found its moment in Victorian Aestheticism, where irony's compulsive detachment increasingly took on the spectral condition of art in modernity – a virtual dimension which became infected by the melancholy of its transitional state, divorced from both practical reason and the immediacy of beauty.

Hegel's critique of irony was to haunt the culture of Victorian Aestheticism and its afterlives. One of the reasons for this haunting was that in spite of its translation into a decadent culture of spectacle, hyper-consumption and performative detachment, Aestheticism was still derived from the most blithe and simple of idealist claims, that 'truth and goodness only become sisters in beauty'. Yet the more it promoted the autonomy of artifice and the sublime detachment of aesthetic subjectivity, the more it experienced the rent between beauty and truth. As a consequence, Victorian Aestheticism exemplified the condition that Jay Bernstein has described in *The Fate of Art* (1991) as 'memorial aesthetics'; it was a culture in mourning for the alienation of art in modernity.[15] Even in 'Diaphaneitè', Pater already had a sense of the limits of the aesthetic personality, the ease in which sensuous openness crossed over into compulsive refinement and became a more obdurate and exclusive assertion of taste. Hence his call for a style of being that maintained the 'freshness without the shallowness of taste, the range and seriousness of culture without its strain and over-consciousness' (*MS*, 250). Pater was always conscious of the risk that Aestheticism might compromise its utopian claims for art precisely in its attempt to maintain the freedom of the aesthetic personality. Yet as much as Ruskin and Morris, Pater was attempting to conceive a new vision of sensuous life. Part of Pater's uniqueness, and what makes his work the point in which an autonomous Aestheticism is constituted in English literature, is that he established his broader cultural vision on properly aesthetic terms – through a theory of the specific conditions of artistic media.

In Chapter 1, 'Walter Pater's Acoustic Space', I develop a new reading of Pater's aesthetics that re-conceptualizes his theory of music as the basis of a utopian vision of a sensuous life. In 'The School of Giorgione' (1877), Pater performed a provocative engagement with Hegel's *Aesthetics*: where Hegel saw music as the art of time, evanescent, inchoate and constantly dissolving, like the subject in Pater's 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance*; Pater saw music as uniquely the medium of space. Pater's accounts of Venetian Renaissance painting evoke the sense of music as an energy pervading the air, touching the water that flows in the fountain in a city square or the dew that glazes over a friend's eyes. The spirit of aesthetic renaissance is uniquely carried by music, the most ineffable but also the most physically direct of the arts. As the one medium that enters the body, it is the most erotic, organic and invisible art form. But 'The School of Giorgione' also narrates the emergence of art's autonomy, the struggle of genre painting to free itself from devotional purposes and the artist's

gradual emancipation from the patronage of the church. Within this changing cultural condition, music is both the type of the autonomous arts, since it has no duties to representation or the concept, and the solution to the alienated condition of the objective arts, which are both limited by their obdurate conditions in space and by their bondage to a consumer economy.

Pater developed his aesthetics of acoustic space in 'The Study of Dionysus' (1878), where he blithely disregarded the social and professional conditions of musical reproduction in order to instate a Dionysian vision of musical eroticism. Increasingly his musical ideal became associated with the evocation of an ideal pre-Enlightenment culture, prior to the separation of the artistic sphere in modernity. But this introduced a new set of aesthetic and political problems. The more Pater attempted to evoke an organic aesthetics based on the correspondences between form, matter and spirit, the more he tended to evoke an organic culture in which the individual subject was subordinated to an ideal order. Pater's final works suggest that he came to have profound doubts about the cultural politics of the music ideal that he had articulated in his Giorgionesque and Dionysian phase. In *Plato and Platonism* (1893) he argued that philosophy itself was grounded in the Pythagorean aspiration towards an ideal musical universe, but he also foresaw the political dangers in this drive towards totality. Pater's expression of doubt was tenuous and qualified, but it helps to explain an important aspect of the history and evolution of Aestheticism: the gradual retrenchment of a critical spirit which asserted individualism, cosmopolitanism and ironic subjectivity above the project of sensuous renaissance.

Towards the Victorian fin de siècle, Pater's legacy was to be manifested in surprising and spectacular ways. At the turning point between the aesthetic 1880s and the decadent 1890s, Wilde's critical dialogues stated a double demand: for an ideal of beauty, variously embodied in Hellenic sculpture, Renaissance drama and modern Impressionist painting; and for an evolution of self-conscious subjectivity towards the 'critical spirit'. In 'The Critic as Artist' (1890), Gilbert, Wilde's mouthpiece, declares that life is a failure in so far as it is 'deeply deficient in form'.[16] The duties of art demand the refinement of critical consciousness, and 'all fine imaginative work is self-conscious and deliberate'.[17] As a consequence 'every century that produces poetry is, so far, an artificial century' – like Wilde's fin de siècle, progressively moving towards the proliferation of artifice in all modes of life, at least within the coteries of the European avant-garde, which had become all the more specialized, subtle and deliberately perverse, to borrow from Arthur Symons's definition of decadence.[18] This movement towards specialization and autonomy was in part due to internal problems in the discourses of Aestheticism, but it was also a consequence of significant changes in the nature of the public sphere. The more that self-conscious spectacle became a pervasive quality of both the aesthetic avant-garde and a burgeoning consumer culture, the more that

the cultivation of ironic detachment became the defining strategy of an aesthetic personality.[19] This double process is to some extent a typical fin de siècle phenomenon: it was repeated and exaggerated in the excessive consumer spectacle of the 1980s, which was followed by such a pervasive mode of irony that literary and artistic culture might be said to have been exclusively preoccupied with an act of exculpation. After a decade of grotesque self-assertion followed an aftermath of hyper-conscious urbanity and controlled response. Much of the art of the period was calculated enough to mask its embarrassment around expressive intention and theoretically astute enough to make a counterclaim to freedom and abstraction against the cynical neoliberalism of political culture, but it lacked any coherent vision of aesthetic transformation. English literature in this period oscillated between suburban melancholia and a new urgency in the encounter with metropolitan modernity. Martin Amis developed an ironic vision of metropolitan life with an acute sense of the grotesque, but *Money* (1984), generally taken as the representative novel of its decade, chose to remain flagrantly enthralled by the excesses of the 1980s, the better to enjoy the languor of Swiftian disgust.

One of the most compelling literary reflections of the cultural politics of the 1980s is Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004), which identifies the ironic consciousness of postmodern culture with Victorian Aestheticism, situating both of these moments in the context of a belligerent economic liberalism. In Chapter 8, towards the conclusion of this study, I examine the politics of what might have been regarded as a new Aestheticism,[20] if postmodernity had not been so transparently collusive with a consumer economy. While this is the point at which my critical narrative draws to a conclusion, it was also the beginning of *Aesthetic Afterlives*. It was *The Line of Beauty* that provoked my attempt to read backwards from the end of the twentieth century to the Victorian fin de siècle, since Hollinghurst's version of James had an uncanny resemblance to my own reading of James's relationship to Aestheticism and to the critical strategies of post-Marxist aesthetics. *The Line of Beauty* is a stringent ideological exposé of Aestheticism as a strategy of collusion, and it is the compulsive irony of Hollinghurst's young Jamesian aesthete, Nick Guest, that ultimately makes him complicit in the collapse of cultural and political values. Thatcherism fabricated an ersatz idea of freedom out of 'opportunities' for consumption and class transition, while underlying this was an escalating inequality in the distribution of freedom and beauty and a confirmation of entrenched privilege. In *The Line of Beauty*, Nick Guest's claim to have a certain detachment from this politics masks his deeper investments in the culture of finance and consumption, and in an image of aristocratic privilege. Yet in spite of this narrative of collusion and disenchantment, Hollinghurst opened the question of the meaning of beauty in contemporary life, implicitly asking if Aestheticism could be rescued from postmodern consumer culture and political cynicism. The idea of beauty still carries the trace of an idealist promise,

but in Hollinghurst's critique, as much as in Hegel's, the ironic subjectivity of the aesthete stalls the possibility of a regenerative cultural vision.

If there is a limit to these disenchanted visions of the aesthetic, it is that they too easily flatten the dialectical claims that were inherent in Victorian aesthetic culture. It is quite possible to produce a convincing narrative of disintegration, where a culture based on the ideal of sensuous revival declines into the etiolated condition of decadent irony, and a number of the narratives I examine here reproduce this cultural topos, with quite different implications and purposes. Yet aesthetic culture had two essential currents from the beginning; its Dionysian affirmation of sensuous revival was an essential as its promotion of autonomy, cosmopolitan criticism and subjective play. It is worth echoing Adorno's frequently cited diagnosis of the great divide in the cultural promise of the twentieth century here, in which autonomous art and popular culture are 'torn halves of an integral freedom, to which however they do not add up'.[21] Aestheticism's democratic vision of sensuous plenitude and its insistence on autonomous ironic subjectivity do not add up; there is no way of dialectically resolving them in a facile concept of a 'third way', either aesthetically or politically. Yet they are both essential expressions of aesthetic and political freedom.

The most forceful analysis of the conflicting imperatives of the aesthetic in recent cultural theory has been Jacques Rancière's delineation of the 'two politics of aesthetics', particularly in two significant and accessible works: *The Politics of Aesthetics* and 'The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcome'.[22] Rancière makes a distinction between a 'politics of the distribution of the sensible' and a politics of autonomy. The first conceptual operation of aesthetic revolution, where art is ultimately sublated into the life-world, is exemplified by the Arts and Crafts movement, then subsequently by the Bauhaus and a variety of twentieth-century avant-garde movements.[23] The second politics of aesthetics is derived from Schiller's ekphrasis of the Juno Ludovisi – the statue of the Greek goddess who exemplifies the idea of play and the liberal demand for an autonomous life:

> the self sufficiency of the Greek statue turns out to be the 'self-sufficiency' of a collective life that does not rend itself into separate spheres of activities, of a community where art and life, art and politics, life and politics are not severed from one another. Such is supposed to have been the Greek people whose autonomy of life is expressed in the self-containment of the statue.[24]

Close readers of Pater will be aware that Schiller's Juno Ludovisi provided the most enduring image of his aesthetic prose: the reanimation of the Mona Lisa, 'the presence that rose thus so strangely beside the waters' (*R*, 98). In Pater's gothic Aestheticism the former Greek goddess has become spectral, the spirit of the vampire and the 'symbol of the modern idea' (*R*, 99). This is a vision of

modernity as the refinement of art's autonomous space to the point where it becomes an implacable gesture of resistance. But like the diaphanous personality, the figure of the Mona Lisa is a reminiscence of an ancient culture, a relic weary of her immortality.

In Chapter 2, 'Aesthetic Vampirism', I argue that the afterlife of the Mona Lisa not only articulated but embodied the concept of irony that had been mobilized in German Romanticism and rejected by Hegel. Like the 'paradox in the world' of 'Diaphaneitè', this was an embodiment without substance – a paradoxical figure of negation – and Pater's anxieties about this absolute image of autonomy demonstrate how closely he had incorporated Hegel's critique of Romantic irony as a spectral conscience that haunted his vision of sensuous revival. His identification of Prosper Mérimée as literature's most consummate vampire cemented an association between irony and vampirism current in nineteenth-century literature, but it also carried a sophisticated theory of the constitution of aesthetic modernity. In 'Leonardo da Vinci' and 'Prosper Mérimée', Pater suggests how the ironic detachment of aesthetic subjectivity expressed a mimetic relationship with the autonomous art object. In René Girard's terms, the aesthete was subject to an all-consuming mimetic desire for the autonomous object of modernity.[25] As the aesthete's performative signature, irony was an attempt to emulate the blithe indifference of the art work, but it was also a striving to be more autonomous than art itself, to perform a negation that was irreducible to the commodity and to the consumer economy to which it was bound. This constellation of mimetic desire and envy was allegorized most famously in Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), one of the most famous documents of a gothic Aestheticism, and prior to this, with a supreme evocation of the uncanny relationship between the living and the dead, in Vernon Lee's *Hauntings* (1890). The gothic mode, epitomized in work by Pater, Wilde and Lee, was the product of a transition from utopian idealism to decadence, but it was also a fundamental aspect of Aestheticism's sense of haunting.

There are intrinsic reasons for the haunting of Aestheticism – the transient nature of art's serial impressions, the psychological fragility of the 'diaphanous' subject, the difficulty of maintaining order and stability without recourse to habitual identities or limited conceptual schemes and the mourning for the rent between the surface and spirit of beauty. In the attempt to protect an autonomous enclave for impressionable subjectivity, the Aesthete frequently defined itself against nature. In an unpublished late essay called 'The Aesthetic Life', Pater described how 'the modern mind has come to a refinement, a versatility, a spiritual cunning' in a process which mirrored the general evolution of culture; yet he admitted that this process might easily invoke the cry that its refinement was both morbid and compulsive.[26] This morbid refinement was just one of the qualities that motivated a series of attempts to contain or overcome Aestheticism in the twentieth century, from Lawrence's vitalist assault

on aesthetic detachment to Waugh's attempt to translate Aestheticism into a sacramental vision of divine intervention.

In works as diverse as *Dorian Gray*, *Women in Love* and *The Line of Beauty*, it was the function of the novel to circumscribe the space of Aestheticism, and in my narrative of the relationship between Aestheticism and the concept of irony, the novel is the dominant literary form. The novel's condition as the medium which arose in modernity as a vehicle of a largely ironic vision is particularly significant in the way it relates to the broader terrain of Aesthetic modernity. Andrew Bowie has noted that the novel had a peculiar position in Hegel's *Aesthetics*: since its matter is the 'prose of the world', it has the inherent tendency of assenting to the arbitrary above the essential, while at the same time, 'the novel keeps horizons open by its very resistance to "closure"'.[27] One of the consequences of its openness to contingency is that the novel begins to take on a role that might be regarded as post-idealist, even post-philosophical. This makes it intrinsically threatening to Hegelian schematism, and Bowie establishes an analogy here with Weber's idea of modernity as 'the "disenchantment" inherent in modern rationalization, where real technical and organizational means take over from imaginary ones, at the price of the loss of an immanently meaningful world'.[28]

There are a number of ways in which the novelists I examine in *Aesthetic Afterlives* reacted to this disenchantment. Lawrence attempted a genealogical diagnosis of the origins of disenchantment and sought its cure, isolating machinic rationalization and aesthetic subjectivity as its decadent flowers. Waugh sought the reconsecration of the aesthetic sphere in order to complete a work of mourning – for the transience of beauty and the absence of spirit. Beckett mined the condition of disintegration to its limit, seeking a sublime mode of irony while exposing that same irony to its own powers of negation. A more sober strategy is demonstrated by the writers with the most immediate affinity with British Aestheticism: Katherine Mansfield and Henry James. Both of these writers were absorbed in Pater's work in their youth; yet both came to develop a mode of ironic pragmatism in the wake of their own disenchantment with Aestheticism.

In Chapter 3 I examine Henry James's fiction as a protracted and anxious attempt to extricate himself from an anxious identification with Aestheticism. His project was in one sense self-defeating from the outset, since James was clearly the most cultivated ironic voice in late-Victorian fiction in English; yet at the same time he chose compulsive irony as the focus of his critique of Aestheticism. Jonathan Freedman makes the important point that 'the critique of aestheticism from outside aestheticism frequently shares unexpected affinities with aestheticism itself – that this critique serves all too frequently as a way of advancing a surpassing aestheticism of its own',[29] and nowhere is this more apparent than in James's attempt to ironize the aesthetic ironist. As the arch-literary ironist, James exerted such a rigorous diagnostic intelligence against the compulsive irony of Aestheticism that he threatened to demonize

what he himself practiced and perfected as one of the essential freedoms and technical resources of the novelist. Gilbert Osmond's demonic condition as the 'master of irony' who cultivates the most dangerous form of aesthetic distance left James little room to articulate his own concept of irony as part of the ethical basis of fiction. Yet there is another current in his representation of the aesthetic personality that suggests a more open sense of his own affinities with Aestheticism. James repeatedly narrated a process of transatlantic *Bildung*: a series of American characters who seek to cultivate themselves in Europe are figured in terms of a sublime aspiration towards freedom and refinement which constantly runs the risk of lapsing into an obdurate posture of detachment. My analysis of James concludes with a suggestion of how his later fiction re-imagined this process of *Bildung* in terms of a constitutive relationship between irony and the sublime. The aesthetic personalities of Milly Theale and Adam Verver are both constituted by encounters with Romantic sublimity. In these haunted late portraits, James is establishing a genealogy of Aestheticism as the remnant or remainder of Romanticism; a critique that will be echoed throughout *Aesthetic Afterlives*, particularly in my reading of Beckett's *Trilogy* (*Molloy*, *Malone Dies*, and *The Unnamable*).

The paradigm of transatlantic *Bildung* is carried into my analysis of modernist literary relations. In Chapter 4 I am as much concerned with Katherine Mansfield's autobiographical notebooks as with her fiction. Margaret Scott's complete edition of *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*[30] presents a compelling narrative of aesthetic *Bildung*; this is a form of life-writing which self-consciously treats personal development as an aesthetic project, and Mansfield's personal and cultural models for her own self-fashioning were Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. Her youthful obsession with Wilde was made up of a compact of sexual identification and artistic ambition, both in literature and music, and her own experiments in aesthetic prose mimicked the musical aspirations of Pater's 'The School of Giorgione'. Yet Mansfield radically turned against her adolescent Aestheticism with the caustic irony of her German pension stories. This was at the very moment that she had become involved in the culture of metropolitan Modernism, writing for Orage's *New Age* and later editing another modernist periodical, *Rhythm*, with her partner J. Middleton Murry. In this case irony's turn was a purgative performance of rationality and cultural maturation; what Pater saw in Leonardo da Vinci as an aesthetic way motivated by a 'series of disgusts' had instated an anti-aesthetic position. Yet in her later work, which has significant affinities with Virginia Woolf's fiction, Mansfield came to recuperate Aestheticism for the development of a modernist prose Impressionism.

A comparative reading with Virginia Woolf's fiction of the 1920s would have been illuminating here,[31] but my reading of modernist culture is necessarily circumscribed, partly for reasons of space but primarily to maintain a continual focus on the relationship between Aestheticism's sensuous afterlife and the concept of irony. All of the writers I am dealing with explicitly established

a specific relationship between Aestheticism and ironic subjectivity which was either productive or diagnostic. Mansfield is one of three writers I examine who turned their own cultivated irony against Aestheticism, the others being James and Hollinghurst, but her later work completes a voyage of return, recuperating Pater's legacy in what turns out to be a dialectical pattern of negation, containment and renewal. Mansfield's career has a tripartite pattern: aesthetic idealism was followed by disenchantment, then a subsequent attempt at the re-enchantment of things through the return to an aesthetic dimension shared with childhood. *Prelude*, her most famous story, is the vehicle of this return, but it is clear that Mansfield continued to be haunted by her own disavowal: the dream of Oscar Wilde's afterlife she recounted towards the end of her life suggests the psychic price of her ironic turn, as much as it represents the torn and *Blast*ed position of Aestheticism in modernist culture.

Disavowal is too weak a term to describe Lawrence's relationship with Aestheticism, which has clear and disturbing analogies with sacrificial violence. At the same time his work was the most powerful and brilliant attempt to establish a Dionysian vision of sensuous life in literary modernity. Chapter 5 is a close reading of *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love,* in which Lawrence established a genealogy of modern disenchantment that directly targets Aestheticism. The two novels, originally planned as 'The Sisters', project a dialectic of modernity based on the progressive realization of self-conscious spirit, the turn towards cosmopolitan culture, the simultaneous advance of machinic technology and the emergence of the modern aesthetic sphere. Once again, irony has a significant place in this cultural narrative. In *The Rainbow*, Lawrence begins to identify irony with a form of instrumental consciousness, and in *Women in Love* this is manifested in two forms; artistic bohemianism – its exemplary figures being Gudrun Brangwen and Loerke – and industrial organization, with Gerald Crich as its exemplary figure. In one sense Lawrence's novels are an answer to these twin forms of modern alienation: their very form is an expression of germinal life, with a poetic substrata that continually evokes the dimensions of experience that have been foreclosed in the institutions and experience of modernity. Yet Lawrence's way of resolving modernity's crisis demands a sacrificial mechanism. As the novel's ideological system becomes increasingly dogmatic, Lawrence's scapegoats appear to be Aestheticism and irony, both of which are demonically associated with instrumental reason. Yet ultimately it is the industrialist Gerald Crich who takes on the sacrificial position in the narrative. The aesthetes live on, albeit in a condition of 'disintegration' around which Lawrence gathers an overdetermined and politically dangerous set of cultural coordinates. Lawrence's effort of critique is so sustained, and so animated by the evocation of brilliant personalities like Gudrun Brangwen, that the afterlife of Aestheticism is as compelling a presence in his fiction as the dogmatic critique of his mouthpiece Rupert Birkin is vitriolic and repetitive.

In one of the early chapters of *Women in Love*, 'Breadalby', Lawrence articulates a critique of Bloomsbury Aestheticism as the ideological expression of the aristocracy in its moment of obsolescence. In *Brideshead Revisited*, Evelyn Waugh provides a more languid, extended and nostalgic representation of aristocracy and Aestheticism which is ultimately motivated by Catholic conversion. In Chapter 6, I demonstrate how Waugh's novel recuperates both the spirit, style and spaces of Paterian Aestheticism: Oxford, a particular moment in youth, and an experience of languor and play that constitutes the aesthetic life. The literary manifestation of this mode of being is a form of paratactic sentence that Pater brought to fruition in his ekphrastic prose, and Waugh reanimates this Paterian style in Charles Ryder's evocation of aesthetic being. The revival of Paterian parataxis progressively becomes associated with a kind of mourning, as Charles Ryder's distance from the aesthetic life of his youth becomes more acute, and this mourning is tied to a religious dimension of experience. Waugh's ultimate trajectory is towards the intervention of divine grace in a series of lives, but this is not so much an anti-aesthetic project as a reconsecration of Aestheticism, symbolized in the persistence of an art nouveau chapel and the gem-like flame of its altar lamp.

Lawrence's vitalist purgation of aesthetic irony and Waugh's Catholic transubstantiation of the aesthetic could not be more divided in spirit. But while both were written in the shadow of separate world wars, neither text bears the shadow of atrocity and barbarism that art and aesthetics were forced to reckon with in the latter half of the twentieth century. Beckett was famously promoted by Adorno as one of the writers who was capable of bearing witness to disaster by the rigor of his negation.[32] In this sense he enacted an absolute break from both Lawrence's vitalism and Waugh's sacramental aesthetic. Beckett appears to have manifested the degree zero of the aesthetic dimension. Yet within the circling negations of his trilogy of novels there is a momentary affirmation of aesthetic urbanity which is dedicated to an 'art and code of dying'. In Chapter 7 I argue that this brief gesture towards a gothic Aestheticism in *The Unnamable* is connected to a more persistent revival of German Romanticism. The narrator of Beckett's *Trilogy* takes Romantic irony to its most absolute form of circling self-negation; the result is not a habitual cultivation of detachment but a trajectory towards the sublime. Beckett's fiction has a similar project to that of the late Henry James here, since both reveal that the founding moment of an aesthetic subject 'exclusively condemned to irony' (in James's terms) is a sublime encounter. Yet Beckett went on to ironize the rhetoric of Romanticism in a different way in *Krapp's Last Tape*. This is the one dramatic work examined in this study, and it focuses a different ironic relation to any of the fictions I consider. What is specific to this play is that Beckett is staging the diary form; this is the medium of aesthetic *Bildung*, in spite of its machinic and parodic reproduction on Krapp's tape recorder. Beckett's work frames the production of aesthetic afterlives as the ghostly product of the ironic subject; in the relentless

effort to cast off former selves, the aesthetic afterlife emerges as a remainder of Romanticism which is both absurd and insubvertible.

In one sense my analysis of Beckett brings the conceptual trajectory of *Aesthetic Afterlives* to completion, but in Chapter 8 I make a historical leap towards the end of the twentieth century which is also a return to the Victorian fin de siècle and Henry James. Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* situates the late-twentieth-century distrust of the aesthetic in terms of postmodern consumer culture and the politics of Thatcherism, and in my reading of the novel I examine the ways in which Hollinghurst frames the cultural politics of the 1980s in terms of a variety of media, including the new concept of public architecture articulated by the architects of the Lloyds building, and the persistence of a symbolist idea of musical space in Nick Guest's cultural consumption. *The Line of Beauty* is carried over into my final chapter, which adopts a significant change of form; a decision which was suggested by the example of Wilde's *The Portrait of Mr W.H.* and the prevalence of embedded narratives of aesthetic *Bildung* in Pater's aesthetic criticism. In an autobiographical account of my personal encounter with Pater's afterlife I describe my privileged but elusive access to Pater's presence in his contemporary remains. Recent revivals of the idea of beauty in work by Hollinghurst, Zadie Smith, Alan Ball and Jon McGregor have all in some sense attempted to critique or revive nineteenth-century Aestheticism, but their success needs to be questioned in the light of both their fidelity to the project of aesthetic Renaissance and its possibility in the contemporary. I conclude with a return to the question of whether Aestheticism can have an afterlife in spite of its collusion with a spirit of absolute irony and its co-option by postmodern consumer culture. The ends of beauty are ultimately judged by their contemporary political dimension, and for this reason my narrative goes forward in to the twenty-first century in order to recapture the afterlife of Aestheticism in its most spectral form.

Chapter 1

Walter Pater's Acoustic Space: 'The School of Giorgione', Dionysian *Anders-streben* and the Politics of Soundscape

From the beginning of his writing career Walter Pater was refining his idea of what would constitute an aesthetic life. The various artistic media solicited different dimensions of human experience, appealing to a fragment of the human sensoria or ambitiously striving towards a total synaesthetic immersion. Pater is known primarily for his textual encounters with visual art, but such meetings were never limited to a singular dimension of sensory experience; they extended out into a sensuous and cultural realm which incorporated music, touch, theatre, and the masque of urban life. In his incomplete and unpublished essay 'The Aesthetic Life', written towards the end of his life, Pater reflected that the only way the aesthetic personality can be truly attentive to the generality and breadth of sensuous life is by a form of devotion:

> If he must live by 'sight', by sense, [. . .] The true business of life will seem to be the conservation, the enlarging, the refinement, of the energy of ear and eye, of the audible and visible world, and, indirectly, of those apprehensions of things which ally themselves most closely to, and seem to follow the rule of sense. In proportion as he is really a free agent, his life will become an ordered service to the beauty of the sensible world.[1]

What is striking about the way that Pater appropriates the language of religious attention and discipline in this essay is how directly it contradicts the pseudo-religious currents of fin de siècle symbolist culture, in which art's autonomous condition was projected as the basis of a hermetic mystical rite. Far from being hermetic, Pater imagined his devotional Aestheticism by projecting outwards from artistic forms to the whole of sensuous experience: 'the habit, the temper, thus germinated in the world of eye and ear will inevitably extend itself, in the case of a consistent disciple of the aesthetic principle beyond the bounds of purely sensuous objects to the reception of life as a whole'.[2] It is typical of the dialectical subtlety of his work that at a historical moment when his vision

of Aesthetic renaissance was rapidly being translated into decadence, Pater was in some sense writing against what many took to be his legacy; a vision of art for art's sake in which the radical freedom of artifice had supplanted all sense of devotion or 'ordered service'. But from his earliest works, Pater had embraced two equally necessary but opposing aesthetic ideals: a vision of renaissance based on the 'reception of life as a whole', and an insistence on the eccentric and diaphanous subject as the unique site of an encounter with the autonomous work of art. The struggle between these two versions of Aestheticism emerges with particular clarity in the development of Pater's ideal of music – the sensuous medium which emerged in Aesthetic culture as both the ultimate site of sensuous plenitude and the most abstract and autonomous art form.

Pater's most famous aesthetic statement, that 'all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music' (*R*, 106), has commonly been read as expressing a general aspiration to formal autonomy common to aesthetic modernity. In 'The School of Giorgione' (1877), he describes the process of Anders-streben, common to all artistic media, which strive to become musical, shedding their bondage to subject matter and achieving the status of an 'end in itself'. This formalist discourse is an inheritance of Kant's analysis of beauty and underpins a typical proto-modernist affirmation of aesthetic autonomy. But there is another aspect to Pater's musical ideal that is fundamentally at odds with this

Figure 1.1 Titian's 'Concert'.

formalism. The theoretical discourse of 'The School of Giorgione' is vitally inflected by Pater's extraordinary ekphrastic imagination, which continually projects an ideal acoustic space – a mode of experience which integrates the formal and utopian aspirations of nineteenth century Aestheticism. Although Pater's primary subject is Venetian Renaissance painting, specifically those paintings Titian completed under Giorgione's influence,[3] the quality he calls Giorgionesque is equally attributable to the represented landscape and, more elusively, the quality of air as an acoustic medium. In Pater's ekphrasis of Titian, music is a wave form which is instilled in the air and contours of the landscape – its unique quality is that it fills the entirety of perceived space without being reducible to the visual field of the painting. In describing Titian's *Concert* of the Pitti Palace in Florence (Figure 1), he praises 'the skill with which he has caught the waves of wandering sound, and fixed them forever on the lips and hands' (*R*, 113). If the limits of painting are its flat surface and the limits of music are its evanescence, then Pater is prescribing a double achievement here: painting overcomes its own limits by rendering a three-dimensional acoustic space, while sound overcomes its evanescence and is 'fixed . . . forever' within the conditions of painting. Vladimir Jankélévitch has written of the ineffable quality of music: being invisible yet apparently omnipresent, it is the most appropriate medium for a mystical aesthetics of transcendence.[4] Yet Pater conceives of music's immanence quite differently; as an invisible sensuous plenitude, sound is materially manifested in the quivering of the body, itself a site of acoustic vibrations, or the welling of affective delight in the eyes. In two of his most brilliant prose experiments, 'The School of Giorgione' and 'A Study of Dionysus' (1876), Pater elucidated this sensuous condition as both the original, primitive ground of aesthetic feeling and the trajectory of art in modernity. Art begins and ends in the soundscape.

Giorgionesque Acoustics and the *Anders-streben* of Painting

A good deal of recent work on the idea of soundscape has stressed the spatial aspect of sound,[5] and visual artists have become increasingly interested in experimenting with acoustic space. One striking example was Janet Cardiff's *The Forty Part Motet* (2001),[6] which reconstituted the individual parts of Tallis's *Spem et Alium* through 40 speakers in a gallery space: this had the double effect of renewing the spatial experience of sound and visually marking the acoustic experience. In this case visual art passes into music while sound intimates a virtual architecture. Pater's concept of *Anders-streben* describes such transitional states in terms of the formal conditions of artistic media, but the passages between the visual, the acoustic and the environmental in his work also have utopian possibilities that can be properly assessed only in terms of a wider cultural politics.

Victorian Aestheticism promoted a regenerative ideal of culture, but its various competing strands produced a series of dialectical problems; the aspiration for an organic relation to culture and environment was pitched against the claims of a cosmopolitan Aestheticism which valorized the critical spirit, difference and desire. The claims of a conservative Romanticism for an ideal cultural form, which reached its apogee in Wagner's total theatre, stood against the claims of a radical liberal Romanticism for irony, the fragment and the haunted trace. These political and aesthetic tensions were already at work in Pater's earliest works: 'Diaphaneitè', 'Leonardo da Vinci' and the 'Conclusion' appear to enshrine a liberal subject which is evanescent, haunted and vampiric – a supreme figure of aesthetic detachment which is also an inchoate site of sensuous receptivity. Yet in his essay 'Wordsworth'[7] he celebrates 'the close connexion of man with natural objects, the habitual association of his thoughts and feelings with a particular spot of earth' (*Ap*, 48). And Pater suggests that Wordsworth's organic sense was revealed especially 'in the noting of sounds; so that he conceives of noble sounds as moulding the human countenance to nobler types, and as something even "profaned" by colour' (*Ap*, 45). While Pater is best known for celebrating fugitive impressions, the Wordsworth essay focuses an impression which conveys 'the whole complex sentiment of a particular place' (*Ap*, 45). This impression is intrinsically auditory – a soundmark, an acoustic residue of a wider ecological consciousness.

The politics of soundscape since the late twentieth century have been primarily determined by R. Murray Schafer's idea of acoustic ecology, which was articulated in his seminal work *The Tuning of the World* (1977) and practised in the formation of the World Soundscape Project. This was motivated by a concern to regenerate the sound environment of urban modernity and frequently returned to pre-modern acoustic forms or soundmarks, such as the sound of church bells.[8] John Picker's recent analysis titled *Victorian Soundscapes*[9] suggests how urban life in the nineteenth century might have generated similar desires for a regenerated acoustic environment, but there has been little analysis of how this was manifested in Victorian Aestheticism. The clearest demonstration of an acoustic programme was in the aesthetic philanthropy that proceeded from Ruskin's example. Octavia Hill and the Kyrle Society developed a broad programme of aesthetic regeneration which was attentive to the acoustically challenged urban poor. In 1877, the year the Kyrle Society was founded, Octavia Hill's essay 'Open Spaces' described 'the two great wants in the life of the poor of our large towns . . . the want of space and the want of beauty',[10] and the Kyrle Society developed a series of subcommittees for 'the diffusion of beauty' in the urban environment, including branches for music and public space.

Pater published 'The School of Giorgione' in the same year that the Kyrle established its Protestant and Ruskinian project, and while Pater's aesthetic vision is in many ways diametrically opposed to Ruskin and the Kyrle's idea of

culture, he shares with Octavia Hill a fundamental utopian concern for the aesthetics of space, a concern which was mediated by the ideal of music. There is a continual emphasis in 'The School of Giorgione' on the spatial aspect of sound, and not only did this formulate a pastoral utopian ideal, it also appeared to provide a solution to the theories of media he had been developing since 'Winckelmann'. In this early statement of Aesthetic Hellenism, Pater was still working from within the coordinates of Hegel's evolutionary system of aesthetics. According to this schemata the classical sculpture was the highest manifestation of the beauty of spirit in physical form – the fulfilment of art's ideal promise.[11] Yet it was also a moment which had to be surpassed, historically and formally, by the subjective spirit of Romanticism and its associated media of painting, lyric poetry and music. In Hegel's system it is music which fulfils the Romantic spirit of negative inwardness. One of the fundamental reasons for this negativity is that music was invariably conceived of as the artistic medium determined most completely by the dimension of time. For Hegel painting was essentially the art of the 'spatial external form',[12] while music involved 'the negativising of spatial matter'. As Andrew Bowie has suggested, music occupies a similar position in Hegel's system as Romantic irony – the negative qualification of subjectivity that refuses sensuous embodiment. Like the ironist, it continually withdraws from identification with the object or performative identity, precisely by being insubstantial, inchoate and unfixed.[13]

The unique value ascribed to aesthetic subjectivity in German Romanticism is as profound a legacy for Pater's thought as Hegel's theory of media, and British Aestheticism might be read as a dramatic demonstration of the conflict between these two equally necessary theoretical demands. This conflict had clear political coordinates – Schlegel's cosmopolitan individualism versus Hegel's conservative organicism – but it was also staged according to different claims for the supremacy of artistic media. Schlegel expressed a 'literary absolute'[14] which was so immaterial that it could be effectively realized only in critical irony and the fragment, while Hegel, mourning the sensuous immediacy of Hellenic sculpture, described an increasing displacement of art in modernity. In this narrative, music is rootless, cosmopolitan, refusing definition by place. The sign of this displacement was the increasing tendency to view music as the most formal medium, following Kant's narrow inclusion of instrumental music, or 'fantasias', in the category of independent artistic beauties.[15] Pater's continual reference to the aesthetic aspiration to become an 'end in itself' appears to ally himself with this Kantian tradition, and it is music which fulfils the aspiration that 'form [. . .] should become an end in itself, should penetrate every part of the matter' (*R*, 106). Yet 'The School of Giorgione' does more than prescribe a formal ideal of aesthetic abstraction; it subtly narrates a history of aesthetic modernity in which the autonomous artistic media emerges from the social conditions of religious patronage and the formal conditions of symbolism. The primary moment in this narrative is

Giorgione's invention of genre painting, but Pater's definition of *genre* is less concerned with subject matter – what he describes is a fundamental change in the conditions of art, which becomes autonomous and private but also mobile and capable of global diffusion. Genre paintings are 'easily movable pictures' which Giorgione 'detaches from the wall' (*R,* 111), but this material mobility is accompanied by a more radical detachment, which gives the art work new powers of transformation and transition. Now that it is transportable, the painting resembles a musical instrument, and it will in a genuine sense *become* musical, moving into the private sphere – 'into one's cabinet' – according to the analogy with the two most imperceptible, invasive and immanent of the sensuous media – sound and scent. The new art work will 'enrich the air as with some choice aroma', transforming one's lived conditions without any perceptible or permanent alteration in the built environment. Music is a higher form of this invisible olfactory diffusion. Carolyn Williams has written that 'The School of Giorgione' presages the aesthetics of film,[16] but Pater's narrative of emancipation, autonomy and private aesthetic experience is equally a premonition of home audio and of the unique pleasures of the private soundscape which is completely emancipated from its source.[17] This suggestion of sound in the private sphere is nevertheless marginal against Pater's dominant imaginative projection of sound in public space – in his ekphrasis of Titian's paintings and in his account of Greek religious life, the soundscape is an immanent force of social interaction, the focal point of an organic sense of culture.

In spite of his narrative of aesthetic autonomy, Pater's treatment of Venetian painting involves an attempt to overcome the displacement of music – to give back to sound its proper place. The description of the *Fête Champêtre* emphasizes the way that a whole landscape is instilled with the presence of music, like the presence of water particles in the air. Music is consistently situated; so in Titian's sketches we see 'music at the pool side while people fish, or mingled with the sound of the pitcher in the well, or heard across running water, or among the flocks' (*R,* 119). Pater's characteristic parataxis builds up a series of acoustic images here, where music is identified by spatial preposition, heard across or amid the landscape. In his evocation of soundscape Pater moves between two modes of acoustic ekphrasis: while in this case the mingling of sound with everyday objects and practices points outside the frame, at other points he begins from an immanent sense of the framed space in order to convey the overcoming of the flat space of painting. In his description of Pellegrino de San Daniele's *Holy Family*, he describes 'the spectator's enjoyment of a singular charm of liquid air, with which the whole picture seems instinct' (*R,* 114). This 'instinct' quality is intrinsically pictorial, but from within these aesthetic conditions it evokes a Wordsworthian aesthetics of immanence,[18] precisely that sense which Pater had noted in his essay on Wordsworth[19] as the provenance of sound that was profaned by sight. If we read 'The School of Giorgione' after the Wordsworth essay, Giorgione and Titian emerge anachronistically

as the post-Romantic artists who retrieve the acoustic potential from within the hitherto profane visual form. The Giorgionesque artist manages to render the sound wave paradoxically present in the space of the painting, and it is through this illusion of acoustic space that painting achieves the *Anders-streben*, the overcoming of the limits of painting as a medium.

Pater's concept of *Anders-streben* is famously difficult to locate in the history of aesthetics. Donald Hill and others have shown how closely the idea is grounded in Baudelaire's conception of media. Pater's brief gesture of attribution, 'what German critics term an Anders-streben (*R*, 105), might therefore have been a tactical diversion, since it does not appear in any of the primary German sources of Pater's aesthetic thinking'.[20] In pointing towards the more earnest German tradition, Pater may have been trying to deflect any dangerous association with French decadent Aestheticism, but the curious construction of the term also begs a deeper consideration of the legacy of German idealist aesthetics on Pater's theory of media. In his *Aesthetics*, Hegel refers to a *Streben* of art towards spirit in the Romantic art forms: '*dem Aufstreben aus der Natur zur Geistigkeit*'[21] – a 'striving out of nature into spirit' (*A*, I, 517). In the account of music this striving towards otherness is more specifically articulated around the space-time conditions of the medium. The Romantic aspiration towards transcendence demands a movement against space, as Hegel sees the temporal work of music as '*das Aufheben der räumlichen Objektivität*',[22] – the 'cancellation of spatial objectivity' (*A*, II, 890). '*Aufheben*' is notoriously difficult to translate, since it combines the registers of preservation and negation, but in this case Knox's consistent use of 'cancellation' conforms to Hegel's negative theory of music.[23] In its striving towards otherness, music fails to preserve 'spatial objectivity': for Hegel it is the most evanescent temporal medium, and its momentary being is inscribed by a sense of loss.

The relationship between evanescence and spatial being should be fundamental to any theory of the *condition* of music. As a fugitive and airborne medium, music always breaks its ties with the origins of sound – the instrument or sonic membrane. While the visual image is fundamentally located in the paint on canvas, music enters a disappearing medium in the moment it is produced by a vibrating instrument, after which its element is the entirety of perceived space. Roger Scruton has described this as the 'acousmatic' quality of music,[24] but while Hegel also pays attention to the passage from vibrating instrument to the air, he fails to account for the sensuous spatial being of music. Hegel defines music's coming-to-be as a double negation; sound negates the instrument of production, then 'in its coming-to-be is annihilated again by its very existence, and it vanishes of itself' (*A*, II, 890). This negative process works specifically against the space of painting; it is a 'renunciation beginning with the sensuous spatiality of the visual arts themselves'. In this account music is in a purgatorial condition – as an evanescent and immaterial medium, it nudges on the door of spirit while still remaining in yearning for

the earthlier substance of sculpture and painting. What is surprising about Hegel's analysis of aesthetic conditions is that he sets out the terms for a dialectical conception of the relationship between painting and music but does not follow this through. Pater's originality as an aesthetic theorist is that he retrieves from Hegel's account the spatiality of music and, conversely, restores the soundscape of painting.

The way that Pater represents this achievement is subtly different according to the qualities of the two major paintings he evokes. Titian's *Concert* is a genre painting which is close to portraiture, since it is dominated by the exquisitely rendered central figure of the monk at the *clavecin*. In Pater's ekphrasis, sound is instilled and preserved in the lips and the hands of the monk, but the animation of the physical attributes also have a metonymic function – they manifest a sound wave which is imminent to the whole space of the painting. Pater works with this tension between figural definition and the represented soundscape, and one of his key concerns is to resolve the essentially performative content of the painting. In evoking Titian's *Concert*, Pater's main challenge is to negotiate the highly theatrical condition of the painting.[25]

The *Concert* is typical of many later Venetian genre paintings in representing the scenic conditions of a musical event.[26] It constructs a complex trio of gazes, which have ambiguous relationships with the beholder. The central figure of the monk at the harpsichord might be regarded as the most self-conscious performer, with the subsidiary figures as internalized spectator's. The gaze of the young page on the left appears to attend to the monk's hands playing, but it could equally be soliciting the gaze of a spectator outside the painting. The tonsured figure on the right may be regarding either of his fellow musicians, but in contrast to the other musicians, his gaze appears to be contained within the visual field of the painting. Pater's reading of the *Concert* effectively negotiates this theatrical system of gazes by displacing our attention from the visual field to the auditory relations between the figures. The tonsured figure to the right is in the process of bowing a viol and the clerk is waiting 'upon the true interval for beginning to sing' (*R*, 113). The interval here is effectively a pause in time, an expanded instant which becomes a moment of 'dramatic poetry' (*R*, 118).

Billie Inman has pointed out that Pater's theory of painting as condensed moment is indebted to Hegel's theory of painting,[27] and it is also clearly developing the legacy of Rossetti's sonnet 'For a Venetian Pastoral by Giorgione'.[28] What is individual to Pater's ekphrasis of Venetian painting is that the effect of temporal expansion is to open and reveal the acoustic space of the painting. Pater situates the space of musical attention in between the three performers – Titian's monk is tilting his ear backwards towards this space, 'the moment before they are lost altogether in that calm unearthly glow' (*R*, 113), and Pater finds a quality of absorption in his gaze which strains towards self-loss. This absorption is the central effect, and the monk's striving into acoustic space, the *Anders-streben* of the painting, might be seen as a striving against the

performative conditions of the musician's art, but it is precisely this striving which constitutes the dramatic effect of Titian's Concert.

In the terms of Michael Fried's criticism, the painting stages a tension between theatricality and absorption, where the absorption of the central performer is achieved in spite of the manifest theatricality of the occasion.[29] Since Pater is focusing on the moment immediately *before* musical self-loss, the theatrical and temporal dynamic remains, but the suggestion is that the absorption in acoustic space overcomes theatricality and the subjective distance of spectatorship. In this sense Pater does suggest a dialectical process in his reading of the *Concert*; the theatrical space of painting is sublated in acoustic space, which is to say that it is not cancelled or annulled; it is raised to a condition where the spatiality of the painting is preserved while the limits of the visual surface are overcome. We can read this double process occurring literally in the image of the monk, who is represented as raising himself upwards, away from the context of production (the *clavecin*), as if in an effort to surpass the means of performance. The moment of negation contained in the monk's gesture mimics the process that Hegel assigns to music as an evanescent medium – the musical transport surpasses the means of musical production – but where Hegel conceives of this as a cancellation through the temporalizing process, Pater sees it as a reclamation of acoustic space. In Titian's painting, the monk's hands arch upwards to instigate a whole bodily movement, but Pater does not conceive of this gestural striving as an effort towards transcendence. The monk strains *into* the space of the musical experience. This is a communal performative space, but Titian clearly foregrounds the monk's absorption, which Pater emphasizes as the act of listening. Another way of viewing the *Concert*, after Pater, is that it represents a condition of musical freedom common to group improvisation – the monk is as much absorbed in listening as playing, and in his listening he achieves a communal consciousness, suspended but also expanded in the acoustic space which surpasses theatricality and individual technique. This sense of group interaction is strengthened by Pater's focus on the players' waiting for the correct interval, but he also effectively releases music from its condition as a notated medium with strict temporal constraints. In accentuating the communal manifestation of sound over the representation of a score, Pater achieves a dialectical and immanent concept of music as dynamic and interactive movement in space.

Aesthetic Organicism, 'Ingathered Space' and Dionysian Eroticism

When Pater goes on to describe Titian's *Fête Champêtre*, he continues to elucidate the value of musical absorption, but in this case the figures of the musicians

are under shadow, and performative intention is no longer a significant quality of the image. The primary values in the account of the *Fête Champêtre* are the landscape and the presence of water, and Pater establishes a series of transitions between the motion of water, the progress of sound waves, the shape of the landscape and the felt experience of air:

> The presence of water – the well, or marble rimmed pool, the drawing or pouring of water, as the woman pours it from a pitcher with her jewelled hand in the *Fête Champêtre*, listening, perhaps, to the cool sound as it falls, blent with the music of the pipes – is as characteristic, and almost as suggestive, as that of music itself. And the landscape feels, and is glad of it also – a landscape full of clearness, of the effects of water, of fresh rain newly passed through the air, and collected into grassy channels. (*R*, 120)

The focus on the sensuous but invisible acoustic quality projects the space of painting outside of the conditions of classical perspective and shifts the emphasis away from the visual apparatus to the virtual landscape. The system of gazes we are drawn to in the *Concert* is replaced by an organic system of relations between the elements – air, water and earth – and this is elucidated through a poetics of space. The catachrestic figure of sound 'falling' facilitates the transition between the visible pouring of water, the wave form of music and the imperceptible rain which is 'newly passed through the air'. Air is the transparent medium in which the acoustic and aqueous elements have an invisible presence throughout the entirety of the medium. The presence of sound in air is able to overcome the limits of the plastic medium (the fixed body in space), and to retrieve the plenitude of space for the flat surface of painting.

While the ekphrasis of the *Concert* suggests exquisite and highly developed sensations, the *Fête Champêtre* presents Pater with an ideal landscape. Yet the ideality of the painting resides as much in organic unity of form as in the pastoral image, and in this sense Pater pre-empts the prescriptive aesthetics of utopian Modernism and its fin de siècle precursors. Dee Reynolds has described how symbolist art and poetry projects a utopian interaction between consciousness and space:

> These rhythmic relationships, where imagination actively participates in and transforms experience of the sensory presence of the medium, can function as a model for the ideal relationship between consciousness and the environment as a whole. In this way, textual/pictorial spaces become sites of imaginary space with utopian implications, both aesthetic and social.[30]

In 'The School of Giorgione' the formal organic unity of the pictorial space is perceived when the spectator is at a prerequisite distance, so that the pastoral images are 'refined upon or idealised, till they come to seem like glimpses of

life from afar' (*R*, 111). This abstract and formal function makes Pater's aesthetic more compatible with the emerging aesthetic of Whistler's Nocturne series, and in this sense it can be read as positional stance in the emerging divide between Ruskin and the new Aestheticism.[31] But the formalist idea of the pictorial space tends to obscure the complexity of the Giorgionesque acoustic image, which gains its force precisely from the overcoming of painting's status as an immediately comprehensible flat plane. There is a tension in Pater's account of the Giorgionesque between a formal perception of organic unity, which may itself have a symbolic function, and the projected experience of imaginary space, which exceeds the frame and evokes a broader social and utopian dimension.

These extra dimensions become somewhat clearer in another of Pater's descriptions of the *Fête Champêtre,* in his slightly earlier essay 'A Study of Dionysus' (1876).[32] In this piece Pater's concept of *Anders-streben* is suggested but not yet fully developed. He does, however, identify the striving of the arts towards music as an essentially Dionysian process: the musical impulse involves 'a *Streben*, between the palpable and limited human form, and the floating essence it is to contain' (*GS*, 28). The emphasis here on the limits of the human form suggests the distance Pater has travelled since 'Winckelmann', which was so dominated by the Hellenic ideal of sculptural embodiment. But it would be a mistake to read this *Streben* as a move towards transcendence of the human form – it is a processual term, that describes a sensuous interaction of forces *between* the human form and the 'floating essence'. This process takes place, crucially, within a cultural and geographic context – a unique sensuous environment which is also a symbolic system. In 'The Study of Dionysus' Pater's ekphrasis of the *Fête Champêtre* begins from this geographical context before focusing on a representative acoustic space which also contains a system of elemental and symbolic correspondences:

> Who that has ever felt the heat of a southern country does not know this poetry, the motive of the loveliest of all the works attributed to Giorgione, the *Fête Champêtre* in the Louvre; the intense sensations, the subtle and far-reading symbolisms, which, in these places, cling about the touch and sound and sight of it? Think of the darkness of the well in the breathless court, with the delicate ring of ferns kept alive just within the opening; of the sound of the fresh water flowing through the wooden pipes into the houses of Venice, on summer mornings. (*GS,* 28)

In spite of Pater's ascription of a symbolic system, a dimension of art which he rejected altogether in the Hegelian schema he followed in 'Winckelmann',[33] this account is grounded in the sensuous and spatial dimension of the painting. The 'darkness of the well in the breathless court' is clearly an eroticized space, but it is also extended into a social dimension which exists beyond the

frame of the painting. It is typical of Pater's ekphrasis to proceed beyond the borders of the work and project a new or virtual object: in this case the passage of water reflexively tracks this move beyond the frame. The water from the dark well moves from the painting and into the urban infrastructure, 'through the wooden pipes into the houses of Venice'. According to this image, the painting circulates the Dionysian spirit within its own cultural conditions at the same time as it provides a trans-historical passage for this spirit. The symbolic media for this passage are music and water, and if the element of air is the condition of music, it is in this acoustic dimension that air might be said to fulfil its aesthetic destiny. The elemental force of Dionysian *Anders-streben* is clearly identified as the basis of the Giorgionesque Renaissance.

In his wider consideration of the Dionysian legacy, Pater sees the sensuous acoustic space as one of two vital manifestations of the spirit of Dionysus in the Renaissance:

> It survived with undiminished interest to a later world, two of the greatest masters of Italian painting having poured their whole power into it: Titian with greater space of *ingathered shore* and mountain, and solemn foliage, and fiery animal life; Tintoret with profounder luxury of delight in the nearness to each other, and *imminent embrace*, of glorious bodily presences; and both alike with consummate beauty of physical form'. (*GS*, 23; my emphasis)

Pater identifies Titian and Tintoretto as the representatives of two fundamental dimensions of artistic beauty – 'ingathered space' and ideal embodiment – and between them the hope of 'imminent embrace'. Titian is *the* artist of ingathered space; the *Fête Champêtre* has the most acute sense of this spatial inscape, which in Pater's sense is the air instilled with musical energy. Titian's paintings provide a 'greater space of ingathered shore and mountain', and in doing so they project a natural landscape as an aesthetic form; in a properly Hegelian but counter-Ruskinian dialectic, nature is not only supplemented but raised or sublated by art. Space is artistic only when it is organized and 'ingathered' – this is the provenance of architecture, which confines and institutes space, whereas landscape is the platform for our experience of the sky, where the sense of limits and organization dissolves.

Pater's evocation of the 'shore and mountain' focuses on limitless horizons to the point where it is tempting to introduce a concept of the sublime,[34] but he remains consistent with the aesthetics of 'Winckelmann' in consistently diverting aesthetic experience from the sublime back to sensuous beauty. We are reminded that the space of Titian's painting still carries a 'fiery animal life', and following this, conceptually and syntactically, Pater's prose slides without break into the second dimension of beauty in painting – Tintoretto's evocation

of the animated body and its 'imminent embrace'. Against the abstract sense of space as imminence it presents a theatre of forms, forces and affects. This is an eroticized beauty based on the proximity of other bodies and the possibility of touch.

In both Giorgionesque and Dionysian aesthetics, the erotic dimension of acoustic experience emerges, through ekphrasis, as the theoretical unconscious of Pater's work. In 'The School of Giorgione' it is present in the evocation of 'the world of Italian music' as it was emerging against the 'silence of Venice' (*R*, 119). Pater roams through an imaginary gallery of sketches for the Pitti *Concert*, which is also an erotic menagerie of 'men fainting at music; music at the pool-side where people fish'. The 'intent faces' listening for the 'smallest interval of musical sound' are touched, exquisitely, by the 'smallest undulation' of the vibrant air. In his ekphrasis of these imaginary sketches, Pater appears to be intimating an ideal intuition, following Hegel's sense of sight and sound as the most abstract and refined of the senses. But although we see 'the ear and finger refining themselves infinitely in the appetite for sweet sound', what these intent faces ultimately crave is the touch to which Pater's passage moves with a combination of delicate modulation and trembling expectation – 'a momentary touch of an instrument in the twilight, as one passes through some unfamiliar room, in a chance company' (*R*, 119).[35] In this passage of prose, which becomes a shadowy passage to an 'unfamiliar room', the erotic promise of music is fulfilled but also delicately masked. The indeterminate encounter with chance company is indistinguishable from the momentary touch of an instrument, but Pater's catachresis here is telling. Throughout his essay he has consistently promoted the acousmatic dimension of music – the conditions of sound – over the means of its production – the instrument. But in this case the 'touch' of the sound wave is misidentified as 'an instrument in the twilight'. This serves only to further accentuate the erotics of the encounter by giving music's touch the embodied form of an object – a transitional object, a fetish, by which music returns from its abstraction to the 'fiery animal life' of an unfamiliar room. It is through this touch that Titian's ingathered space returns to the 'profounder luxury' and nearness of Tintoretto's bodily presences.

With extraordinary subtlety, Pater has performed a displaced homoerotic reading of Titian's *Concert* according to his aesthetics of acoustic space. What he could not say in his ekphrasis of the painting, but which his subsequent elaborations may be tentatively suggesting, is that the monk at the centre of the *Concert*, in the ecstasy of musical transport, might also be the subject of a tentative erotic advance. Pater records the tonsured figure to the right as a clerk who 'grasps the hand of a viol' (*R,* 113), and his attribution of the act of grasping might provoke us to look to the clerk's right hand, which sits on the shoulder of the transported monk – a tentative grasp. If we focus on this twilight moment of touch, then the monk's lifted gaze suggests a surprised

recognition of this erotic advance as much as a straining towards musical absorption. Music, and specifically the acoustic space of the painting, has allowed Pater to instil and encode an erotic possibility within the space of painting without direct reference and representation. In this sense, Pater has performed an *Anders-streben* of art criticism itself, which, having released ekphrasis from its object, has allowed him to evoke a range of sensuous and erotic experience which could not be represented within Victorian cultural conditions. His poetics of acoustic space both preserves and deflects this erotic possibility. Renaissance art transmits the Dionysian while masking its more subversive currents, just as the old gods persisted in disguise in the religions of modernity.

The Olympian Religion and the Consecration of Sense

In 'A Study of Dionysus', Pater's erotic aesthetics of music is accompanied by a social and religious dimension, which is suggested in the account of the Giorgionesque but is more fundamental to the Dionysian. Dionysus is both 'a complete religion' and 'the inherent cause of poetry and music' (*GS*, 18). As the spirit behind the reed instrument and the vine, his productive act is to fill the spaces which Demeter or Apollo leave evacuated. These acts of infusion induce contagious possession, but they also produce a holistic and organic unity to life. Pater detects in the early Hellenic spirit 'a unifying or identifying power' (*GS*, 29): in the dark well of Titian's Dionysian renaissance he finds 'a soul of waters', and in the organic form of the painting he finds 'all the hidden ordinances by which those facts and qualities hold of unseen forces'. This immanent quality is grounded in the experience of space, but when Pater looks for the origins of the Dionysian impulse, he finds it not in the 'ingathered space' of painting but in the limitless horizon. The original godhead is an anthropomorphic identification of the vast space: 'Zeus is, in the earliest, original, primitive intention, the open sky, across which the thunder sometimes sounds' (*GS*, 30). The presence of the sound of thunder brings this space into being in so far as it provides a form of acoustic relief; reverberation and echo give the impression of an opening and unfolding in space. It is as much through this opening as in the organic sense of plenitude that Pater evokes a religious presence in the soundscape.

In the continuing elucidation of this Olympian image, the organic sense of culture becomes the dominant note. The experience of the Greeks begins with the physical form and ends with a musical religious culture of 'procession and hymn':

> They experienced the impress there of that which the eye and the whole being of man love to find above him; and the genius of Pheidias had availed to shed,

> upon the gold and ivory of the physical form, the blandness, the breadth, the smile of the open sky; the mild heat of it still coming and going, in the face of the father of all the children of sunshine and shower; as if one of the great white clouds had composed itself into it, and looked down upon them thus, out of the midsummer noonday; so that those things might be felt as warm, and fresh, and blue, by the young and old, the weak and strong, who came to sun themselves in god's presence, as procession and hymn rolled on, in the fragrant and tranquil courts of the great Olympian temple. (*GS*, 30–1)

Pater moves from the 'impress' of the god in space to the physical form, and then, in a subsequent outward movement, to 'the smile of the open sky'. Finally, he makes a metaphoric move from the open sky to the presence of god in the community. The 'great white cloud' is endowed with an auto-poetic and theological power, it 'composed itself', and as it looks down, it becomes an ideal spectator for the 'young and old, the weak and strong'. Pater is evoking an organic form of Greek religious culture which seems far removed from the contagious fire of the maenads, but the Dionysian still resides in the transference of spirit into landscape and community. The transference of Dionysus is described by analogy with the medium of music, since it infuses within space invisible energies which carry higher symbolic associations. Pater's aesthetics here is nevertheless clearly distinct from the cosmopolitan eroticism of his ekphrasis of Titian in 'The School of Giorgione'. The general cultural experience of the Olympian temple is a containment of the Dionysian prior to its emancipation in contagious enthusiasm and affective intensity – the *Schwärmerei* of the maenads.[36] According to a cultural poetics that will become familiar after Pater, this Olympian culture allows for a transference conceived of as sublimation,[37] rather than the series of inchoate erotic and metaphoric translations that Pater finds in Giorgionesque painting.

In a second Olympian soundscape, Pater gives a greater definition to the acoustic dimension which grounds this culture:

> Think again, of the Zeus of Dodona. The oracle of Dodona, with its dim grove of oaks, and sounding instruments of brass to husband the faintest whisper in the leaves, was but a consecration of that sense of a mysterious will, of which people still feel, or seem to feel, the expression, in the motions of the wind, as it comes and goes. (*GS*, 31)

In this passage Zeus is present in a chthonic acoustic space, a 'dim grove of oaks' where the 'sounding instruments of brass' are intimated as the agents of a divine husbandry. With their customary pomp reduced so as to companion 'the faintest whisper in the leaves', the brass instruments in the grove preserve and cultivate these whispers; they *consecrate* the collective sense of an immanent spirit within the 'motions of the wind'. Music, in so far as it appears

in this consecrated and collective acoustic space, secures a greater intimacy between the feeling of the limitless air and the religious sense. The sense of intimacy is suggested by the word chosen to convey immanence; the early Greeks experienced 'the *impress* there' of Zeus in the sky, gathering the sense of the wine press to convey the incipient Dionysian impulse and situating it *there*, with a spatial specificity that belies the abstraction of the sublime landscape.

The extraordinary combination of intimacy and scale that Pater evokes in his account of Greek pantheism is comparable to the poetics which Gaston Bachelard uncovers in his meditation on Baudelaire's spatial poetics. In Baudelaire's essay 'Richard Wagner et Tannhäuser à Paris', in *Les Paradis Artificiels*, and in his famous poem 'Correspondances,' Bachelard finds 'an intimate call of immensity'.[38] The essay on Wagner is a particularly significant analogue here, since it was to have such a pivotal influence on Aesthetic culture at the fin de siècle in the wave of British Wagnerism that was intimately associated with Baudelaire's poetic influence. Pater's Dionysian work can be read as compatible with Wagnerism in several ways – it suggests an aspiration towards a total sensuous media, an organic vision of culture and a return of mythic consciousness. Yet it is important to establish Pater's difference here: 'A Study of Dionysus' is an account of mythic experience prior to the process of aesthetic modernity which is subsequently narrated in 'The School of Giorgione'. But at the same time, as Stefano Evangelista has argued, Pater found in ancient Greece a trans-historical process that mutated from the Dionysian to the Giorgionesque and became a force of revival within modernity.[39] So while Wagnerism was an attempt to negate aesthetic and social modernity by a return to mythic consciousness, Pater prescribed a return of sensuous culture from within the conditions of aesthetic modernity. 'The School of Giorgione' begins from the autonomy of art and attempts to theorize its overcoming from within the conditions of the individual artistic media rather than through total aesthetic synthesis.

In spite of these important theoretical distinctions, both the Giorgionesque and Dionysian ideal that Pater articulated in the 1870s were influenced by the broader currents of Romantic organicism that were to be revived with both spectacular and demonic results in the culture of Wagnerism.[40] It is likely that Pater was increasingly troubled by the affinities of his own work with these excessive cultural and political visions. After the liberal radicalism of his earliest statement, 'Diaphaneitè' (1864), Pater was politically mute for the large part of his career. To uncover his reflection on the nineteenth-century nexus of aesthetics and politics, we have to work from evasions and tactical diversions more than from direct statement. Why did Pater disguise Baudelaire's legacy in his work and entirely ignore Wagner's theories – perhaps the most influential manifestation of Romantic organicism in the nineteenth century? Why did Pater feel the need to assert a formalist idea of aesthetic autonomy and

reassert the Kantian legacy so directly when the imaginative force of his work resides in the utopian image of acoustic space – a mode of sensuous being in which formal autonomy appears to have been overcome and a new aesthetic life inaugurated? Some of the answers to these questions are suggested in his final writings, the lecture series gathered as *Plato and Platonism* (1893), where Pater's abstract reflections on the origins of Greek thought involve a stringent questioning of aesthetic organicism and its political coordinates. Once again music and the soundscape are the focus of Pater's aesthetic and political reflection.

The Political Critique of Soundscape in *Plato and Platonism*

In acoustic space the listener achieves a unique absorption and harmony with environment, and in this sense Pater's musical ideal fulfils the utopian aspirations of the Victorian Aesthetic Movement. But in many ways this ideal would prove to be problematic. One consequence of musical organicism is that the individual subject tends to be relegated in favour of an impersonal cosmic whole. In this sense it belies some of the most commonly cited and vivid tropes of Pater's writing – such as the vampiric detachment he ascribes to La Gioconda, and the individualism of the 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance*, with its focus on an isolated subjectivity grasping at temporary sensation. Although in one sense the acoustic image offers a solutions to the problems of aesthetic alienation that are rehearsed in Pater's earlier writings, its intrinsic organicism may have motivated a necessary dialectical impulse towards autonomy and detachment.

In *Plato and Platonism* (1893) Pater examines the philosophical genealogy of the musical idea in the beginnings of Greek thought. In Pythagoras's motivation 'to realize unity in variety', Pater identifies a fundamental metaphysical desire. Pythagoras seeks to uncover 'the dominion of number everywhere, the proportion, the harmony, the music, into which number as such expands' (*PP*, 52), and this search becomes the basis of Plato's theory of ideas, which expresses 'the unity-in-variety of concerted music' (*PP*, 60). The philosophical drive towards unity is thus conceived as an education in listening, the attempt to apprehend audibly the musical unity of things, but Plato goes on to prescribe the application of this cosmic unity to all aspects of social and ethical life, coordinating his ideas of education, conduct and the state. It has been argued that this organic musical ideal was integral to the Greek idea of culture. Edward Lippman describes a 'progressive musicalisation of every aspect of experience' in Greek culture,[41] while Andy Hamilton suggests that for the Greeks, 'the value spheres of the aesthetic, the ethical and the cognitive, which we now take as separate, were not distinct'.[42] At the same time, Hamilton notes Christopher Janaway's suggestion that Plato may have been well aware of an

emerging aesthetic independence and reacted to it by reasserting a totalizing metaphysics.[43] The music of the spheres would stand in to conceal the rifts between the value spheres. Another way of articulating this relationship between Hellenic culture and modernity is that aesthetic modernity was and is always already in the process of emerging – the autonomy of the spheres was always progressing to a point, always a threat, just as Derrida has argued that democracy and mimesis were an ever present danger which Plato was forced to identify, contain and scapegoat.[44]

Pater is especially provocative in the way that he identifies this organic vision of culture, since he tacitly associates the Platonic musical vision with the cultural paradigms of the Arts and Crafts movement:

> Understand, then, the poetry and music, the arts and crafts, of the City of the Perfect. [. . .] Liken its music, if you will, to Gregorian music, and call to mind the kind of architecture, military or monastic again, that must be built to such music. [. . .] Nay the very trees and animals, the attire of those who move along the streets, their looks and voices, their style – the hieratic Dorian architecture, to speak precisely, the Dorian manner everywhere, in possession of the whole of life. Compare it, for further vividness of effect, to Gothic building. (*PP*, 278–9)

It is all the more notable that Pater should point towards the contemporary gothic mode in a series of lectures which might appear to be hermetically distinct from Victorian England. Pater is implicating the gothic ideal in the total musical organicism of early Hellenic culture, but equally he is implicating his own aesthetic vision and that of his disciples, the 'Dorian manner' and attire suggesting that diffusion of utopian aesthetics into style culture that the 1890s enacted. Yet Pater's critique is more sombre and wide ranging than this evocation of the varieties of Aesthetic culture might suggest. In his account of Pythagoreanism, we can begin to detect the social and aesthetic problematics that were integral to the musical ideal, as Pater describes the organic conception of the state inherent in Plato's music:

> For him [Plato], music is still everywhere in the world, and the whole business of philosophy only as it were the correct editing of it: as it will be the whole business of the state to repress, in the great concert, the jarring self-assertion [. . .] of those whose voices have large natural power in them. (*PP*, 71)

At this point Pater allows the sinister note of Plato's conception of harmony to sound, as the 'great concert' threatens the violent repression of discordant voices. This repressive ideological implication properly emerges when he goes on to re-contextualize the conception of cosmic harmony in terms of the organicist discourses of modernity. The 'great concert' is conceived as the

manifestation of 'the race, the species, that *Zeitgeist,* or abstract secular process, in which, as we could have no direct consciousness of it, so we can pretend to no future personal interest' (*PP*, 72). This implicitly associates the Platonic idea of music with Hegel's organic conception of the state, a force which erases any personal conception of the future, 'casting aside in its march, the souls of countless individuals' (*PP*, 73).

This is one of the few moments in Pater's writing which suggests his awareness of the potential dangers of aesthetic organicism, but it has significant implications about the directions taken in his work after 'The School of Giorgione'. His turn against Hegel reflected an increasing move in the liberal tradition of philosophy in late Victorian Oxford towards the political questioning of idealist metaphysics and its associated cultural narratives.[45] T. H. Green, in particular, had questioned Hegel's insistence that freedom must be realized in the state,[46] and Andrew Seth had attempted to rescue idealism from Hegel's organicism in *Hegelianism and Personality* (1887). Seth's critique preempts an important move in Pater's work, which is to ground the sense of unity in subjective experience and insist on the self as 'an apex of separation and difference'.[47] After Pater has rehearsed the concert of the zeitgeist in *Plato and Platonism*, he suggests that the solution to Hegel's conservative organicism is a return to Wordsworth, insisting that 'there was nothing of all *that*, however, in the mind of the great *English* poet' (*PP,* 73, my emphasis). Wordsworth is the modern inheritor of the impulse of Pythagoreanism, specifically in his ode *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. The important difference is that his musical ideal of cosmic unity is a subjective impulse, 'an instinct of the human mind itself'. Pater's insistence on a subjective reading of Wordsworthian Romanticism offers an important qualification to his own earlier essay on 'Wordsworth' of 1874, where he had articulated a largely organicist aesthetic in a way that set a template for the vision of landscape in 'The School of Giorgione'.

It is perhaps because of his anxiety about the public and political implications of aesthetic organicism that Pater increasingly moved towards the highly subjective mode of the 'Imaginary Portrait' and tended to retreat from the pastoral vision which had come to fruition in 'The School of Giorgione' and 'The Study of Dionysus'. In his Wordsworthian fiction 'The Child in the House' (1878),[48] Pater reiterated the musical idea in a recollection of his childhood home, where 'this sense of harmony between his soul and its physical environment became, for a time at least, like perfectly played music' (*MS*, 180). But while the Giorgionesque ideal expressed an open space of play, this harmony is predicated on 'a place "inclosed" and "sealed"' (*MS*, 181), a wistful 'love of security' (*MS*, 180) which suggests the love of tombs, through which he wanders later in the story, thinking of 'those poor, home-returning ghosts, which all men have fancied to themselves – the *revenant*' (*MS*, 192). Only a year after 'The School of Giorgione', the familiar figures of gothic subjectivity return:

the acoustic landscape is replaced by a haunted interior, and the former plenitude of wave-instilled air reverberates with spectral yearning. This sudden return from the pastoral to the gothic is highly suggestive of the overall fate of the utopian aspiration in Pater's Aestheticism. His expression of an ideal of acoustic space was in many ways the fulfilment of his aesthetic thinking and performed an important revisionary contribution to the idealist tradition he emerged from. But the deeper political dangers of aesthetic organicism increasingly haunted Pater as he moved further away from aesthetic criticism towards troubled reflections on the history of philosophy. As Pater followed his 'home returning ghosts', the Giorgionesque ideal was to remain an idyll – a briefly glimpsed moment of music seeking habitable space, recoiling from the nineteenth century and its din.

Chapter 2

Aesthetic Vampirism: The Concept of Irony in the Work of Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and Vernon Lee

Walter Pater, Aesthetic Autonomy and the Solid State of Irony

In 'The School of Giorgione' Pater celebrated a form of sensuous plenitude unique to the medium of music, but he figured this ideal through a painting whose central subject was exquisitely refined and strangely detached. The monk at the centre of Titian's *Concert* is perhaps the type of figure that Pater had in mind in 'Diaphaneitè', the 'evanescent shade' whose sensuous receptivity might be regenerative, but whose friction withw contemporary life might be the source of an acute fragility, a melancholia unique to the passing of transient sensations and the passing of ghosts in ruined spaces. Although Pater's ideal personality might have been a Renaissance musician or, in 'Winckelmann', the statue of a young boy suspended at the moment of adolescent awakening, there is another kind of aesthetic persona that haunts his work from the beginning. In the essay 'Leonardo da Vinci' (1873), Pater recounts how the artist trails the streets at night in search of the fleeting appearance of beauty, yet is motivated towards that evanescent ideal by a 'series of disgusts'. If we recall Oscar Wilde's imaginary portrait and critical experiment, 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', where Shakespeare's model, the boy actor Willie Hughes, is constantly reborn throughout history, reanimating the force of the Renaissance into the Enlightenment, it is surely not fanciful to suggest that Pater saw Leonardo as the first vampire of the Renaissance. And in the same essay Pater would famously reveal the Mona Lisa as a vampire who had existed with sublime indifference throughout the turbulent evolutionary movement of world history. What vampirism figured for Pater here was the absolute spirit of aesthetic detachment, just as essential to Pater's vision as the sensuous revolution performed in the name of Dionysus.

When the decadent symbol of the vampire begins to haunt the literary and artistic culture of the Victorian fin de siècle, Aestheticism appears literally to embrace the inhuman. During the evolution of nineteenth-century

Aestheticism the vampire came to embody the concept of irony: this was a paradoxical embodiment, since it is the very nature of irony to turn against the embodied figure and the nature of the ironist to perform his own detachment from expressive forms. But compulsive irony expressed an aspiration that was fundamental to the gothic turn in Aestheticism; by the artful manipulation of refined ironies, the Aesthete aspired towards the condition of the autonomous art in modernity. This was a rather different trajectory to Pater's aspiration towards the condition of music, a medium which was inchoate, spatially dispersed and utopian in its immanent sensuous plenitude. The decadent Aesthete aspired to the condition of the most obscure and opaque object, an object perhaps that had not yet been invented, only intimated in relics of the Hellenic past, which asserted a special kind of isolation by their fragmentary condition or by their blithe obsolescence. Irony was the gesture by which the aesthetic subject aspired to the status of the art object in modernity; independent from devotional or instructional purposes, from fixed tradition or home and, for Baudelaire or Wilde, from morality and realist imitation. Yet the more that the culture and discourse of Aestheticism protected this autonomy, the more it risked the identification of art as an aristocratic reaction, its detachment manifested as an icy reserve, a refusal to manifest itself in the public sphere comparable to the vampire's refusal of daylight. The autonomy of art was both a freedom and danger, but taken to its extreme, the insistence on aesthetic independence might give birth to the inhuman. Articulating such an anxiety in the wake of Modernism, Ortega y Gasset described a 'dehumanization of art' induced mutually by the idea of the autonomous object and the destructive attitude to traditional art, a tendency which left avant-gardists 'doomed to irony'.[1] Writing in 1925, Ortega identified a contrary humanist principle prior to Modernism: the 'works of art that the nineteenth century favoured invariably contain a core of "lived" reality which furnishes the substance, as it were, of the aesthetic body'.[2] But the process of dehumanization Ortega located in Modernism might well be regarded as the development of nineteenth-century Aestheticism. Perhaps the most sensational manifestation of this inhuman turn was the aristocratic irony and immorality of Oscar Wilde's fictional dandies, Lord Henry Wotton and Dorian Gray. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* has indeed been frequently identified as a vampire novel in all but name, and one of the primary tropes of the novel, the living portrait, is framed by an engagement with Walter Pater's earlier evocation of the Mona Lisa as a vampire, in his essay 'Leonardo da Vinci'. These literary treatments of the haunted portrait can be regarded as two of the classic texts of aesthetic vampirism, but both authors were clearly troubled by the implications of the vampire figure.

If the vampire represents the body without substance or 'lived' reality, detached from historical actuality and sensuous presence, then it betrays some of the primary values espoused by the aesthetic Hellenists that emerged from

Victorian Oxford. Pater's early essay 'Winckelmann' announced a 'more liberal mode of life' based on the revitalization of sensuous experience (*R*, 146) and the progressive development of spirit. Pater followed Hegel's model of the development of art through a series of cultural phases, reiterating the Hegelian demand that art should be the sensuous manifestation of spirit. In the first edition of 'Winckelmann' (1867), art is 'a *Versinnlichen* of the idea – the idea turned into an object of sense',[3] and the embodied beauty of the Greek sculpture constitutes its ideal medium. This is clearly difficult to reconcile with the insistence on ironic detachment and critical self-consciousness that characterized later documents of Aestheticism such as Wilde's 'The Critic as Artist' (1890). Aestheticism was the site of a conflict between an ideal of sensuous aesthetic embodiment and the striving for irony, cosmopolitan detachment and abstraction, and this tension was integral to the discourses of German idealist aesthetics on which Pater's and Wilde's thought was founded. Hegel identified the concept of irony as the final product of aesthetic modernity, and only a decade later, his critique was developed at great length by Kierkegaard in his doctoral study, *The Concept of Irony* (1841). It is here that the nineteenth-century relationship between irony and vampirism was cemented. Kierkegaard develops his theory from the example of Socrates, who is credited with the extraordinary achievement of inaugurating the spirit of irony in world history. Socrates stood up for the purely negative principle of absolute subjectivity, and this became both a sublime freedom and a curse. Addicted to the experience of beginnings, the Socratic ironist is always 'negatively free and as such suspended, because there is nothing that holds him'.[4] Living absolutely by moods, his total subjectivism develops into a wasting disease, and Kierkegaard identifies this disease as vampirism. Socrates is a vampire in so far as he embodies the concept of irony:

> There quietly develops in the individual the disease that is just as ironic as any other wasting disease and allows the individual to feel best when he is closest to disintegration. *The ironist is the vampire who has sucked the blood of the lover and while doing so has fanned him cool*, lulled him to sleep, and tormented him with troubled dreams.[5] (my italics)

In spite of the dialectical complexity of Kierkegaard's work in relation to irony and the aesthetic life, his determination of irony as a wasting disease prefigures the terms of Max Nordau's *Degeneration* (1895) – the famously paranoid critique of Aestheticism as a pathological condition of egomania. Yet Kierkegaard's ethical psychology is more subtle: his image of the vampire suggests the anxieties of the limitless freedom experienced by the ironist, translating the negative relationship with the speech act into a general refusal of any temporally limited identity. Since irony gives the illusion of limitless possibilities, it sucks the blood out of the present, and Kierkegaard goes on to diagnose this ironic

disintegration according to the subject's relationship with history. One of the vampire ironist's foremost sins is his renunciation of historical actuality, what Hegel would see as the substance of the ethical life,[6] and Kierkegaard determines this suspended position as 'the purely negative dialectic that continually remains in itself, never goes out into the qualifications of life or of the idea'.[7] As Sylviane Agacinski comments, 'for Kierkegaard irony will always be what eludes Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*)'.[8] As the spirit of irony, the vampire preserves the negative moment in dialectical development but prevents it from being turned back into a positive movement, in the manner of the Hegelian process of sublation. As an immortal and undead subject it thwarts the humanist discourses that dominated the nineteenth century – the idea of dialectical development and the progressive sense of modernity as the unfolding of the European spirit – substituting them with a sublime aesthetic disengagement.

When this demonic irony found artistic expression in the nineteenth century, it assumed a gothic form, finding its most dangerous face in Baudelaire's poetry. In *The Flowers of Evil* irony is not only a rhetorical method but an inhuman force: in the final movement of the volume Baudelaire elucidates a compulsive striving for negation – 'The Taste for Nothingness'[9] – a self-torturing consciousness which, in 'Heautontimoroumenos',[10] is determined as a 'voracious irony'.[11] The poet's ironic compulsion establishes a 'dissonance in the divine symphony' and Baudelaire imagines this negation in the figure of the vampire: 'I am the vampire at my own veins'.[12] In the next poem of the sequence, 'The Irremediable',[13] the negative force is an 'ironic, infernal beacon',[14] but Baudelaire embraces this vampiric irony within the same terms that Hegel rejected it, as the ultimate refinement of self-consciousness at work on its own collapse. Baudelaire's staging of this figure takes the form of a metaphysical melodrama, where irony is embodied as a Satanic principle, and this has the consequence of precluding the possibility that irony might be reincorporated into the civic realm: in *The Flowers of Evil* irony is a performance of subjectivity at its dangerous limits.

Like Stoker's Dracula, Baudelaire's gothic irony subsequently migrated across Europe into the very soils where the Arts and Crafts movement was developing its more earnest ideals of artistic labour as the re-humanizing of an impoverished industrial landscape. If Ruskin and Morris were striving to formulate a democratic ideal of an aesthetic life, then the influence of Baudelaire on figures such as Swinburne and Pater would assist the development of an alternative strand in British Aestheticism, where a refined aesthetic subjectivity began to replace the labouring craftsman and a spectral and haunted gothic replaced Ruskin's civic model of gothic culture. Walter Pater made a subtle but provocative announcement of this transformation in 'Aesthetic Poetry' (1868), his review of William Morris's poem 'The Earthly Paradise'.[15] Using Baudelaire's idea of the 'artificial paradise' to describe Morris's utopian idylls, Pater identified his poetry as a haunted or spectral form: 'Of that transfigured world the new poetry takes possession, and sublimates beyond it another still

fainter and more spectral, which is literally an artificial or "earthly paradise"' (*Ap*, 213). Pater is hardly faithful to the idea of the 'earthly paradise' here, since the 'transfigured world' he celebrates is clearly unearthly, 'spectral' and dehumanized. He goes on to diagnose this poetic aspiration as an 'inversion of home-sickness [. . .] which no actual form of life satisfies' (*Ap*, 213–4). This diagnostic representation of Romanticism contains a distinct echo of Hegel's critique of the Romantic ironist, whose 'craving for the solid and substantial' (*A*, I: 66) is symptomatic of a contrary drive towards unfettered detachment. For Hegel the '*truly* beautiful soul acts and is actual' (*A*, I: 67), and Pater's assertion that the spectral poetry demands a renunciation of any 'actual form of life' suggests a tacit adherence to the logic of Hegel's critique at the very moment when he appears to support Baudelaire's distant and tortured vision of an artificial paradise.

Pater's evocation of the spectral presence of 'Aesthetic Poetry' works as a prelude to the many haunted presences that inhabit his work. The most famous of these is the figure of vampire which emerges in his essay 'Leonardo da Vinci' (1873).[16] Pater famously describes 'La Gioconda' as an embodiment of vampirism, exploiting the capacity of the image to suggest the inaccessible inner subjectivity through its opaque and haunted surface. Pater begins the passage with an idealist conception of beauty as the sensuous manifestation of inner soul: 'It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh' (*R*, 98), but the idea that the Mona Lisa's spirit is sensuously present in the image is soon undermined by a consistent focus on absence and death. The passage which Yeats translated into poetic form evokes this absence as a principle that has presided throughout history:

> She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave, and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and hands. (*R*, 99)

The Mona Lisa has in one sense lived an absolutely discontinuous existence – 'like the vampire', she is repeatedly reanimated as a subterranean hidden presence, or as Leda, Saint Anne and so many mythical mothers. At the same time she eludes the protean identity of mythical embodiment, experiencing the panoply of different incarnations 'but as the sound of lyres and flutes' – her famously elusive gaze suggesting her ultimate disengagement. Immediately before the identification of the Mona Lisa as vampire Pater has described this disengagement in terms of the historical being of the portrait. The aim of the

object is to express the spirit of the successive world-historical epochs; 'the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the mysticism of the middle ages', (*R*, 98) but the power of Lady Lisa ultimately derives from her position in excess of this evolutionary telos, since to Lady Lisa the historical phases are merely 'moods'. It is this excess which establishes her as a paradoxical figure of irony.

In the final section of his evocation of 'La Gioconda', Pater directly engages with this relationship between the figure of the vampire and the conception of history according to which 'modern philosophy has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life' (*R*, 99). This clearly alludes to the Hegelian conception of a developmental history, which had such a crucial influence on Pater's essay on 'Winckelmann' and provided him with an idea of art history as a progressive evolution of spirit towards self-consciousness. By framing 'La Gioconda' in these terms Pater suggests that the image is the final stage of history and the most complete realization of aesthetic modernity, but the nature of this stage is nevertheless uncertain. For Daniel O'Hara, Pater 'discloses the ironic muse of modern literature' precisely in the presentation of Lisa as a summation of historical epochs: 'the aesthetic ideal, as Pater sees it, requires the cultivation of an ironic detachment, a studied indifference, to the direct phases of life. This ironic pose is best shown in Pater's contention that one must view all phases of culture, Classic, Medieval, and Modern as necessary to the progressive development of the human spirit'.[17] O'Hara suggests that the irony of the Mona Lisa is the evolutionary *telos* of world history, the end result of modernity as a developmental process. But the irony of the Mona Lisa may be more radical than this, resisting the Hegelian ideas of summation and development altogether: through the figure of the vampire, Lady Lisa is determined as outside of history – aesthetic vampirism might then be regarded as a symptom of the striving to abstract the idea of art from historical becoming.

The way that Pater introduces the figure of the Mona Lisa continually undermines any attempt to identify her with a historical process or spirit of development. The idea of the image as a historical synthesis is developed in the assertion that the thoughts of the world have been 'etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form', (*R*, 98) but it is important to register at this point that the space of the image, *'there'*, is straining towards its limits as a textual deposit: 'that which they have of power to refine' suggests that there are limits to this power – that there is always an invisible remainder to the signifying process. The final sentences of the passage increasingly focus on the problematic status of the image and the inaccessibility of the Mona Lisa, both as a subject and as an idea, and Pater ends with a speculation on the conditions of interpretation rather than a statement about the object: 'Lady Lisa *might* stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea' (*R* 99; my italics). It is worth stressing the conditional here, which might be extended into a more radical

uncertainty about the possibility of interpretation. The hermeneutic condition instated by this vampiric irony means that the conceptual content of the object is opaque, provoking a series of questions: how is the 'old fancy' related to the 'modern idea'? If the 'old fancy' is equated with 'the fancy of a perpetual life' (*R* 99), this might suggest that the desire which is invoked by the image is the desire for vampirism. If we are to interpret the 'modern idea' as the vampire's ironic detachment from history and the image, then we might see this striving for Romantic irony as a refracted form of the 'old fancy' for immortality. The uncertainty inherent in Pater's conceptual terms is exacerbated by the discourse of representation he uses; the aesthetic terms here are 'embodiment' and 'symbol', but they are used to introduce a spectral figure who is more alive as an abstract spirit than in a body. The extent to which the ideas and fancies constellated around the Mona Lisa can be embodied, when Pater's ekphrasis is motivated and haunted by absence, poses more general questions about the condition of the artistic image as a conceptual vehicle. How can the modern object be said to embody the infinite possibilities of subjective spirit when it is limited by its immobile medium? What are the relative claims for symbolization and embodiment that Pater is mobilizing in his account of 'La Gioconda'?

The contradiction at the heart of Pater's reading of 'La Gioconda' is that if the 'modern idea' is to be taken as the ironic detachment which abstracts the image of Lisa from history, then she is the symbol of precisely that principle which resists symbolization. Lisa is the figure or embodiment of the desire which cannot be figured and a symbol of the spirit which eludes symbolization. Like Baudelaire's 'voracious irony', which is both 'the knife and the wound it deals', this might be read in Paul de Man's terms as the production of 'irony to the second power or "irony of irony"', a process which effectively stalls any capacity for reconciliation with the empirical world.[18] De Man reads this kind of absolute irony as an instantaneous event, the negative suggestion of infinite potential revealed in a performative moment. Yet in Pater's case the temporality of irony is quite different; when irony becomes vampiric it is as if the negative moment has been frozen in Lady Lisa's gaze. As Carolyn Williams suggests, 'one cannot look at her face through the lens of Pater's prose without becoming, like her, immobile in the collapse of temporality'.[19] The effect of this immobilizing of consciousness is that the ironic distance of Lady Lisa appears to establish itself as an object. According to this anthropomorphic process, irony has achieved the status of the autonomous object, while at the same time being uncannily resistant to the sensuous material of the work of art. Adapting Goethe's idea that architecture is 'petrified music',[20] we might say that 'La Gioconda' is irony frozen into the solid state of painting, and this would suggest the more general relationship between irony and artistic autonomy which I have mobilized as a constitutive feature of nineteenth-century Aestheticism. Conversely, we might see irony as the gaseous form of the art object when, like the vampire in hiding, it assumes the form of a creeping

mist.[21] Irony is a both a mimetic desire for the autonomous object of art and a striving for release from the body of representation.

This relationship between the condition of aesthetic subjectivity and the autonomous art work is a consistent feature of Pater's work and is central to the general account of the life of Leonardo da Vinci which precedes the evocation of 'La Gioconda'. In the miniature Bildungsroman typical of *The Renaissance*, Leonardo is identified from the outset within the terms of Romantic irony, as Pater notes 'his high indifference, his intolerance of the common forms of things' (*R*, 77). Just as Kierkegaard identifies the ironist with discontinuity and moods, Pater sees Leonardo's life as 'one of sudden revolts' (*R* 77); the artist strives by negation, 'for the way to perfection is by a series of disgusts' (*R*, 81). This oscillation between indifference and disgust appears to be an essential aspect of Leonardo's devotion to artistic perfection, and Pater goes on to distinguish his attitude to art in the terms of a modern conception of aesthetic autonomy, comparing Leonardo's 'solitary culture of beauty' to those artists motivated by moral or political concerns:

> Other artists have been as careless of present or future applause, in self-forgetfulness, or because they set moral or political ends above the ends of art; but in him this solitary culture of beauty seems to have hung upon a kind of self-love, and a carelessness in the work of art of all but art itself. (*R*, 92)

The devotion to 'all but art itself' is described in terms of the Kantian definition of the idea of beauty as an 'end in itself', as for Leonardo 'the exquisite effect woven, counted as an end in itself – a perfect end'. The terms for the fashioning of Leonardo's personality and his fashioning of the perfect object are interchangeable: the 'high indifference' to which his self-fashioning aspires mimics the indifference of his most ideal object – the elusive and vampiric portrait.

This kind of transition between ironic self-fashioning and artistic autonomy is particularly relevant for the broader claims of Aestheticism concerning the relationship between art and life. Pater's narratives of artistic life could be regarded as privileging the process of *Bildung*, or cultural development, over the art object itself, yet this would be to neglect the constitutive role the autonomous art object has in the process of aesthetic self-cultivation. The primary drive of many of Pater's artistic personalities appears to be a kind of self-undoing in which they come to mimic the object of art precisely for its Kantian qualities of autonomy and detachment. Pater is quite explicit about the negative tendency of this process, which he locates at the heart of the classical ideal. In 'Winckelmann' he describes the 'supreme, artistic view of life' as a process of negation: 'with a kind of passionate coldness, such natures rejoice to be away from and past their former selves' (*R*, 183). This aspiration

to autonomy is associated with a striving towards death: 'That high indifference to the outward, that impassivity, has already a touch of the corpse in it' (*R*, 179), and in the essay 'Pico della Mirandola' the same indifference suggests the 'chilling touch of the abstract and disembodied beauty Platonists profess to long for' (*R*, 33). Although the Renaissance is interpreted as the rebirth of sensuous culture, in this essay and in the volume as a whole, Pico's works are 'a glance into one of those ancient sepulchres' (*R*, 31). As a personality striving for abstraction Pico himself is described as 'one alive in the grave' (*R*, 38), and Jeffrey Wallen has emphasized the way that this trope is intimately associated with both the vampire image in 'Leonardo da Vinci' and the suggestion Pater takes from Heine's 'The Gods in Exile' that the god Apollo may have been sacrificed in the era of Christianity only to return as a vampire.[22] In Wallen's reading Pater's vision of the Renaissance 'is always also vampiric, displaced, and haunted by exile and death',[23] and this negativity is implicit in the idea of Renaissance as the return of classical culture, where the Greek world reappears as a spectral ideal, haunting the present in a state of suspended manifestation.

It is clear that Pater remained haunted by this spectral and vampiric condition in much of the work he produced after *The Renaissance*. Laurel Brake has noted that the *Imaginary Portraits* frequently resemble vampire narratives, particularly those of 'Carl of Rosenmold' and 'Denys L'Auxerrois',[24] and we might also include the deathly idealism of 'Sebastian van Stork'. It was only late in his career, however, that Pater would come to a direct theoretical treatment of these issues. Pater's most considered statement on the condition of irony and aesthetic vampirism was his essay 'Prosper Mérimée' (1890),[25] a highly significant late work which performs a retrospective mediation on nineteenth-century Aestheticism, clarifying the associations between aesthetic subjectivity, the autonomous art object and Romantic irony that were implicit in his earlier work.

Mérimée was famous as the author of stories such as 'Carmen' and 'Matteo Falcone', which Pater describes as 'perhaps the cruelest story in the world' (*MS*, 9). What Pater sees in Mérimée's stories is a combination of perfect self-containment, immaculate stylistic finish and an inhuman detachment and violence. Once again he is drawn to a subject who is preoccupied with 'the brief visit from the grave' (*MS*, 22), seeing the returning spectre as the condition of his art: 'That ghosts should return [. . .] is but a sort of natural justice', and Pater finally reiterates the figure of the vampire to determine this uncanny return: Mérimée's chosen company are 'half-material ghosts – a *vampire tribe*' (*MS*, 22; my italics). This undead condition appears 'congruously with the mental constitution of the writer' – a peculiar compound of refinement and violence, and Pater identifies this 'mental constitution' as essentially ironic.[26] Mérimée is represented as a 'master of irony', pathologically anxious to secure both his self-fashioning and his literary production as ends in themselves. This ironic mastery is fulfilled in the production of a mask: 'himself carrying ever,

as a mask, the conventional attire of the modern world – carrying it with an infinite, contemptuous grace, as if that, too, were a sufficient end in itself' (*MS*, 5). Pater explicitly introduces the Kantian idea of art as an 'end in itself' here, in order to describe a mode of aesthetic subjectivity that remains hidden, reflecting the ironic principle of the Mona Lisa's detachment from history and the general condition of artistic autonomy.

Pater's association of Mérimée's work with the condition of vampirism suggests the extent to which he was troubled by irony and aesthetic autonomy. Irony is identified as the guiding principle and compulsion behind Mérimée's life and work, and Pater goes on to associate this compulsion with an incipient nihilism: 'Almost everywhere he could detect the hollow ring of fundamental nothingness under the apparent surface of things. Irony surely, habitual irony, would be the proper complement thereto, on his part' (*MS*, 4). This association of irony with the 'sense of negation' (*MS*, 3) reiterates Hegel's critique of irony as the destructive expression of philosophical subjectivism: in 'Prosper Mérimée' Pater is more explicit than in any of his other critical essays in suggesting the limits of Aestheticism and determining these limits according to the mutual inheritance of post-Kantian thought and French Romantic literature. His intellectual narrative here is nothing less than 'the mental story of the nineteenth century' (*MS*, 3). As its representative figure, Mérimée epitomizes 'the *désillusionné*, who had found in Kant's negations the last word concerning an unseen world [. . .] and will demand, from what is to interest him at all, artificial stimulus' (*MS*, 2). The various forms of artificial stimulus – including gambling, drugs and the bullfight – are subsequently associated with 'art exaggerated, in matter or form, as in Hugo or Baudelaire' (*MS*, 3), and later with the quality of impersonality (*MS*, 29), the 'impeccably correct, cold-blooded' (*MS*, 18) style he also associates with Flaubert (*MS*, 28). Once again reflecting Hegel's critique, Pater establishes a qualitative ethical association between a mode of existence and an artistic style, with the result that Aestheticism in general is apparently identified with the negative, dehumanizing principle of absolute irony. This produces a violent impulse which is associated with the faculty of taste itself: Mérimée's Aestheticism embraces 'the beauty of the fire-arms [. . .] a sort of fanatic joy in the perfect pistol-shot' (*MS*, 18–19). What is extraordinary about this essay is Pater's ease in apparently determining this combination of spectrality and violence with a whole phase of French literature that is intimately associated with his own work and the development of Aestheticism in Britain. In this respect, the essay on Mérimée might be regarded not only as a moment of self-criticism but as an expression of considerable anxiety about the work of his own disciples – a troubled meditation on the translation of Aestheticism into decadence as an awakening of the inhuman.[27] Pater tacitly invoked the Hegelian critique of irony at the moment when Aestheticism was increasingly beginning to appear as the play of self-consciousness with its own refinements.

Oscar Wilde's Vampire Novel and the Crisis of Aesthetic Humanism

At the onset of the 1890s, the same year that Pater lectured on Mérimée, Wilde had already serialized *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and 'The Critic as Artist'. In the dialogue mode of 'The Critic as Artist' he had found a suitable vehicle for his ironic consciousness, using masks to propose a theory of criticism as the refinement of self-consciousness: 'there is no fine art without self-consciousness, and self-consciousness and the critical spirit are one'.[28] In his previous aesthetic dialogue, 'The Decay of Lying', Wilde had staged his most radical assertion of art's autonomy: 'Art never expresses anything but itself. It has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines'.[29] He was yet to achieve a mature theoretical statement of the relationship between the autonomous art object and the principle of ironic critical subjectivity, but the codependence of these principles was clearly demonstrated in his fictional work. *Dorian Gray* produces an effective metaphor for the ironic condition of Aestheticism by combining the gothic conceit of the living art work, familiar from Pater's 'Leonardo da Vinci' and Poe's 'The Oval Portrait', with the narcissistic narrative of Huysmans's *Against Nature*, where the critical self-consciousness of the aristocratic des Esseintes aspires to an absolute autonomy. As in Pater's essay on Mérimée, irony, artificial stimulus and compulsive aestheticized violence are manifested in a vampiric personality. Camille Paglia has observed how Wilde's novel rehearses many of the classic tropes of vampirism – mesmeric influence, a hieratic aristocracy and sexual possession.[30] *Dorian Gray* is a tale of two vampires and an innocent Hegelian Hellenist, Basil Hallward, whose earnest ideals of the sensuous manifestation of artistic spirit are seen to fail as the vampiric ironists transform the culture of Aestheticism. Henry Wotton, the hitherto largely inactive vampire and master of aristocratic irony, practices his 'influence' for one last time on Dorian, who henceforth cultivates an ironic indifference to life which, as with Mérimée, develops into violence. Identified from the beginning with 'the spirit that is Greek', Dorian is initially framed in the discourse of aesthetic humanism: 'the harmony of body and soul' (*DG*, 10), the 'abstract sense of beauty' which can be materialized in the 'visible presence' of the beautiful boy. These are largely Basil Hallward's ideals, but Wilde represents, both conceptually and historically, the passing of Basil's humanist version of aesthetic idealism into decadent irony.

This process of decadence is clearly situated in relation to Pater's work, and the vampiric image of 'La Gioconda' is echoed throughout the novel, most obviously in the reanimated portrait, but also in the form of Huysmans's *Against Nature*. This 'novel without a plot' inherently refuses the humanist ideals of development and *Bildung*, effectively working as the vampire who stands in for Lord Henry in his absence, mediating the spirit of irony and raising it

in the form of a sacred text. The effect on Dorian is to induce the condition of Pater's Lady Lisa, as the world appears to pass him by 'to the delicate sound of flutes' (*DG*, 125). This Paterian allusion is then consolidated in the description of the unnamed protagonist of the novel, Wilde's version of des Esseintes:

> A certain young Parisian, who spent his life trying to realise in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own, and to sum up, as it were, in himself the various moods through which the world-spirit had ever passed. (*DG*, 125)

Huysmans's protagonist is framed by Pater's negative dialectics of the portrait. Like Lady Lisa, the young Parisian has stepped outside of dialectical development: his ambition to invoke the various historical experiences 'for their mere artificiality' facilitates a reduction of history to a 'dumb show', and this translation of the world into a general theatricality supports an essentially ironic condition. This is subsequently elucidated in chapter 11, where Dorian completes his aesthetic education, fully embraces Lord Henry's cynicism and masters the practice of dandyism in all its modes. At this point he arrives at the theory, which Wilde himself proposed in 'The Critic as Artist', that 'insincerity is merely a method by which we can multiply our personalities' (*DG*, 142–3). This critique of the ego as 'permanent, reliable, and of one essence' (*DG*, 143) is subsequently translated into the gothic idea of the human as 'a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead'. It is at this point that Wilde invokes Pater's conceit of 'the soul with all its maladies', effectively situating the ironic condition of aesthetic vampirism as a direct legacy of Pater's work.

By repeatedly bringing Huysmans and Pater together here, Wilde begins to suggest that the condition of vampiric irony is equally integral to the foundational documents of British Aestheticism and French decadence. This diagnosis is consolidated in the culminating scene of this central phase of the novel, when Dorian visits the haunted gallery of his ancestors, echoing the opening scene of *Against Nature*, where des Esseintes is introduced in his family gallery as the end of a degenerate aristocracy. As Dorian contemplates the demonic portraits, each figure mimics the vampiric condition of Lady Lisa: Lady Elizabeth Devereux and George Willoughby, his 'sensual lips twisted with disdain', and his mother, whose eyes 'seemed to follow him wherever he went' (*DG*, 144). Dorian realizes two aspects of his ironic condition at this point; his position of ideal spectatorship and knowledge, and his peculiar mode of historical being at the end of history: 'He felt he had known them all, those strange terrible figures that had passed across the stage of the world' (*DG*, 144). Dorian can only conceive of himself historically insofar as his own present condition is repeated or rehearsed in the portraits of his ancestors, where the 'the whole

of history was merely the record of his own life'. The condition of the Wildean dandy here performs a narcissistic translation of Pater's aesthetic historicism, in which the Aesthete sees himself repeated in an endless series of ancestral portraits. Since each of the ancestors is undead, contained and reanimated by their portrait, this is not a genealogical relationship; uncanny repetition replaces development. Dorian finds his ancestry in a tribe of vampires, a genealogy outside of history.

This paradoxical relationship with an ahistorical residue repeated throughout history might be said to represent Dorian's temporal condition according to three essential modes of his experience: his ironic dandyism, his status as an object of beauty in the Kantian sense and his position as an aristocrat. All of these modes have an ambivalent position in modernity, which is encapsulated by the idea of vampirism. The fictional vampire commonly figures a pre-modern social form – in Franco Moretti's famous reading of *Dracula,* the Count figures the feudal aristocracy before the advent of capitalist modernity, but he is also the vampire that Marx unveiled within capitalism, the monopoly capitalist which reinstates the relation of lordship. The resulting condition is that 'Dracula is at once the final product of the bourgeois century and its negation'.[31] The same can be said about Dorian's dandyism, which he himself considers in terms of Baudelaire's ideas as 'an attempt to assert the absolute modernity of beauty' (*DG*, 129). The other side of Baudelaire's theory, which Dorian neglects, is that the dandy retroactively performs the position of an outmoded aristocracy.[32] In the case of Dorian Gray, the 'modern idea' of an ironic urban dandyism ultimately supports the 'old fancy' of an aesthetic aristocracy. As Linda Dowling has argued in *The Vulgarization of Art*, Wilde's work staged an emerging distinction between a democratic and liberal model of Aestheticism and an aristocratic idea of the 'aesthetic critic', detached from the *sensus communis* in a fundamentally illiberal posture of aristocratic independence. The logic of Wilde's orchestration of the discourses of Aestheticism in *Dorian Gray* has particularly dangerous suggestions about the status of British Aestheticism as a humanist discourse, since it situates the condition of aesthetic negativity, irony and vampirism as the legacy of Pater's work, threatening to undermine the ideals of aesthetic education and development that were equally central to Victorian aesthetic Hellenism. One of the most significant features of *Dorian Gray* is that Wilde chose *not* to focus his attention on the life and adventures of Basil Hallward, which might have produced an artistic and philosophical Bildungsroman in the mould of Pater's recently successful *Marius the Epicurean* (1885). For Wilde the twinned principles of ironic consciousness and absolute artistic autonomy increasingly undermined the idealist conception of historical and personal development: the humanist discourses of Aestheticism were haunted by the ironic condition of frozen temporality and aristocratic distance.

If Pater himself had suggested his anxieties about the aristocratic irony of Aestheticism in 'Prosper Mérimée', he gave no suggestion of how it might be

overcome. In his later review of the 1891 edition of *Dorian*,[33] he continued to express the moral doubts to which he had given public voice in his lecture. Confronted with the continuous echo of his own ideas and the reanimation of his own vampire, Pater was forced to be more emphatic in distinguishing his own Aestheticism from the inhuman negations embodied by Henry and Dorian. Criticizing the novel's espousal of a 'dainty Epicurean theory',[34] Pater implicitly takes issue with the negative dialectic instated by Henry and Dorian. Against the decadent Aesthete's ironic relation to history and morality, he attempts to restore his ethical credibility from what he recognized as a distortion of his own theories:

> A true Epicureanism aims at a complete though harmonious development of man's entire organism. To lose the moral sense therefore, for instance, the sense of sin and righteousness, as Mr Wilde's heroes are bent on doing so speedily, is to lose, or lower, organization, to become less complex, to pass from a higher to a lower stage of development.[35]

Against the condition of vampiric irony, Pater asserts a discourse of organic development, echoing his statement in the early essay 'Winckelmann', that 'the mind itself has a historical development' (*R*, 167) and implicitly suggesting the example of his own *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) – a novel of spiritual education and development, albeit of a curiously spectral kind.

Pater is clearly anxious to qualify his conception of development, and he does so according to the value of complexity. This intervention is both provocative and risky in relation to Wilde's novel, since Pater is in danger of demonstrating his affinities with Wilde's aristocratic ironists at the moment he seeks to disavow their cynicism. Complexity is in fact one of the recurrent terms of Lord Henry's philosophy: in a typically Paterian move he embraces the moment when 'a complex personality took the place and assumed the offices of art' (*DG*, 57), but the idea is morally compromised by his notion that 'there are certain temperaments that marriage makes more complex' (*DG*, 74), since in this case complexity facilitates the capacity for dissimulation and infidelity. The immoral form of complexity is also embodied in the 'complex refrains and movements' (*DG*, 126) of the 'novel without a plot' and is subsequently reiterated in Dorian's assertion of the 'complex multiform creature' who multiplies, rather than harmonizes his personality. Complexity, in this case, expresses the sophistication, irony and subversive capacities for which Wilde is frequently celebrated – qualities which risk dehumanizing Aestheticism and reducing it to a narcissistic play with spectacle. In the light of Wilde's decadent turn, Pater is forced to contest these qualities with his own notion of development: in order to rescue complexity from decadent vampirism, he reasserts the 'modern idea' not as the negative dialectic of irony but as a dialectical development with a moral humanist *telos*. Pater appears to need this developmental and

organic idea to re-humanize Aestheticism; his only way of combating decadence is to restore a humanist notion of *Bildung* which is sanctioned by a wider cultural dialectic.

Considering the complexity of his engagement with aesthetic vampirism in 'Prosper Mérimée', Pater's critique of *Dorian Gray* appears to be an anxiously defensive gesture. He could well be accused here of attempting to defensively slay the vampire that he himself had unleashed and even tacitly celebrated in the evocation of 'La Gioconda'. What Pater's review demonstrates is the difficulty of reconciling the humanist legacy of Aestheticism – the idea that the aesthetic subject has a reciprocally productive relationship with the organic development of culture – with its equally central claim to a position of ironic detachment; the Aesthete as a cosmopolitan subject and independent faculty of judgment. The ideas of development and *Bildung* were fundamental to the foundational discourses of Victorian Aestheticism, but so was the vampiric detachment of the Mona Lisa. The idea of the 'aesthetic critic', as it was promoted by Wilde in 'The Critic as Artist', might be seen as a parasitic figure who demanded the liberties of critical consumption at the expense of artistic production and embodiment. Yet to a certain extent this spectral form of the idea of art was integral to the historical possibilities of Aestheticism: the discourse of aesthetics intimating an art without substance and, in the figure of the vampire, a disembodied subject existing only in the form of an apparition. The claims for the absolute detachment of the art object and the aesthetic subject were in one sense motivated by a version of Enlightenment liberalism which enshrined the freedom of individual subjectivity according to its capacity for artistic expression. The problem that haunted Pater, and which drove Wilde to his most extravagant gestures of independence, was that this enlightenment claim for autonomy could not be reconciled with a moral or social claim for art's re-humanizing capacities, but perhaps more crucially, it threatened to disable the sensuous vision that Pater had articulated in 'The School of Giorgione' and 'The Study of Dionysus'. As long as Aestheticism had to determine art's independence as an absolute principle, the threat of vampirism always remained implicit. The dialectical optimism of Aestheticism was haunted by the possibility that the primary force of art resided in the inhuman image; this haunting was both an intimation of the limits of art and the condition of its freedom.

Vernon Lee, Undead History and the Literary Absolute

The more that Aestheticism's concept of freedom was constituted by the ironic disavowal of human ties, the more its narratives turned towards the condition of haunting. In *The Concept of Irony*, the vampire is not the only undead state that Kierkegaard chose to figure the condition of absolute irony. If the

vampire is the figure of the ironist, the effect produced by irony is identified with the formless spectre that returns to haunt. This haunting occurs after the achievement of irony's primary function, which is to volatize all appearances to the point where their vanity and ephemerality is laid bare. In its most rigorous application, irony produces a desert such as that imagined in Ecclesiastes, where the vanity of human wishes disappears into a handful of dust. The resulting condition is a peculiar excess of freedom, but it is perhaps in this excess that the subject discovers irony's capacity for haunting:

> In irony [. . .] since everything is shown to be vanity, the subject becomes free. The more vain everything becomes, the lighter, emptier and volatized the subject becomes. And while everything is in the process of becoming vanity, the ironic subject does not become vain in his own eyes but reduces his own vanity. For irony, everything becomes nothing, but nothing can be taken in several ways [. . .] *the ironic nothing is the dead silence in which irony walks again and haunts* (the latter word taken altogether ambiguously).[36]

No writer of the Victorian fin de siècle explored the ambiguous condition of haunting more acutely than Vernon Lee, one of the most refined ironists of the culture of Aestheticism as well as a key practitioner of aesthetic historicism. The haunting she evokes takes place at the intersection of literature and criticism – a liminal condition which Aestheticism made its own; skeptical, equivocal, oscillating between irony and ecstatic identification, at once hysterical and indifferent, prone to both rapt absorption in the sensuous particular and expansive intellectual generality.

Lee established herself as a historian and aesthetic critic in works such as *Studies in the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880), *Belcaro* (1881) and *Euphorion* (1884). One of her most provocative essays of this period was 'Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art',[37] which might be taken as the primary intellectual statement of a gothic Aestheticism. For Lee, spectrality had become one of the defining desires of the fin de siècle: 'to raise a real spectre of the antique is a craving of our own century' (*H*, 319). Crucially this must not be an embodied form of haunting, since 'we moderns seek in the world of the supernatural a renewal of the delightful semi-obscurity of vision and keenness of fancy of our childhood' (*H*, 312). What she seeks in childhood vision is a state of freedom and play, a 'liberty of seeing in things much more than there is' that has been compromised by Enlightenment rationality and its 'tyranny of the possible' (*H*, 313).

Lee exercised and exploited this freedom in her later collection *Hauntings* (1890), one of the exemplary works of gothic Aestheticism; a series of tales that manifest what Sondeep Kandola has called a 'revenant aesthetics'.[38] This gothic form is intimately bound to the mode of aesthetic historicism that Pater articulated and practiced in *The Renaissance* and 'Aesthetic Poetry',

since history in the Paterian sense involves an effort of revivification, an awakening of the dead that gives substance to what was spectral, even as the strangeness and beauty of the past epoch has the effect of distancing our sense of the present. The peculiar double effect of aesthetic historicism is related to the ambiguities of Kierkegaard's haunting and gives it a special position in the discourses of aesthetic idealism. In one respect it fulfils the idealist desire to embody the spirit, to manifest the ideal in sensuous form; yet at the same time it produces a sharp ironic division between the real and the ideal – what Pater theorized in his essay 'The History of Philosophy' as the 'radical dualism' that was the real legacy of idealism for the relativistic and skeptical mind.[39] Carolyn Williams has argued that Pater tended to relativize historical epochs in a way that 'frees content or belief into form, detaches it from its original contextual function, and frees it to 'play' rather than to work in the service of some disciplinary system'.[40] As a consequence of this moment of irony and emancipation, 'the shift leaves behind an aura or residue of the formerly "sacred" [. . .] function that has now been displaced as the "aesthetic"'.[41] It is in this displacement that ghosts rise up – the aesthetic dimension now appears as an afterlife of spirit. What Williams sees as a mode of play can equally be experienced as a condition of haunting, since when the past is aesthetically revived in such a way as to sever the moorings of lived conditions and beliefs, the residue of deeper attachments persists, subliminally or in moments of spectral return.

This is also the condition of literary irony in the wake of the absolute skeptical negation that Pater described in his essay 'Prosper Mérimée'. In Kierkegaard's evocative description, irony creates a total break in which 'everything becomes nothing', and in this sense irony does the work of modernity in Marx's famous definition, where 'all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned'.[42] Such vanishing tricks will most likely be incomplete bids towards freedom and abstraction, and the spectres of past belief and attachment will emerge as a residuum of such performances of detachment. But there is another more 'altogether ambiguous' suggestion in Kierkegaard's analytic of haunting. Following its act of severance and emancipation, irony's work is done, but what will remain of its momentary life? Unsatisfied with such a transient demonstration of vivid yet elliptical intellectual force, the ironist will insist on repeating itself; it will look longingly on history with its embodied passions and reliable content, demanding the chance of a second life. Irony will ask to be reawakened, again and again, but since its form is that of an abstract negative gesture, its only possibility of return will be spectral. In Pater's and Wilde's work, this return was understood according to the idea of vampirism, finding a fleshly embodiment in an immortal figure, but in order to preserve its uncanny force, irony will continue to seek its highest destiny as a formless spectre whose appearances are momentary, whose presence is only perceptible by those with elective affinities and whose work is only fully achieved in death.

In the gothic tales of Vernon Lee's *Hauntings*, irony walks again and haunts, but for Lee, as much as for Kierkegaard, haunting should be taken in an altogether ambiguous way. While she professes not to be concerned with 'spectres that can be caught in definite places and made to dictate judicial evidence' (*H*, 40), her ghosts manifest a set of desires that might be integral to the aesthetic dimension of experience; the possibility of imaginatively reanimating an epoch (in 'Amour Dure'), the desire for and fear of an absolute music of the body (in 'A Wicked Voice') and the possibility of becoming another soul, either through imaginative transference or theatrical mimicry. If 'Amour Dure' is concerned with the relationship between literature and history and 'A Wicked Voice' vividly imagines the seductions of music, the first of Lee's gothic tales represents literature and theatrical masquerade as the primary forms of aesthetic historicism. But the specific artistic media are merely the mask for a higher aspiration towards the spirit of absolute irony. In the tale originally published as 'A Phantom Lover' (1886) and subsequently reprinted as 'Oke of Okehurst', this spirit takes the form of Mrs Oke – a manifestation of Paterian fantasy who is nevertheless quite in control of her condition as representative figure of gothic Aestheticism and symbol of what all men have come to desire. The narrator of the tale is an unnamed artist, who henceforth shall take the title 'the artist-as-critic', since he increasingly takes on the condition of a baffled critical intellect straining to identify an impossible object.

On a commission to produce a portrait for the Tory aristocrat William Oke, the artist-as-critic is immediately struck by Oke's wife, with 'her beautiful, pale, diaphanous face' (*H*, 123), and her 'mixture of extreme graciousness and utter indifference' (*H*, 116). Mrs Oke appears to deliberately cultivate this condition of vampiric indifference in order to destabilize her husband's authority. But her detachment has an equally powerful effect of eliciting and controlling the epistemophilia of interpretative spectators such as the artist-as-critic: 'her absent manner, her look, while speaking to you, into an invisible distance, her curious irrelevant smile, were so many means of attracting and baffling adoration' (*H*, 116). The narrator begins to suspect that her indifference is a ruse directed at him, and as a consequence he begins to pile up a series of anti-aesthetic ideas that corroborate the sense of Mrs Oke's morbidity and narcissism. He speaks of her 'indifference' and 'restlessness'; she is a 'delicate, morbid, exotic, hothouse creature' (*H*, 133), 'exquisite and baffling', a 'Narcissus', prone to 'morbid daydreaming' and 'intense boredom'. This constant reiteration of the discourse of decadence suggests how the artist-as-critic has situated Mrs Oke as a symptomatic product of the aesthetic culture of the fin de siècle, but he soon recognizes that her temporal condition is far more ambiguous than this. On first impressions she seems to be an epochal emergence of the new: 'once in a thousand years there may arise a combination of lives, a system of movements, an outline, a gesture, which is new, unprecedented, and yet hits off exactly our desire for beauty and rareness' (*H*, 114). But this is not the newness

of modernity; it is the unearthliness of the past's eruption in the present. Mrs Oke is a historicist for whom originality and imitative modeling are not contradictory: 'she was dressed in a strange way, not according to any established aesthetic eccentricity, but individually, strangely, as if in the clothes of an ancestress of the seventeenth century' (*H*, 116). Like the reanimated presence of the actor Willie Hughes in Wilde's 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', Mrs Oke appears to have carried and preserved the spirit of a previous epoch at the same time as she embodies the aspirations of aesthetic modernity.

Mrs Oke's temporal disjunction and insistent detachment have a disabling effect on the artist-as-critic: she 'seemed always to have been present in my consciousness . . . as an enigma' (*H*, 113). But if such an enigma might be the source of artistic inspiration for a decadent or symbolist artist, its effect on the portrait painter is to defeat his capacities for representation and interpretation. Mrs Oke's power is beyond portraiture, like the vampiric spirit of the Mona Lisa in Pater's ekphrasis, to which the artist-as-critic continually alludes: 'her eyes were mostly fixed with that distant smile in them, which harmonized with a constant tremulous little smile in her lips' (*H*, 127). Like Pater's Mona Lisa, Mrs Oke might be said to be a manifestation of Romantic irony – a paradoxical figure of negation – and this thwarts all of the narrator's attempts at identification. Patricia Pulham has noted how the tales from *Hauntings* frequently construct a relationship of narrative misidentification with an unknowable aesthetic woman or femme fatale; 'Oke of Okehurst' hinges on an artist's presumption of critical knowledge which is ultimately undermined. As a consequence 'the artist experiences a psychic "castration" and is unable to complete his task after his encounter with an enigmatic woman'.[43] Lee is adopting a classic Jamesian strategy here: the narrator or satellite character is involved in an attempt to define or identify a baffling and mercurial personality, but the attempt to name the unnameable ultimately creates a discursive feedback: the more the narrator attempts to identify the subject of his obsession, the more he reveals his own epistemophilia. But in 'Oke of Okehurst', the narrator's propensity for psychological detective work does have results. He is quite assertive about Mrs Oke's resemblance to the portrait of her ancestor Alice Oke when she questions him about the likeness; '"You are like her, and you know it. I may even say you wish to be like her, Mrs Oke", I answered, laughing' (*H*, 119). The narrator is close to realizing that Mrs Oke's performance of detachment can only be maintained by her identification with the dead, and this is precisely the source of Mrs Oke's enigmatic authority. What appears at first to be the sign of her cultural propensity for aesthetic historicism is derived from a specific obsession with her ancestress Alice Oke. Mrs Oke's indifference is produced by the identification with the dead.

If the artist-as-critic appears to have achieved a kind of interpretative triumph at this point in the narrative, it quickly becomes clear that he is being led by Mrs Oke's strategy. In his eagerness for psychological hypotheses, the narrator

expounds in public on her mimetic desire for the portrait, but in doing so he manages to inadvertently inflame William Oke's anger and envy. Mrs Oke has used the artist-as-critic to provoke jealousy by proxy. The revelation of her mimetic desire for the dead woman is a performance of independence which is all the more powerful for being reliant on an absent object. Ghosts disturb her husband, the 'regular Kentish Tory' (*H*, 117), more than anything else, and the most exasperating ghost of all is the poet William Lovelock.

The former lover of Alice Oke's, Lovelock was murdered in a roadside ambush by Alice and her husband, with Alice herself administering the death blow. The contemporary Mrs Oke appears to identify with this murder as much as she enjoys the continual presence of the dead Lovelock, and it is this double identification that begins to suggest her extraordinary achievement. Mrs Oke is a woman with no occupation married to an aristocrat who would be expected to enjoy a traditional authority over his wife, but in this ostensibly powerless situation she has achieved a position of absolute mastery. The identification with the dead Alice Oke is the first condition of this mastery, but she is made the more powerful and threatening by her blithe indifference to the morality of Lovelock's murder. The psychological question that the story leaves unanswered and which the artist-as-critic cannot approach, is why Alice Oke would murder the man she loved, but even more curiously, why she would murder him in league with her husband. In a sense the opacity of this question is a great advantage to Mrs Oke; the very fact that she can raise the spectre of Lovelock's murder without moral judgement places her beyond good and evil. This is hugely disconcerting to her husband and fascinating to the artist-as-critic. It is even more uncanny that she can raise the spectre of Lovelock, then appear to resume relations with him gracefully, oblivious to both her husband's jealousy and to any lingering resentment that Lovelock's ghost might harbour, having been brutally murdered by her in the seventeenth century. To compound this moral shock, Mrs Oke assumes Alice Oke's identity and orchestrates Lovelock's haunting with an obsessive rigour, yet her blithe manner shows none of the strain of an obsessive disorder.

Mrs Oke achieves this extraordinary condition of mastery by harnessing all the attributes of obsession and turning them into a unique kind of art; a total art work whose fundamental irony resides under the mask of absolute earnestness. This translation of the obsessive condition into a position of mastery is a compelling variation on the dialectic of lordship and bondage that Hegel described as the shape of subjectivity in the political conditions of feudalism,[44] and Lee's story orchestrates many of the central Hegelian themes: the performance of negation as the origin of self-conscious subjectivity and the constitutive role of death in the establishment of mastery.

Hegel's account of the master/slave dialectic can be described according to three stages. First, the master defines himself by his negation of all objective being, proven by his indifference towards death: 'The presentation of itself,

however, as the pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific *existence* [. . .] that it is not attached to life'.[45] What this demands is an ultimate performance – a submission to the mortal danger of a duel, in which the master demonstrates his absolute indifference to life, since 'it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won'.[46] Second, he must deny the slave all vestiges of subjectivity. The slave is not only bound to the material conditions that the master has so consummately disavowed, but to confirm his abjection, the master denies him the one thing that confirmed his being: his labour. The slave is prevented from attaining recognition in so far as the products of his labour are taken from him and do not bear his signature. This is the point where Alexandre Kojève attempted to reverse the political implications of Hegel's account by asserting the revolutionary potential of the slave, whose labour gives him the dialectical potential to overturn the master's vampiric hegemony.[47] Crucially the lord denies history; this is the source of both his power and his fatality, but in Kojève's reading of the third stage, the slave appropriates his own labour and becomes a historical subject.[48] In the literary gothic, this eventuality is denied, since the gothic imagination invariably exaggerates the power and threat of lordship. This is where Lee's tale of Mrs Oke and the phantom lover performs such an uncanny reversal of traditional feudal relations, gender performatives and gothic conventions. Mrs Oke appropriates the position of the lord by internalizing a dead ancestor, co-opting the power of a past murder and, finally, by enshrining the dead within the space of literature. When the artist-as-critic reflected that her performance was more than 'the caprice, the mania, the pose' (*H*, 122), of aesthetic culture, he was to an extent correct, since what Mrs Oke has done is harness the strategies of aesthetic historicism in such a way as to approximate the force of obsessional behaviour, without being reducible to mania or pathology. She is an indifferent obsessive, protected by the identification with the dead.

Lacan has commented suggestively on the ways that the imagination and appropriation of death has a significant role in the master/slave relation, specifically in the context of the obsessive subject:

> In fact the obsessional subject manifests one of the attitudes that Hegel did not develop in his dialectic of the master and the slave. The slave has given way in face of the risk of death in which mastery was being offered to him in a struggle of pure prestige. But since he knows he is mortal, he also knows that the master can die. From this moment on he is able to accept his labouring for the master and his renunciation of pleasure in the meantime; and, in the uncertainty of the moment when the master will die, he waits.[49]

Hegel identified this suspended possibility with the condition of Christianity in early Rome – the endless alienated anticipation of the 'Unhappy Consciousness'.

Yet clearly Mrs Oke has rejected and surpassed this stoic hiatus. Both blithe and obsessional, abject and lordly, she has taken the alternative *via negativa* suggested in Lacan's alternative reading of the master/slave dialectic. Lacan argues that in his essentially purgatorial condition, the slave's only possibility of freedom is in the death of the master: the slave exists 'in the anticipated moment of his master's death, from which moment he will begin to live, but in the meantime he identifies himself with the master as dead, and as a result of this he is himself already dead' (*H*, 97). Even in the slave's abject condition, the death of the master holds out the possibility of freedom. Yet ultimately this identification confirms his abjection, since the master's death remains the *only* condition of freedom and as a consequence, the slave internalizes this death; it becomes the principle of his existence always distant and deferred.

The predicament for the slave is that since the master has already demonstrated his disregard for his own death, the slave's possibility of freedom only exists in a future moment for which the master has already shown a sublime disregard. In Lacan's account the being-towards-death of the slave is reduced to a 'primordial masochism',[50] and his revolutionary potential is denied. But this is where Vernon Lee's gothic imagination comes to articulate a far more uncanny and potentially subversive vision of gender and power. For Mrs Oke the incorporation of the dead is the source of her fantastic achievement; it is the basis of a personal triumph, albeit a temporary one, which is also the triumph of literature. Mrs Oke has achieved a kind of sublimity in her identification with the dead, and in doing so, as the artist-as-critic recognizes, she has become a far greater aesthetic personality than the original Alice Oke, who is 'very uninteresting compared with this wayward and exquisite creature' (*H*, 131). Mrs Oke is superior according to the decadent logic that artifice is superior to nature, which Lee extends to the point where the revivification of the dead is superior to the original life.

Lee's final twist is that the logics of aesthetic vampirism are fulfilled most completely in Mrs Oke's literary devotion, in a language which aspires towards the condition of music – the poetry of the dead. In establishing a relationship with the dead poet that her ancestress has murdered, Mrs Oke achieves a total mastery over her husband and admirers, and she consolidates this by co-opting Lovelock's poetry as her own. This is Lee's gothic image of the triumph of literature. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe have described how German Romanticism enshrined a 'literary absolute' by privileging irony as the basis of all literary activity, a negative force that was supported by the form of the fragment. Incomplete and shrouded, the fragment was as much a promise of absent things as a presentation of the real. But such ineluctable modes of presence-in-absence still require an object and a space of presentation.

In order to achieve the condition of absolute literary independence, Mrs Oke needs a unique private space, and she finds this in a room which directly echoes the cornucopia of Huysmans's des Esseintes, 'like the cabin of a ship'

(*H*, 126),[51] full of curious instruments and obscure volumes of Elizabethan poetry, a synaesthetic enclave with an appropriate yellow tinge. The artist-as-critic notices her increasing devotion to this hermetic room:

> hours and hours [. . .] all alone in the yellow room, where the very air, with its scent of heavy flowers and old perfumed stuffs, seemed redolent of ghosts. It explained that strange smile which was not for any of us, and yet was not merely for herself – that strange, far-off look in the wide pale eyes. (*H*, 142–3)

Within this room she protects the space of literature, embodied by Lovelock's archive. When the artist-as-critic voices his desire to paint Mrs Oke in this room he is immediately conscious that he has 'done wrong', and Mrs Oke's only response is to show him Lovelock's poems:

> she commenced reading some of them out loud in a slow, half-audible voice. They were songs in the style of those of Herrick, Waller, and Drayton [. . .] The songs were graceful, and not without a certain faded passion; but I was thinking not of them, but of the woman who was reading them to me. . . .
>
> Her voice, which was delicate, shadowy, like her person, had a curious throbbing cadence, as if she were reading the words of a melody, and restraining herself with difficulty from singing it. (*H*, 126–7)

Mrs Oke applies the somnambulistic style of modern literary symbolism to the Elizabethan archive. She appears to protect the space of literature with a deliberate anti-theatricality; a resistance to audience and spectacle that has the double effect of excluding the artist-as-critic *and* of drawing him in towards the grain of her voice, which is reined in from the excess of song yet 'throbbing' with suppressed musicality. It seems that Mrs Oke could remain in this condition indefinitely, absenting herself from worldly authority yet with complete power over her husband and her admirers, but this is not sufficient. Mrs Oke is compelled to confirm the authority she has hitherto cultivated by indifference, absolute irony and the incorporation of the dead. Consequently she decides to give it a spectacular embodiment. Just as the power structures of Elizabethan England confirmed themselves in spectacular modes of entertainment, Mrs Oke chooses the form of a courtly masque to exhibit her identification with Alice Oke and confirm her relationship with the ghost of Lovelock. The masquerade she puts on, with the help of a 'fashionable artistic Bohemian' cousin (*H*, 136), is a triumph of aesthetic historicism, and while the artist-as-critic imagines that 'such a carnival as this must be positively revolting' (*H*, 137) to Mrs Oke, his expectation of her anti-theatrical prejudice is confounded when she emerges in

the costume of Alice Oke, 'her face preternaturally bright, and her whole face lit up with a bold, perverse smile' (*H*, 138).

Mrs Oke's theatrical reinvention is a fatal turning point: it enacts the passing of the literary absolute into theatre, the reawakening of the dead Alice Oke and the summoning of the murdered Christopher Lovelock. The effect is to utterly destabilize her husband. The reversal of the feudal master/slave relation and its concomitant system of gender identities is completed, and the artist-as-critic notes William Oke's rapid decline: 'Oke got worse. He was growing perfectly unstrung, like a hysterical woman' (*H*, 144). Hysteria is the obverse of irony; it is an excess on the level of the signifier, where gesture and symptom are inseparable – a pathological mode of revealing. In Victorian fiction, the histrionic and the hysterical are frequently identified and invariably gendered as feminine, but in 'Oke of Okehurst' Lee stages an episode of male hysteria that is triggered by two forces; Mrs Oke's sublime indifference and her invocation of the twinned ghosts of Alice Oke and William Lovelock.

Alice has provocatively displayed her identification with Alice Oke by dressing up as the dead woman, and at this point her literary absolute passes into theatre. This might be seen as a loss of mastery, since the authority of poetry is constituted by the invisibility of its object and its author, but it could equally be seen as the one moment where Mrs Oke has any real potency in the narrative; the moment where her previously spectral power is manifested. What is certain is that the passing between the dimensions of haunted literature and theatrical masquerade has a decisive effect. It is this transition that enacts the fatal narrative mechanism typical of gothic – the violent return of the repressed. But in 'Oke of Okehurst' the return of the repressed comes from a surprising place; it is not the ghost of the dead poet who returns to take revenge, but the hysterical desire of William Oke. The Tory aristocrat and the aesthetic ironist have mutually conspired to supplant Aestheticism's vision of sensuous renaissance with an indifference constituted by the imitation of the dead.

In spite of Lee's skepticism about the supernatural conditions of haunting, her narrative ultimately judges William Oke and the artist-as-critic for their anti-aesthetic refusal to listen to the truth of haunting. In this context, haunting expresses a partial, dialectical truth: Mrs Oke has established a position of mastery for literature which is confirmed and supported by the ghost of the dead poet. Literature takes its power from death, the absolute master, as much as from the sensuous force of the aesthetic dimension that William Oke has excluded. Mrs Oke's recitation of Lovelock's poetry holds and preserves this aesthetic dimension in her 'curious throbbing cadence', reanimating its 'faded passion', yet she deliberately imposes restraints on an eruption of passion that would identify her as a hysterical subject. It is in this refusal of hysterical identification that Mrs Oke gains her authority, protecting literature from theatricality, and aesthetic autonomy from the renaissance of sensuous life.

But in order to maintain this authority she has to preserve a delicate and static economy that is only possible when literature remains isolated on the altar of symbolist autonomy.

It is only when Mrs Oke manifests Alice Oke and Lovelock within the realm of theatrical embodiment that she triggers the return of the repressed. As Lee suggests in her preface to *Hauntings*, we should not be diverted by the supernatural here, since the final turn of 'Oke of Okehurst' is the very prosaic event of a jealous husband's murderous violence. The end of Lee's story demonstrates the collapse of that delicate economy of mastery that the aesthetic woman maintained at the expense of her vacuous husband. But it is also the collapse of the fragile autonomy of literature and irony, which are now revealed to be the twin modes in which the gothic subject maintains a phantom of mastery in the face of its own incapacity to disturb a conservative political order. Lee was subtly articulating a series of relationships between aesthetics and politics, gender and class, that will resonate throughout my account of Aestheticism's afterlives; in James and Waugh's evocations of a fading but aestheticized aristocracy, and in Hollinghurst's skeptical portrait of irony and Aestheticism's capacity for resistance. William Oke's conservatism could hardly be described as the 'political unconscious' of this story, since it is repeatedly stated by the narrator; but it is still perhaps the unconscious basis of Mrs Oke's gothic desire to establish a realm of Symbolist transcendence. Her cultivation of the literary absolute is an attempt to establish psychic and cultural mastery where she has no political and economic autonomy. This tentative establishment of cultural and psychic mastery in the face of political impotence is also suggestive of the fragile conditions of Lee's narrator, and, more widely, of the condition of the aesthetic in Victorian culture as a whole. If the artist-as-critic is so emphatic in his rehearsal of the discourses of Paterian Aestheticism, it is perhaps a sign that Mrs Oke's fascination to him is not entirely reducible to the seductions of the femme fatale. For an artist whose work is limited by his formal and material dependence on aristocratic patronage, Mrs Oke represents both the power of Aestheticism's bid for artistic freedom and, ultimately, the limits of a *literary* Aestheticism that defines the space of literature by irony, haunting and a mimetic aspiration towards the undead object.

Chapter 3

'Master of Irony': Henry James, Transatlantic *Bildung* and the Critique of Aestheticism

Vernon Lee's story 'Lady Tal' (1896) offers a teasing invocation of Henry James and his literary legacy. Jervase Marion, a 'psychological novelist' and 'cosmopolitan American', is also 'an inmate of the world of Henry James and a kind of Henry James, of a lesser magnitude'.[1] But this is also the world of Aestheticism in its decadent phase: Marion is sojourning in the 'half-artistic Anglo-American idleness of Venice', where 'the smoke of the cigarettes mingled with the heavy scent of the flowers' and where 'young men and women flirted in undertones about Symonds, Whistler, Tolstoy'. The young Jamesian ephebe clearly feeds on this aesthetic milieu, but not so much for its provision of a sensuous life as for the space it provides for cultivating detachment:

> Indeed, if Jervase Marion, even since his earliest manhood, had given way to a tendency to withdraw from all personal concerns, from all emotion or action, it was mainly because he conceived that this shrinkingness of nature (which foolish persons called egoism) was the necessary complement to his power of intellectual analysis; and that any departure from the position of dispassioned spectator of the world's follies and miseries would mean also a departure from his real duty as a novelist.[2]

The effort of a cultivated cosmopolitan distance; an ambiguous position at the intersection between the identification with an artistic community and a condition of isolated literary reflexivity; a shrinkage of the narrative subject which at the same time renders the narrator a peculiar form of authority – all of the qualities that Lee presents here are an acute rendering of Henry James's contribution to literary modernity. If Jervase Marion suffers from an anxious relationship with his own literary subjects, this is a symptom of a diaphanous subject who is incapable of transforming his ethereal aesthetic character into the condition of artistic mastery. But such an alchemical achievement had already been performed by Henry James, the image of cosmopolitan literary professionalism and the master of irony.

The constitution of Henry James as 'the Master' had much to do with his particular achievement as a literary ironist. Irony determines literary authority as a model of detachment and control; a professionalized form of the aesthetic disinterest that was theoretically consolidated in Kantian and Romantic aesthetics. James's career presents a geographic and cultural model for the acquisition of aesthetic detachment, where the American writer and traveller acquires the authority of irony by a process of transatlantic *Bildung*. Becoming European, acquiring a cosmopolitan identity,[3] is a process of refinement established through a particular kind of ironic performance which James himself epitomized. Yet in his fiction and criticism James was clearly troubled by the nature of irony, both in terms of personality and literary practice. From the early 1880s these anxieties were increasingly focused around the culture of Aestheticism. When, in *The Portrait of a Lady*[4], James describes the demonic Aesthete, Gilbert Osmond, as a 'master of irony' (*PL* 566), the naming of the ironist expresses the keynote of a complex critique of the aesthetic personality, which James extended in characters as various as the vampiric Mark Ambient and the angelic Gabriel Nash. Osmond, the expatriate American Aesthete, is the most complex of these portraits; his mastery is in some sense the culmination of a civilizing process, and his refined ironies signify the cosmopolitan spirit he has acquired in his transatlantic passage. Yet at the same time, his ironic detachment is represented as a gothic threat: a manipulative performance of mastery constituted by negative postures of distinction. In his fictional representations of aesthetic personality between *The American* and *The Tragic Muse*, James simultaneously read this form of ironic withdrawal in three ways: as a strategy with respect to performative identity (the Aesthete's posture of indifference), as a mode of cultural translation – the process I shall characterize as transatlantic *Bildung* – and thirdly, as the constitutive gesture of Aestheticism, a cultivated performance which grounds and protects art's autonomous sphere.

James showed a sophisticated and troubled sense of the relationship between irony and aesthetic autonomy in his essay 'Gustave Flaubert' (1902), where he identified a caustic form of narrative irony which 'bristles and hardens' the literary work. For Flaubert, the ironic mode provides a 'refuge' which risks a turn away from the human face; it suggests 'the getting away from the human, the congruously and measurably human, altogether', and this refusal of humanity 'perhaps becomes in the light of this possibility but an irony the more'.[5] James levelled this charge of inhuman distance at other French fin de siècle writers, notably Maupassant, but Flaubert remained for him the extreme and exemplary figure of aesthetic distance. In an image of purgatorial enclosure which gives a retrospective clarity to all of his previous representations of Aestheticism, James suggests that Flaubert had become 'absolutely and exclusively condemned to irony'. Yet in the same essay he evaluates the French master's role in establishing the autonomy of art, effectively crediting him with

nothing less than the constitution of an independent literary sphere: 'It is as if [. . .] literary honour being by his example effectively secure for the firm at large and the general concern, on its whole esthetic side, floated once for all, we find our individual attention free for literary and esthetic indifference'.[6] James's use of the corporate metaphor of the 'floated firm' for the autonomy of literature suggests the complex ways that he configured the relationship between aesthetics and economy, artistic freedom and the marketplace. Flaubert has established a European 'firm' in which the American writer is required to invest in order to secure his aesthetic independence. If his speculation was motivated by exclusively personal formal concerns, it nevertheless had a crucial function for the art of fiction as a whole. In terms of the cultivation of personal detachment, Flaubert's irony is a 'getting away from the human', but in the context of the literary sphere as a whole, it provides the grounds for a necessary freedom. In this sense the 'inhuman' irony of Flaubert might be regarded as the basis of literary modernity.

This double image of Flaubert suggests a problematic which is central to James's perspective on irony and aesthetic autonomy. James assigns quite different and in some cases opposing values to the cultivation of detachment in relation to the self-fashioning of personality and the cultivation of literary form, but these two aspects of the ironic condition can never be fully separated. If Gilbert Osmond has fashioned himself as a 'master of irony', he has done so, to some extent, in imitation of the autonomous aesthetic object – we know, for example, that he is inclined to a specular identification of himself through Renaissance portraiture, following a narcissistic narrative typical of Aestheticism.[7] Conversely, if Flaubert has cultivated the most perfect form of literary detachment in his prose, this formal strategy also projects a form of personality. Flaubertian mastery constitutes precisely the kind of 'inhuman' and instrumental detachment that James narrates in personalities like Osmond and Mark Ambient.

If Pater's anxious assessment of Prosper Mérimée's work suggests the doubts about aesthetic detachment that were internal to British Aestheticism, James's work up to the beginning of the 1890s dramatized these anxieties in such a way as to formulate a sustained critique of Aestheticism. This critique is clearly the result of a complex affinity, and there is the constant underlying possibilty in James's portraits of Aestheticism that an ethical stance might conceal a gesture of disavowal. In this sense, the structure of James's relationship to Aestheticism in the 1870s and 1880s has much in common with Hegel's relationship with German Romanticism. Hegel associated irony with an essentially manipulative attitude to 'living as an artist and forming one's life *artistically*' (*A*, I, 65), clearly pre-empting the strategic and instrumental qualities of an Aesthete like James's Gilbert Osmond, whose exquisite pose effectively exploits Isabel Archer's youthful desire for a beautiful appearance that reflects an ideal inner life. Isabel Archer might be regarded as a

typical post-Romantic victim of the idea of the 'beautiful soul', and James was well acquainted with this idea from his reading of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, a work which already had an important influence on the philosophical critique of irony. In his early work, *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel had suggested that the ironist's primary desire was to mimic the exalted Romantic position of the 'beautiful soul', but the result was a compulsive negative project; a 'type of subjectivism which empties the object of all content and so fades away until it loses all actuality'.[8] There is a suggestion of this morbid attenuation in the way that James represents the beautiful soul of Paterian Aestheticism. As Jonathan Freedman has suggested, James's statements about Pater maintained a studied ambivalence that balanced irony and homage: the image of the 'pale, embarrassed, exquisite Pater' as a 'lucent matchbox' who 'shines in the uneasy gloom'[9] is both reduction by Keatsian pastiche and an admission of Pater's peculiar power.

James's relationship with Pater and British Aestheticism has a similar dynamic to that between Hegel and the Romantic ironists, characterized by both trenchant ethical critique and a barely concealed anxiety of identification. James had his own aesthetic youth: he was touring Italy at the beginning of the 1870s, when Pater was publishing his essays on Leonardo, Botticelli and Michelangelo, and James's early writing reveals an enthusiastic appreciation of Pater's work and the aesthetic ideal of Italy. While he had clearly moved some distance from his youthful aesthetic effusions by the time he began his career as a novelist, certain essential aspects of his early experience of Aestheticism appear integral to his condition as a transatlantic author. In his early works *Roderick Hudson* (1875) and *The American* (1877), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and 'The Author of Beltraffio' (1884), James framed his representation of the condition of Aestheticism in terms of the American encounter with Europe, the famous international theme. As Michèle Mendelssohn has demonstrated, James's stories of the 1870s and 1880s documented a mode of transatlantic Aestheticism which developed before British Aestheticism had reached its spectacular phase, in the advent of Wilde's declaration of his genius and du Maurier's caricatures for *Punch* (Mendelssohn 2007). Yet it was during the high period of British Aestheticism, the 1880s and early 1890s, that James developed his critique of the Aesthete as compulsive ironist. This culminated in *The Tragic Muse* (1890), where the thematic of transatlantic migration was replaced by an analysis of the artistic sphere, patronage and the marketplace. The ironic spirit of Aestheticism was identified and, James might have hoped, finally contained. The purpose of this analysis is to demonstrate how James's representation of Aestheticism and the artistic life on the eve of the 1890s grew out of the earlier narratives of transatlantic Aestheticism. It was in *The American* and *The Portrait of a Lady* that James began to represent Aestheticism, and the experience of transatlantic expatriation, as an encounter with the spirit of irony.

Transatlantic *Bildung* and Mimetic Desire in *The American* and *Portrait of a Lady*

The American stages a contrast between two dominant types of ironic personality; the Parisian aristocrat, who appears to have cultivated a highly refined form of distance which works according to ancient conventions, and the American traveller, who represents a more modern form of detachment, conceived of as civilized spectatorship and liberality of spirit. Both types present a certain form of urbanity, and in all cases James is attentive to the performative basis of irony: Christopher Newman 'spoke slowly, with a quaint effect of dry detachment' (*Am*, 32), while Valentin de Bellegarde is characterized by 'his peculiar facial play, in which irony and urbanity seemed perplexingly commingled' (*Am*, 95). In Valentin's case, the aristocratic performative appears to have become genetic legacy; he is gifted with 'a short nose, of the ironical and enquiring rather than of the dogmatic or sensitive cast' (*Am*, 99). In the aristocratic family, the ironic gesture is inscribed in the facial structure itself. The suggestion here is that certain characters are born to irony: in the aristocrats it is almost a physiognomic value, while others acquire it through travel, aesthetic cultivation and studied performance. Yet the possibility of an inherited irony contradicts the transient and instantaneous condition of the ironic gesture – the negative suggestion which must be performed in the instant and which gains its power through this temporality.[10] James's representation of the ironic personality is consistently engaged with this paradoxical attempt to turn an instantaneous gesture, a performance of negation, into a habitual performative, to such an extent that irony appears to be the basis of the cultivated cosmopolitan personality.

James's most extended analysis of irony as a cultivated practice is the character of Mrs Tristram, another expatriate American whose Parisian life is a model of studied and earnest leisure. In the 1877 version of the novel she is little more than a suggestive vignette, but in James's 1907 revisions she becomes an increasingly overdetermined figure, so that in spite of her tenuous narrative position she comes to focus a critique of ironic *Bildung*. After oblique references to her marital situation James suggests that 'circumstances had done much to cultivate in Mrs Tristram a marked tendency to irony'.[11] In the revised version it is her husband who perceives Mrs Tristram's ironic opacity: 'this lady often had a tone that defied any convenient test; he couldn't tell for his life to whom her irony might be directed' (*Am*, 39). James is extensive and precise in his revisions of Mrs Tristram in the 1907 version of these passages, to the extent that she becomes a curiously detached exemplar of a philosophy of character; although far from the typical Jamesian Aesthete, she is retrospectively imbued with a compulsive Romantic irony. Defined by 'her beautiful culture' (*Am*, 42), she suggests another miniature version of the 'Beautiful Soul'.[12] Like Goethe's 'Beautiful Soul', Mrs Tristram is involved in a perpetual practice of self-cultivation which appears to have a wholly negative trajectory;

the practice is motivated by a hypothetical inner beauty which is always postponed, a continual work in progress. Newman comments on the 'reserves' of spirit which Mrs Tristram appears to possess, allowing her to define herself in detachment, rather than according to her marriage and her social engagements. Her 'reserves' provide the basis of an essentially idealist project: 'They were founded upon the vague project of her some day affirming herself in her totality; to which end she was in advance getting herself together, building herself high, enquiring, in short, into her dimensions' (*Am*, 39). Mrs Tristram's irony is the constitutive basis of this project, since it clears the ground for her to build a hypothetical edifice – her 'totality' – an unspecified quality which neither Newman nor her husband can guess at. Her ironic proclivity nevertheless provides the grounds for a certain affinity with Newman, who is the exemplary figure of the detached spectator. While this detachment is to some extent integral to the experience of travelling, there is clearly a mode of detachment which is special to the American in Paris. Both Newman and Mrs Tristram are undergoing a project of transatlantic *Bildung*, but with the character of Mrs Tristram James stresses the negative basis of this project. Mrs Tristram acquires the forms of Parisian life in order to be able to better display her detachment from them. While Paris provides the scene for her self-culture, Mrs Tristram's irony ensures that she cannot be identified with Parisian forms and refinement – that is, with a local culture. Europe is not so much the destination of her self-culture, but the necessary condition for a project which refuses to be limited by place.

James's determination of Europe as an amorphous and perhaps specious form of cultural destiny is comparable to the Enlightenment conception of European identity that Derrida has discussed in *The Other Heading*. Derrida suggests that while Europe may be identified as the destination of travel and progress, what Hegel projected as the cultural and geographic destiny of spirit, philosophical determinations of European identity frequently project an absence or aporia as the condition of being European. Europe has no definite consistency; it is a principle of modernity or enlightenment only by being non-identical. According to the Enlightenment project, 'what is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself',[13] where this non-identity holds a promise that one will reach out to the other, become another in the future project of *Bildung*. Europe is then 'a culture of oneself as a culture of the other, a culture of the double genitive and of the difference to oneself'.[14] A positive way of reading this, according to a Levinasian ethics, would read the experience of non-identity as an ethical moment – an opening towards the other.[15] But we might equally suggest that this 'difference to oneself' is the mark of a subject condemned to an ironic condition.

Once again the concept and condition of irony involves an ethical and aesthetic ambivalence: following Richard Rorty and contemporary liberal pragmatists, we might see this condition as the basis of a liberal ethics – irony would

then be the capacity to recognize the contingency of our own legitimizing discourses and self-representation.[16] Or alternatively, following the implications of Hegel's critique of irony, we might regard this insistence on the non-identical as a dangerous refusal of communicative reason. This ethico-aesthetic problematic was clearly staged in the culture of Victorian Aestheticism. Amanda Anderson has recently defended the position of aesthetic distance in terms of the development of cosmopolitanism in late Victorian literature. In this reading Arnold, Pater and Wilde become pivotal figures in the constitution of literary modernity as a liberal ideal, based on the Hellenist discourse of aesthetic disinterest: the Aesthete's ironic detachment is defended as 'both reflective distance and radical freedom'.[17] Yet the figure of the Aesthete also represented the ultimate assumption of European privilege, an aristocratic ideal of taste, which, as Linda Dowling has argued, threatened to undermine the liberal ideal of self-culture and the democratic ideal of an aesthetic *sensus communis*.[18] The problematic of irony in James's work suggests the extreme difficulty at this historical juncture in distinguishing between the cosmopolitan ideal of a European subject and the image of the Aesthete as a shadow form of the aristocracy.

These cultural and political dualities become particularly acute when self-culture, in the idealist sense, is translated into self-fashioning, in the Greenblattian sense – where the Aesthete assumes the postures of the dandy and fashions himself as an aesthetic project. James's most extended representation of this process was *The Portrait of a Lady*, and it is perhaps this novel which offers the greatest challenge to those critics who would seek to forge a hereditary link between Jamesian irony and modern liberal pragmatism.[19] In the relationship between Isabel Archer and Gilbert Osmond, James represents a peculiar form of the process of transatlantic *Bildung*, which works through a triangular orientation of American, British and European identities. Osmond is a refashioned American who assumes the superior indifference of the English aristocrat; this constitutes his exemplary image for Isabel Archer, who is herself engaged in the same movement from America to Europe through the mediating channel of the English country house. Isabel's narrative of transatlantic *Bildung* is determined as an encounter with irony, but this might be regarded as tutelage or seduction, depending on which ironist is concerned.

The first ironist that Isabel encounters is her cousin Ralph Touchett. In the description of his Oxford days, which might conceivably have coincided with Wilde's, Ralph is 'naturally inclined to adventure and irony' (*PL*, 92). His irony is described in relation to 'his outward conformity' to conventional manners, which are ultimately 'the mask of a mind that greatly enjoyed its independence', but it is clear that this need is a product of his physical condition. Suffering from tuberculosis, Ralph's irony secures an independence of the mind from the sickness of the body, which is ultimately maintained by a 'secret hoard of indifference' (*PL*, 94).

In the representation of Gilbert Osmond, the same terms recur: Isabel is fascinated by Osmond's indifference, his curious conventionality and his cultivation of an exquisite independence. From an early stage in their relationship, she frames Osmond's peculiar effect in terms of his ironic nature. This is ambiguously defined in relation to European identity. Unlike his former lover Madame Merle, Osmond appears to have erased all traces of his American origins, and to this extent he appears as the ultimate product of a process of European refinement: the model of cosmopolitanism and transatlantic *Bildung*. But Osmond in fact defines himself as 'provincial' rather than metropolitan and cosmopolitan. It is this claim that incites Isabel's first meditation on his ironic nature. When Osmond asserts his own obscurity by 'speaking of his provincial side' (*PL*, 312), Isabel is bemused by his claim, suggesting that it contradicts his obvious mastery of the 'finish of the capitol'. On further reflection, though, she grants this contradiction the status of a suggestive paradox: 'Was it a harmless paradox, intended to puzzle her? Or was it the last refinement of high culture?' This question suggests James's fundamental questions about Osmond and the figure of the Aesthete: is the Aesthete the ultimate enactment of the position of high culture, art manifested in the human subject, or an empty paradox masquerading as depth? Isabel's hesitant answer to these questions is that Osmond 'probably took a rather ironical view of what he himself offered: a proof into the bargain that he was not grossly conceited' (*PL*, 313). This 'rather ironical' view appears to be the basis of Osmond's humility, but it is also the ground of his peculiar power.

In the later stages of the novel, Isabel comes to realize that Osmond's irony is a far more dangerous and demonic force. When she has finally realized the nature of her husband's relationship with Madame Merle, she begins to imagine the kind of expressive relationship the couple share. These reflections determine the idea of ironic mastery as a kind of vampiric threat: 'What must be his feelings to-day in regard to his too zealous benefactress, and what expression must they have found on the part of such a master of irony?' (*PL*, 566). Isabel's question has such force precisely because, as a 'master of irony', Osmond refuses to be identified with his expressive apparatus; even if she were able to identify his 'expression' towards Merle, it would offer no access to his intents. Irony is expressive precisely in its withdrawal from the scene of expressive embodiment, and it is this distance which constitutes the effect of mastery.

This equation between ironic negation and mastery had been suggested in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, in the portrait of the aristocratic Grandcourt, whose authority is constituted by his 'refined negations'.[20] The same logic is present in Hegel's dialectic of the master and slave, where the lord constitutes his mastery by 'an absolute negation' – the total denial of his 'submergence in the expanse of life'.[21] The lord achieves an abstract and transcendent authority by presenting himself as 'a vanishing moment', and it is this effect of vanishing, the rent in the field of vision and identification, that constitutes his

independence and his distinction from the bondsman, who is 'entangled in a variety of relationships'. There is clearly an ethical motive in Hegel's and Eliot's critiques of mastery here, which I shall ultimately suggest is inherent in James's critique of Aestheticism, but the special focus of James's critique is his sophisticated conception of the relationship between irony and performative identity. In Judith Butler's terms, the performative is an identity which is constituted through the repeated suggestion of an unlocatable origin: 'Acts [. . .] produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle as a cause'.[22] While the targets of Butler's critique here are normative gender identities, her analysis of the lure of the performative is peculiarly applicable to late Victorian aesthetic self-fashioning. The ironist might be taken as a special case in the constitution of performative identities, where what Butler refers to as 'signifying absences' are exploited in order to cultivate an abstract authority: while they suggest an 'organising principle', this can never be located as a stable intention or origin.[23]

Part of Gilbert Osmond's seductive power is his frank acknowledgement that he constructs himself through conventional performatives, that he is 'convention itself' (*PL*, 362). This claim is underwritten by his insistent detachment, which he performs with a 'still, disinterested gaze which seemed void of an intention' (*PL*, 308) and a manner which 'was an odd mixture of the detached and the involved' (*PL*, 306). In this sense, Osmond mimics Ralph Touchett's claim to stoicism: he suggests to Isabel that an ascetic life has 'affirmed my indifference' (*PL*, 315), and if this value is negative, it is nonetheless the result of determined effort: he affirms his own obscurity by 'willful renunciation'. The stoic discourse appears to endow his indifference with a certain ethical legitimacy for Isabel, to whom he claims: 'I've ceased to form attachments, to permit myself to feel attraction' (*PL*, 309). But later in the novel, the idea is reiterated through Isabel's point of view to signify the danger of Osmond's 'deliberately indifferent yet most expressive figure' (*PL*, 584). By this point the narrative has assumed a melodramatic condition, and Osmond has been revealed as the type of the manipulative aristocratic seducer, but the novel's circulation of the idea of aristocracy is more complex than this gothic image suggests. Isabel's desire for Osmond is motivated by an aestheticized version of aristocratic principles which she maintains to the last: he is 'a man to whom importance is supremely indifferent' (*PL*, 397), who accepts relative poverty 'with such indifference'. In her sustained reflection on the nature of her seduction, she reiterates this ideal of an 'aristocratic life', based on 'the union of great knowledge with great liberty' (*PL*, 480). Isabel defines this ideal aristocracy as 'a grand indifference, an exquisite independence' (*PL*, 479), and she continues to promote this notion of the 'aristocratic' throughout, after she has been fully exposed to Osmond's cruelty. It is clearly the quality that allows Osmond to seduce her but also a coherent reflection of her aesthetic

principles: indifference maintains the autonomy of the aesthetic subject in spite of the manifest conventionality of the image of the dandiacal Aesthete.

James's continual emphasis on the performance of *indifference* mobilizes a motif that had been well established in the nineteenth-century treatises on dandyism. Barbey D'Aurevilly isolated Brummel's 'glacial indifference',[24] and Hazlitt also referred to the 'utmost *nonchalance* and indifference' of the celebrated Regency dandy.[25] In 'The Painter of Modern Life', Baudelaire associated the quality of indifference with class identity: the superiority of the dandy was signified by 'an air of coldness which comes from an unshakeable determination not to be moved',[26] and the effect was to suggest a 'new kind of aristocracy'.[27] It is clear from Baudelaire's account that this assumption of an aristocratic performative was retroactive and emerged as a response to the increasing dominance of the marketplace and the bourgeois sphere.[28] The dandy's cultivation of an aristocratic indifference was a method of declaring singularity in a culture where forms and gestures are inevitably implicated in consumer spectacle, conventional form and theatrical repetition.

James's portrait of Gilbert Osmond's aristocratic mimicry brings out a paradox in the condition of dandyism, and this provides the grounds for a far-reaching critique of Aestheticism. What the novel bears out is that while Osmond's irony is clearly a negative method which seeks to abstract aesthetic subjectivity from representation, it is nevertheless the product of a rapacious mimetic desire. *The Portrait of a Lady* is a novel where relations frequently assume René Girard's classic triangular form.[29] Madame Merle's relationship with Osmond is mediated through her perversely sacrificial acquisition of Isabel; Isabel's desire for Osmond is mediated through her tutelage with Madame Merle; Lord Warburton's desire for Isabel is mediated through his imaginary love of Pansy. Unmediated desire is the exception, and it is significant that its primary representative, Caspar Goodwood, is the image of the American who has not been infected by Europe, nor by the aristocratic/aesthetic ideal of culture that Isabel has assumed. Gilbert Osmond, in contrast, is constituted by a rage for imitation which is clearly based on envy, as Isabel points out after the opera:

> 'You seem to be always envying some one. Yesterday it was the Pope; to-day it's poor Lord Warburton'.
>
> 'My envy's not dangerous; it wouldn't hurt a mouse. I don't want to destroy the people – I only want to be them. You see it would destroy only myself'. (*PL*, 352)

Osmond's primary object of envy is the English aristocrat, Lord Warburton. What he envies in the lord is an 'acquired habit [. . .] that of not attempting' (*PL*, 525) – a refusal of effort which guarantees the effect of superiority. Warburton's habitual example forces Osmond to be more artful about his own performance of aristocratic indifference, with the result that 'the air of

indifference, which he was now able to wear, had the added beauty of consistency'. In *The Portrait of a Lady*, the imitation of aristocracy is the first principle of aesthetic subjectivity, and this can only be fully secured by irony – a resistance to performative identity. The paradox of dandyism is that in Osmond's case this ironic resistance to mimesis is only ultimately secured when he allows himself to be constituted absolutely by representation, as 'convention itself'.

The final product of Osmond's mimetic acquisition of aristocratic identity is to become something other than the English aristocrat – an uncanny fabrication of a lord – but in one sense he becomes more absolutely an aristocrat by being artificial. Osmond's artificiality foregrounds an artistic agency which the effortless Lord Warburton lacks. This diagnosis pre-empts the logic of the copy that Huysmans would exploit in 'Against Nature' (1884), but it has a peculiar resonance in the narrative of the American Aesthete's transatlantic self-fashioning. As an American mimic, Osmond establishes a reconstructed and autonomous image of aristocracy; the condition of this autonomy is that he cultivates the idea of aristocracy outside its native conditions and without hereditary privilege. This is transatlantic *Bildung* reconceived and perfected as decadent Aestheticism. The American imitates the British aristocrat's hereditary superiority within the free space of Europe and specifically within the ideal aesthetic space of Tuscany. By achieving this image of aristocracy in cosmopolitan yet ironically 'provincial' conditions, Osmond might be said to have become the ideal European, where 'what is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself'.[30] His non-identity is confirmed through an absolute position of irony, but it is rooted in and dependent on mimesis. This condition of simultaneous dependence and disavowal of mimesis defines aesthetic subjectivity in James's fiction, but it is equally the condition of transatlantic migration. In *The American* and *The Portrait of a Lady* the Aesthete and ironist is framed, according to an overdetermined geographical and cultural image, as the end product of Europe, the aesthetic end-in-itself and, as such, a spectral form of the ideal European which can perhaps only be fully achieved by the expatriate.[31] In James's formulation, then, we might read the Aesthete's conception of Europe in terms of a diaphanous subject transformed by a culture of irony and simulation. As the primary subject of this process of aesthetic Bildung, the greatest aspiration of this young Isabel Archer is the overcoming or dialectical sublation of her American 'nature'.

These complementary thematics of irony, aesthetic subjectivity, aristocracy and cultural identity are also subtly implicated in discourses of national and racial identity. Having become the ideal European, Gilbert Osmond resists any immediate national and cultural identification. James represents this resistance with a monetary figure: the Aesthete is a 'fine gold coin' who exists independently of the signs of exchange value:

> If he had English blood in his veins it had probably received some French or Italian commixture; but he suggested, fine gold coin as he was, no stamp or

> emblem of the common mintage that provides for general circulation; he was the elegant complicated medal struck off for a special occasion. (*PL*, 280)

The figure of the specially minted coin frames Osmond's transnational identity as a resistance to exchange value, and this symbolizes a more general relationship to both representation and economy.[32] The Aesthete attempts to represent his own refined subjectivity as distinct from representation and the commodity. For Osmond, this produces an essentially ironic condition of being in language, and James's economic/aesthetic motif can be clarified by an analogy with Kierkegaard's monetary metaphor for the ironist:

> There is in the ironist an *Urgrund* [primordial ground], an intrinsic value, but the coin he issues does not have the specified value but, like paper money, is nothing, and yet all his transactions with the world take place in this kind of money.[33]

Kierkegaard's image of the faceless coin figures a double relation to economy. The ironist tries to assert an 'intrinsic value' which is faceless; a hypothetical gold standard which retains an abstract authority, but he is nevertheless forced to use the 'paper money' of the everyday performative.

Derrida has explored this relationship between aesthetics, economics and the commodity form according to a 'problematic of aesthetic subjectivity' that emerges in Kant's *Critique of Judgement*.[34] Kant made a distinction between 'free art' and 'mercenary art', which was translated into a distinction between play and work, genius and subjection.[35] In his essay on 'Economimesis', Derrida shows that this distinction is untenable in practice, since the free artist needs the constraints of material: 'Liberal art relates to mercenary art as the mind does to the body, and it cannot produce itself, in its freedom, without the very thing that it subordinates to itself'.[36] The idea of 'free art' typically involves a disavowal of its mimetic conditions and a subsequent attempt to define itself as an ideal mode of productivity, the 'production of freedom by means of freedom'.[37] But aesthetic subjectivity can only work within a regime of *economimesis* – according to the body of representation.

This idea will become increasingly relevant to James's later work, but *The Portrait of a Lady* sets the basis of his developing critique of Aestheticism by undermining Osmond's claim to the 'intrinsic values' of irony and aesthetic subjectivity. Ralph Touchett represents Osmond's performance of mastery as a form of subjection to the audience which his irony disavows but cannot live without:

> Under the guise of caring only for intrinsic values Osmond lived exclusively for the world. Far from being its master as he pretended to be, he was its very humble servant, and the degree of his attention was his only

> measure of success. He lived with his eye on it from morning till night, and the world was so stupid it never suspected the trick. Everything he did was *pose*. (*PL*, 444–5)

In spite of Osmond's determination to define himself outside the conditions of performative self-fashioning, economy and national identity, he is nevertheless absolutely subject to these conditions. Touchett's critique ultimately determines James's critique of Aestheticism according to this relatively simple ethical psychology, which is complemented by the critique of self-conscious performance as 'pose'. While this locates James's critique in terms of a serious moral tradition, suggested by my comparison with Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, it tends to deflect the broader implications of James's critique of Aestheticism for the politics of culture and the fate of autonomous art. Yet James was to return to this thematic in order to complete his analysis of Aestheticism as compulsive irony. At first, in 'The Author of Beltraffio' (1884), he effectively translated the gothic characterization of Osmond into the condition of an artist who treats the world 'with a due play of that power of ironic evocation in which his books abound'.[38] But it was a decade later, in *The Tragic Muse*, when he developed his representation of Aestheticism into a far-reaching investigation into the function of irony, both as the basis of an aesthetic life and as a resistance to the labour of art.

The Allegory of Irony and the Overcoming of Aesthetic Autonomy in *The Tragic Muse*

In *The Tragic Muse*, James orchestrates the same set of concerns about irony and aesthetic subjectivity in a sophisticated form of aesthetic Bildungsroman. His earlier meditations on Aestheticism, European identity and irony are translated and refracted according to the lives of a series of English characters: the Aesthete Gabriel Nash; the aristocratic diplomat and theatrical aficionado Peter Sherringham; the fledgling artist Nick Dormer, torn between his aristocratic family's demand to pursue a political career and his need to paint; and the developing actress Miriam Rooth, who ultimately comes to embody a Jamesian principle of the artistic life. The development of these interlocked destinies in Paris and London presents a kind of ideal image of aesthetic cosmopolitanism. Unlike *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Tragic Muse* involves a close representation of the emerging bourgeois sphere of art in a comparative context, where the conditions of aristocratic patronage clash with the new consumer economy. Within this cultural divide, the elite theatrical institution of the Comédie Française provides some mediation between the two spheres. But James is equally concerned with a broader divide between theatre and Aestheticism, where theatre presents a model of art as a material practice

which is inherently social and institutional. Within these conditions, the primary figure of the Aesthete is Gabriel Nash, who retains his independence from artistic institution and profession through his 'likeness to curling vapour of murmuring wind or shifting light' (*TM*, 470)[39]. James develops this elusive quality into an allegory of irony which brings together many of his earlier fictional reflections on irony and Aestheticism.

Previous readings of the complex relationship between James and Aestheticism have produced contrary positions on the politics of aesthetic autonomy, particularly in relation to Pater's work. For Jonathan Freedman, Pater projected a post-Kantian conception of 'the aesthetic as a separate realm of experience, removed from "the actual forms of life"'.[40] Yet for Richard Salmon, the Paterian conception of life as art is an attempt to 'de-differentiate the category of the aesthetic from its enforced autonomy within modern (post-Kantian) cultural experience'.[41] The equal legitimacy of these contrary views suggests a dialectical condition, which was only partly resolved by what Salmon refers to as Pater's model of 'radical subjective autonomy'[42] – the elevation of aesthetic 'being' above artistic 'doing'. Aestheticism maintained two equally necessary positions on the condition of aesthetic independence. The first was a subjective conception of art's autonomy, the process theorized variously by Gadamer as 'the subjectivization of aesthetics' and by Bourdieu in terms of the constitution of a 'pure gaze' – a form of aesthetic disinterest which is achieved by exemplary aesthetic personalities.[43] The second position was to maintain a concept of the art work as an ideal and utopian practice which resists realist mimesis; an autonomous aesthetic realm which would inspire the refashioning of character and reality in its image. These two positions came together in Oscar Wilde's major critical statements, 'The Decay of Lying' (1889) and 'The Critic as Artist' (1890). As critical provocations performed by leisured aristocratic mouthpieces, these works also projected ideal personalities who claimed to perform or embody the dual condition of aesthetic autonomy and the artistic life. In 'The Critic as Artist' Wilde determined this as the ironic condition of critical consciousness, where 'there is no fine art without self-consciousness, and self-consciousness and the critical spirit are one' (Wilde, *Intentions*, pp. 126–7). The critic now became the epitome of life as art – the culmination of cultural evolution – but in a logic which resonates with Hegel's dialectical account of the history of culture, this end point is a negative moment: artistic production is replaced by reflexive subjectivity, consumption and the ironic spirit.[44]

James's portrait of Gabriel Nash has been variously identified with the figures of Wilde and Pater on a number of grounds.[45] What is important for this analysis is that Nash embodies a particular conception of criticism as the ironic destiny of the modern spirit, which had only recently emerged as the keynote of Wilde's critical theory. Nash is identified as an ironist early on in the novel, when Peter considers 'the chill of Mr Nash's irony' (*TM*, 110), but the idea increasingly accumulates a more general character. During his walk

around Paris with Nick Dormer, Nash insists that Nick should be 'on the side of the "fine"', and he complements this Paterian echo with a characteristic aesthetic declaration of independence. If Nick chooses art, 'there'll be the beauty of having been disinterested and independent' (*TM*, 121). For Nash this independence is secured by the choice of the aesthetic life; a Paterian distinction between aesthetic 'being' as distinct from artistic 'doing' which rejects specific artistic work, and the choice of medium and profession. Nash is nevertheless influential in promoting the choices of others to devote themselves to artistic careers, but his function, as his name suggests, is to be the angel of art, whose disappearance maintains his capacity for the insemination of artistic destinies.

In the last phase of the novel this model of Aestheticism as angelic insemination is determined according to an identification between the concept of irony and aesthetic freedom. This is established through the allegorical figure of the fading portrait, when Nick's attempt to paint Gabriel is thwarted by the supernaturally rapid erosion of the image's outline. As Nick reflects on the fading portrait, he catches a 'glimmer' of the real meaning of Nash, which is an ironic resistance to identification;

> He caught eventually a glimmer of the truth underlying the strangeness, guessed that what upset his friend was simply the reversal, in such a combination, of his usual terms of intercourse. He was *so accustomed to living upon irony* and the interpretation of things that it was new to him to be himself interpreted and – as a gentleman who sits for his portrait is always liable to be – interpreted all ironically. From being outside of the universe he was suddenly brought into it, and from the position of a free commentator and critic, an easy amateurish editor of the whole affair, reduced to that of humble ingredient and contributor. (*TM*, 474; my emphasis)

As William Goetz has suggested,[46] James mobilizes a concept of irony typical of German Romanticism, as Nash attempts to maintain an absolute gap between subjectivity and representation. The fading portrait functions as an allegory of irony which symbolizes both this general relation to representation as such and also a relation to a particular set of cultural functions – the activity of interpretation and the freedom and amateurism of Nash's position as a critic.[47] It is vital for Gabriel to avoid representation by the portrait since, as an object of mimesis, he runs the risk of being the object of the artist's irony and no longer the subject of irony himself. What is at stake, once again, is the meaning of freedom in relation to representation or mimesis in abstraction, and then more generally to the market economies of art. It is significant that Nash determines this freedom in relation to criticism; 'the position of a free commentator and critic'. Ian Small has argued, in *Conditions of Criticism*, that the major figures of Aestheticism emerged at a threshold moment in

the professionalization of criticism; at this point criticism had declared its autonomous space without being subject to the constraint of academic convention. 'Living upon irony', Nash might be compared to the position of the aesthetic critic that had already been assumed by Walter Pater, ambiguously positioned in the academy, and Oscar Wilde, ambiguously positioned within the growing apparatus of spectacular consumer culture, but Nash's detachment is more absolute. In sharp contrast to Wilde, Nash is unambiguously 'outside of the universe' and the marketplace. This disappearance is one of the means by which the critic secures the autonomy of the aesthetic regime as the non-representable provenance of the ironic subject; in this sense Nash as ironist is the only 'free' artist who avoids the mercenary conditions of the actress or painter.

In the last phase of the novel James attempts to provide a perspective on artistic practice that moves away from the Aesthete's version of ironic subjectivity. In the career of Nick Dormer this involves a double process: assenting to an artistic career according to the conditions of the bourgeois marketplace, and of rejecting the aristocratic patronage which had hitherto tied him to an unwanted political career and a condition of artistic amateurism. Nick's transition begins when he is ostracized by Julia Dallow, his betrothed, over unfounded fears about his involvement with Miriam. This effectively grants Nick a default condition of artistic freedom, but he is slow to realize this as an incitation to artistic work. In between patronage and the marketplace, Nick's position mimics the fragile autonomy achieved by Gabriel Nash, but this experience is framed as liminal condition which is defensive and obscurantist.

At this point James returns to the concept of irony to describe a form of aesthetic addiction, as Nick's reservations about the isolation of the Aesthete are figured by the image of the cigarette. The exquisite cigarette was first used as a master trope for Aestheticism by de Banville[48], but it was reiterated famously by Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. James compounds the status of the exhalatory metaphor as Nick recognizes the limits of his own ironic condition: 'He saw he should live for months in a thick cloud of irony, not the finest air of the season, and he adopted the weapon to which a person whose use of tobacco is only occasional resorts when everyone else produces a cigar – he puffed the spasmodic defensive cigarette' (*TM*, 347). Nick's ironic cigarette apparently express his tendency to 'cultivate independence, mulishness and gaiety, and fix his thoughts on a bright if distant tomorrow' – a deferred project of self-culture comparable to that of the American Mrs Tristram. At this point Nick has adopted a 'new idiom' (*TM*, 346), which alienates through a premeditated obscurity. Far from being 'the finest air of the season' (*TM*, 347), the tenuous wreaths which his irony emits suggest his 'obscurely tortuous' style, which he cultivates in order to confound, 'abounding so in that sense that his critics were themselves bewildered'. In so far as he is inclined to the occasional

'spasmodic defensive cigarette', then, Nick mimics the irony of Gabriel Nash; he is condemned to a position of angelic inaction.

As with Gilbert Osmond, Nick's ironic phase is represented as a refinement of mimetic desires: he aspires to Nash's 'winged words' (*TM*, 347), his exhalation of the cigarette secures the aesthetic style, and his portrait of Miriam idealizes her in a position of transcendence, the same condition of freedom that will appear to Peter Sherringham as the 'winged liberties and ironies' (*TM*, 319) which Miriam enjoys in her newly acquired home. This general aspiration to a position of sublime irony is to some extent symptomatic of the mercenary conditions of art in a rapidly expanding consumer economy, yet the whole trajectory of *The Tragic Muse* suggests that this desire for the ideal must be overcome. The artist who achieves this overcoming most successfully is Miriam Rooth. If Isabel Archer was unable to make a decisive move away from Gilbert Osmond's aristocratic form of Aestheticism, Miriam can in some sense offer an image of life after aesthetic aristocracy; as a successful actress, she straddles the worlds of the elite theatrical institution and the commercial sphere. The values of Miriam and theatre itself are suggested in Peter Sherringham's revelatory experience of Miriam on stage: 'the vision of how the uplifted sage and the listening house transformed her' (*TM*, 306). What Peter finds extraordinary is how the actress is transformed 'in her conditions', and by 'conditions' James suggests not only the stage and audience but the whole institutional and educational apparatus which a theatre constructs. Miriam is the product of a system of training which is both protected and shared, and this projects an entirely different model of aesthetic subjectivity to that of the autonomous figure of the Aesthete. In *The Tragic Muse* this model of theatrical training and success is also part of an alternative vision of European cultural identity. Miriam Rooth is culturally hybrid, demonstrates an extraordinary aptitude for mimetic transformation and she presents an image of cosmopolitanism, but these qualities are produced through the cultivation of artistic relations rather than by refined negations.

In the narrative of Nick Dormer, it is the experience of painting Miriam that finally allows Nick to break the habit of aesthetic subjectivism. The relief to his lungs comes from the typically Jamesian recognition that the subject is constituted in a system of relations: 'Life is crowded and passion restless, accident and community inevitable. Everybody with whom one had relations had other relations too, and even indifference was a mixture and detachment a compromise' (*TM*, 394). This critique of 'detachment' and 'indifference' repeats the terms of Ralph Touchett's analysis of Gilbert Osmond, specifically Ralph's assertion that 'everything is relative; one ought to feel one's relation to things – to others' (*PL*, 396). Nick Dormer recognizes that his portraiture involves the sitter as a significant other – it is an essentially intersubjective process rather than a solitary practice. This experience is in direct contrast to his thwarted attempt to represent Gabriel, the spirit of irony. It is significant here that Nick

begins to overcome his own indifference and detachment when his subject is an actress, since it is the model of theatrical art which emerges as the contrary principle to Nash's version of aesthetic subjectivity. In the final movement of the novel Miriam achieves an extraordinary theatrical success while Nash disappears, either defeated by Nick's attempt to portray him or recognizing his angelic presence to be a surplus value.

If we read James's vision of the triumph of theatre in *The Tragic Muse* back into his earlier portrait of the ironist in *The Portrait of a Lady*, we can see a hidden logic in his critique of Aestheticism. In the earlier novel James determined the Aesthete's irony as a contradictory relation to the performative. Osmond's self-fashioning involved a simultaneous subjection to mimetic desire and a disavowal of its conditions through irony. This disavowal was the sign of the retroactive position of aristocracy, a position that is echoed in the anti-theatrical diatribes of Gabriel Nash. In *The Tragic Muse*, Miriam's theatrical art emerges as the principle medium of a vision of aesthetic democracy. It is theatre which inaugurates trans-European artistic relations, not through coteries constituted by ironic detachment but through commitment to communal practice. All the major relationships of *The Tragic Muse* are effectively determined by their capacity to assent to the example of theatre as a demand for public expression and an insistence on artistic *Bildung* as a relational process.[49]

James framed this triumph of theatre over aesthetic irony at a significant point in his career, immediately before his own attempt to become a stage writer. But in James's life of art a painful irony emerges within the conditions of his critique of irony. James's own drama, *Guy Domville* (1895), famously failed on the eve of Oscar Wilde's spectacular success with *An Ideal Husband*, and the abjection which James experienced after this failure, exquisitely rendered by Colm Tóibín in *The Master* (2004), may have laid the conditions for his 'obscurely tortuous' late style. Aestheticism, finally, would triumph over James in the arena of the London stage, with its refined ironies and spectacular poses, but James's own position as the master of irony and representative of literature's autonomy would in some sense emerge from this defeat. Exiled from theatre and public expression, the later James may have recoiled from the ironies of his own condition, an aesthetic state that was oddly reflected by the equally exclusive Flaubert, forging literary freedom yet 'exclusively condemned to irony'.

The Return of the Sublime in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*

In his later work James radically reformulated his critique of Aestheticism, becoming increasingly concerned with the spectrality of aesthetic revival and the haunted return of the sublime in aesthetic modernity. The concept of irony continued to provide the master trope for aesthetic subjectivity, but

increasingly the evanescence and evasiveness of the Aesthete began to appear in James's work as a transcendental aspiration – aspiring towards the condition of the sublime. In *The Awkward Age* (1989) the dandyish Vanderbank is represented as a 'sacred flame', an ellipsis within discourse and representation who inspires a system of mimetic desires by his unidentifiable mastery of style. As the supremely refined master of an aesthetic salon, Vanderbank is 'forever cultivating his detachment'.[50] The aesthetic life is achieved by intensification and abstraction, so as to take from life 'the finer essence of which it appeals to the consciousness'.[51] Although the group of aesthetic hedonists that constellate around Van claim to be 'simple lovers of life', such simplicity is undercut by the profound gap which exists between 'the finer essence' of life and its appearances.

By the turn into the twentieth century, James's conception of aesthetic subjectivity had deepened, so that the stylistic self-fashioning of aesthetic coteries was no longer his main concern. In *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) his heroine, Milly Theale, emerges as an ideal figure of art tainted by a recognition of mortality. This consequently imbues her with an untouchable status to her satellites and admirers, and to those who seek to exploit her apparently witless sense of her own autonomy. In one significant mountain-top scene, James represents this condition in terms of the discourse of the Romantic sublime. Subsequently, in *The Golden Bowl*, James continued to implicate the aesthetic personality in the discourse of Romantic transcendentalism. In the character of Adam Verver, James came to represent the sublime encounter as the original basis of Aestheticism, a constitutive experience of ecstasy and abjection from which the aesthetic subject might never recover, nor wish to, circling for a lifetime around the sublimity of his or her own origins.

The culture of Aestheticism was founded upon a suppression of the sublime, but also upon a redefinition of the sublime as a pre-modern and, surprisingly, pre-Romantic form. In insisting that art must be faithful to its sensuous beauty, Aestheticism had to historicize the sublime as an ancient religious mode of experience which Hellenic culture overcame. The theoretical basis for this Hellenist ideal was the evolutionary system of Hegel's *Aesthetics*. Hegel located the sublime in those ancient religious icons which necessarily failed to represent the godhead, whose nature was infinite and unrepresentable. In its 'symbolic' mode, art's only hope is to intimate an idea of the limitless being it can never manifest, and the result is that 'the relation of the Idea to the objective world therefore becomes a *negative* one, since the Idea, as something inward, is itself unsatisfied by such externality, and [. . .] it persists *sublime* above all this multiplicity of shapes which do not correspond with it' (*A*, I, 77). From this formal point of view, the sublime rends the sensuous texture of the art work and insists on a negative freedom. From an evolutionary historical perspective, the 'Symbolic' mode was in want of, and waiting for, the sensuousness of the Hellenic, or classical, mode of art. Thus

in the 'Winckelmann' essay Pater glosses: 'The art of Egypt [. . .] is, according to Hegel's beautiful comparison, a Memnon waiting for the day, the day of the Greek spirit' (*R*, 168).

This idea of the Hellenic revival as the overcoming of a purgatorial negative sublime was fundamental to the major theorists of aesthetic Hellenism. Gautier reiterated Hegel's scheme directly in his essay 'Plastique de la Civilisation: Du Beau Antique et du Beau Moderne',[52] Pater in 'Winckelmann' and Symonds in *Studies in Greek Poetry*.[53] Wilde then followed the same system at second hand in his American lecture on 'The English Renaissance of Art',[54] and Vernon Lee reiterated the critique of the symbol in 'Faustus and Helena'.[55] At the same time, though, Lee's essay is testament to a persistent desire for sublimity within the culture of Aestheticism, which she found in the craving for the supernatural. In aesthetic culture, the return of the sublime generally took the form of horror, not least in Lee's own volume *Hauntings*. What was lacking in the Victorian fin de siècle was a literary form which reflexively considered the position of the sublime in aesthetic Hellenism without recourse to the Gothic pathos of death and reanimation. But this was finally achieved in James's late fiction.

The Wings of the Dove was James's most developed statement about decadent Aestheticism since *The Tragic Muse*. In the later novel James represents, once again, a card-carrying Paterian – not its heroine, Milly Theale, but her admirer and attendant, Susie Stringham, a Bostonian writer with a tremulous aesthetic temperament but little to show for it in literary achievement. Susie's obsession with Milly's ideal personality is identified unmistakably in the discourse of Paterian Aestheticism. Reflecting on Milly's life she feels: 'This was poetry – it was also history – Mrs Stringham thought, to a finer tune even than Maeterlinck and Pater'.[56] Fulfilling this aesthetic historicism, Milly is Susie's spectre of the antique, and in James's consistent Paterian echo, 'the striking apparition' of Milly inaugurates an 'infinitely fine vibration' (*WD*, 122). It is clear, though, that the late James is positioning Paterian and decadent Aestheticism as a flowering of late Romanticism. Susie finds in the consumptive and exquisite Milly an image of 'boundless freedom, the freedom of the wind in the desert'; she is a 'Romantic life' who manifests the sublime.

This is focused most clearly in the famous scene in which Susie finds Milly balanced on an Alpine promontory, surveying the vast horizon like Friedrich's 'Wanderer Above the Sea of Mists'. Imagining Milly's hypothetical elation, Susie reflects;

> She was [. . .] in a state of uplifted and unlimited possession that had nothing to gain from violence. She was looking down on the kingdoms of the earth, and though indeed that of itself might well go to the brain, it wouldn't be with a view of renouncing them. Was she choosing among them or did she want them all? (*WD*, 135)

It is important here that Milly's subjective experience is closed to us and raises unanswerable questions. In a typical Jamesian strategy, the scene tells us most about the focalizer, Susie Stringham, for whom the image of Milly is a revelation:

> The image that thus remained with the elder lady kept the character of a revelation. During the breathless minutes of her watch she had seen her companion afresh; the latter's type, aspect, marks, her history, her state, her beauty, her mystery, all unconsciously betrayed themselves to the Alpine air, and all had been gathered in again to feed Mrs Stringham's flame. (*WD*, 136)

Aesthetic spectatorship emerges here as a mode of passive vampirism. The Aesthete gathers and devours the inscrutable impression of Milly in the Alps. Susan's hard gem-like flame is a gathering of sublimity – the sublime is the hidden source on which she feeds. But as much as it allows her to participate vicariously in what she believes to be the sphere of genius, it also renders her abject, since she is only ever fulfilled in an ideal personality or in an eternally postponed future state. For James, this is the essential melancholy of aesthetic *Bildung*.

James orchestrates a similar meeting of the rhetoric of Aestheticism and Romanticism in *The Golden Bowl* (1904), in the portrait of Adam Verver. Adam is an American billionaire who has devoted himself to the spirit of art, to which he is offering a 'museum of museums' in the American Midwest – a sanctuary of art in the desert of commerce. *The Golden Bowl* replays the cultural and temporal dynamics of Paterian Aestheticism – the dialectic of ancient and modern and the aesthetics of revival – within the personal narrative of a character who has become an Aesthete belatedly. For Pater, aesthetic awakening was figured by the statue of the *adorante*, an adolescent Greek boy, 'the image of man as he springs first from the sleep of nature, his white light taking no colour from any one-sided experience'.[57] Adam is similarly colourless, but in late middle age his gem-like flame has become cold. At the same time it constitutes his being and stands for 'all his freedom'.

> It was all, at bottom, in him, the aesthetic principle, planted where it could burn with a cold, still flame; where it fed almost wholly in the material directly involved, on the idea (followed by appropriation) of plastic beauty, of the thing visibly perfect in its kind: where, in short, in spite of the general tendency of the 'devouring element' to spread, the rest of his spiritual furniture [. . .] escapes the consumption that in so many cases proceeds from the undue keeping-up of profane altar-fires. (*GB*, 146)

His hope is that the 'aesthetic principle' will maintain its autonomy from the 'devouring element', but Adam has been devoured, more than he knows, by the cold still flame, and in the process of the novel he becomes an increasingly

attenuated presence, barely speaking or acting. As a result, Fanny Assingham, the novel's embedded reader and interpreter, confesses that 'he's beyond me', but the nature of this beyond is uncertain, as she says: 'he *may* be sublime: sublimer even than Maggie herself. He may in fact have already been. But we shall never know' (*GB*, 398). Fanny's confusion of tense here is telling: Adam is either the possibility of the sublime – he intimates a future state – or conversely, his current life is an echo or memorial of a previous sublimity. Like the condition of art in modernity, he is mourning an ideal Hellenic past which has become more spectral in the light of our accelerated consumption, the devouring element which also feeds the aspiration to protect art's spirit in a temple of abstraction.

The sublime origins of Adam's sensibility are focused in the long and brilliant section, chapters 7 and 8, which opens on a Sunday morning at his country estate, with a solitary Adam reflecting on the primal scene of his Aestheticism, in Rome, three years after his wife's death. James represents this sublime moment of awakening through the analogue of Keats's sonnet 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' (1816): 'He had, like many other persons, in the course of his reading, been struck with Keats's sonnet about stout Cortez in the presence of the Pacific' (*GB*, 104). The poem consolidates Adam's sense of transatlantic *Bildung*, since it is during his first trip to Europe, after the death of his wife, that Adam encounters the spirit of art. The opening of Keats's poem, 'Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold', is echoed in James's title and also echoes the novel's persistent discourse of economy, consumption and imperial acquisition. Its guiding image is the figure of Cortez staring at the Pacific in his first encounter with America:

> Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
> When a new planet swims into his ken;
> Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
> He star'd at the Pacific – and all his men
> Look'd at each other with a wild surmise –
> Silent, upon a peak in Darien[58]

It is important here that it is the gaze of Cortez, rather than the Pacific, that carries the sublime, and 'all his men' get a vicarious sublimity though their leader. Cortez's heroic gesture is endowed with sublimity by the silence of his apprehension and the sublimity of his vantage point, the 'peak in Darien', and this supplies a rich fantasy life for Adam Verver. We might suspect that Adam's position is closer to that of Cortez's men, or of Susie Stringham, always at one remove from the sublime encounter, but Adam nevertheless identifies himself with Cortez:

> Few persons, probably, had so devoutly fitted the poet's grand image to a fact of experience. It consorted so with Mr Verver's consciousness of the way

> in which, at a given moment, he had stared at *his* Pacific, that a couple of perusals of the immortal lines had sufficed to stamp them in his memory. His 'peak in Darien' was the sudden hour that had transformed his life, the hour of his perceiving with a mute inward gasp akin to the low moan of apprehensive passion, that a world was left him to conquer and he might conquer it if he tried. (*GB*, 104)

Adam figures his awakening in imperial and martial rhetoric, but he also directly appropriates the conceptual discourse of idealist aesthetics:

> The thought was that of the affinity of Genius, or at least of Taste, with something in himself – with the dormant intelligence of which he had thus almost violently become aware and that affected him as changing by a mere revolution of the screw his whole intellectual plane. (*GB*, 104)

Genius and Taste are capitalized here; James is putting continuous pressure on the discourse of Romanticism, and this culminates in his subtly ironic recapitulation of the language of sublimity and revelation: 'Now he read into his career, in one single magnificent night, the immense meaning it had waited for'. This 'magnificent night' is the dominant impression of Adam in the novel, both for the reader and himself, and his subsequent invisibility is integral to James's critique of Aestheticism. After this intimate representation of his aesthetic subjectivity, Adam is a mute and spectral presence, leaving the question: what was the consequence of his magnificent night?

Adam's fundamental need in these internal monologues is to sanctify his sublime encounter as a singular, original moment which constituted his aesthetic life as an original project. The sublime is the grounds of his ideal of *Bildung*, and Adam repeatedly reflects on his own development: 'the development had not been somebody else's passing falsely, accepted too ignobly, for his. To think of how servile he might have been was absolutely to respect himself, was in fact, as much as he liked, to admire himself, as free' (*GB*, 110). Adam feels that this 'development' is uniquely his own, protected from imitation and mimetic desire. As for Wilde in 'The Decay of Lying', the project of *Bildung* must be distinguished from imitative borrowing, and Adam shares with Wilde a crucial American context: Emerson's refusal of mimetic influence in the essay 'Self-Reliance' (1841). For Emerson this also meant an attempt to retrieve the American spirit from European wanderings, but Adam's ideal of aesthetic originality, far from being rooted in American values, demands the renunciation of his home country and the acceptance of European influence. The space of *Bildung* is Europe, but at the same time it must confirm its origins as irreducible to place, a sublime cosmopolitanism. Adam's only way of confirming this achievement is by continually revolving around his own original encounter with the spirit of art, which he seeks to cultivate and protect

within the ideal spaces of his country retreat and his museum. But there is a constitutive contradiction in this attempt, and in the discourse that Adam uses to enshrine his aesthetic subjectivity. When he reflects on his 'development', the word is cited in such a way as to give it the conceptual weight of the idealist *Bildung*, but it is also subtly ironized by the citationality, carrying the implicit questions: what is Adam developing towards; what is the telos of aesthetic *Bildung*?

The more the word 'development' echoes through Adam's circling self-reflection, the more it loses its verbal quality, the active sense of self-culture, and increasingly tends towards objectification. Adam's development is a thing enshrined, reified or translated into an ideal object, it is his singular production. It is tempting to say, according to the primary symbol of the novel, that this development is his Golden Bowl, but Adam's recuperation of his sublime origins is precisely his attempt to protect his Aestheticism from being reducible to an object which, however exquisite, may still be cracked.

There are positive ways of conceiving of this return to aesthetic subjectivity – Pater had celebrated the aesthetic life as an inchoate and processual flux which might, he suggested in *Marius*, be lived in the light of recollection, as an 'ideal now'.[59] But for James, ultimately, aesthetic subjectivity – the ideal subject of genius and taste – is a lure which can never be immediately experienced. In returning to the sublime encounter, Adam is condemned to repeat and memorialize his original moment of freedom in art. His great museum, in this sense, is not a repository of sensuous culture, but a mausoleum which commemorates for him the traces of his originary encounter. In an ironic inversion of Hegel's evolutionary aesthetics, the objects of plastic beauty are now symbols of a sublimity to which they can never aspire – this sublimity is no longer the godhead but the aesthetic subject itself, who is, like the Romantic ironist, or Pater's Hellenic personality, diaphanous, irreducible, but always disappearing.

At the conclusion of *The Golden Bowl*, Adam sails back to his native America, in a desperate mimicry of Cortez, to tend to his ideal museum with an adulterous wife whose vision of art appears to be limited to the discourse of advertising copy. Both Adam Verver and Milly Theale are the afterlives of an original aesthetic encounter – their own idealized youthful moments of revelation – and in this sense they are both belated. Yet they are also unrealized, waiting for return. Aestheticism is a purgatorial condition instated by an original sublime eruption which cannot be repeated, only memorialized by a process that is also a bid for repetition, a sacred faith in the possibility that the sublime event will be repeated. Milly Theale dies in her flat in Venice, which becomes a symbolist shrine that deliberately refuses contemporary life and the cynical reason of Kate and Merton. Adam, in contrast, returns to America in order to sanctify art in the desert of commerce. But

far from replicating Cortez's epiphanic journey, Adam's return to America represents the diremption of the sublime and the beautiful: in the afterlife of Aestheticism, it suggests, Pater's vision of sensuous cultural revival would soon be replaced by an increasingly eviscerated vision of artistic autonomy, a museum in a desert, with the spirit of art, once again, a 'Memnon waiting for the day'.

Chapter 4

Irony's Turn: The Redress of Aestheticism in Katherine Mansfield's Notebooks and Stories

If Henry James's twentieth-century novels had recorded decadence as a purgatorial condition, it might equally be experienced as the revelation of sensual possibility and cosmopolitan culture. For the young Katherine Mansfield, the examples of Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde set an ideal of a sensuous life to come. British aesthetic culture after the Pre-Raphaelites gave Mansfield the image of a metropolitan aesthetic life, and just as Henry James's early work had imagined the passage to Europe as a process of transatlantic *Bildung*, Mansfield saw the trans-Pacific journey from Wellington to London as an essential educative process, not only for herself but for the cultural development of her homeland. Having been sent to an elegant London college in her teenage years, she returned to her native New Zealand at the awkward age of 16. The intensity of Mansfield's Aestheticism was at its greatest pitch at this point. After over a year at home, in a letter to Vera Beauchamp, she made an emphatic statement of the necessity of metropolitan refinement and aesthetic cultivation:

> I am ashamed of young New Zealand, but what is to be done. All the firm fat framework of their brains must be demolished before they can begin to learn. They want a purifying influence – a mad wave of pre-Raphaelitism, of super-aestheticism, should intoxicate this country. They must go to excess in the direction of culture, become almost decadent in their tendencies for a year or two and then find balance and proportion.[1]

'Super-aestheticism', the necessity of decadence, a 'mad wave of pre-Raphaelitism', an excess of culture, the demolition of the cultural and neurological template of her homeland. These were images of Aestheticism as an active force for transformation and Dionysian renewal. They were far removed from the parodic image of a callow, mauve sensibility that modernist writers of the next decade would promote to bolster their own radical credentials, but

they were also rooted in a deep form of snobbery and shame that would be consolidated in the Bloomsbury Aestheticism of the early twentieth century.

Following Pater's sense of Leonardo's life and aesthetic *Bildung* in general as a 'series of disgusts', Katherine Mansfield's literary life contained a series of disavowals. In her teenage years, the culture of fin de siècle Aestheticism supported a rejection of provincial life; then later, in her entrance to London's professional literary culture, Mansfield apparently rejected Aestheticism, cultivating a sophisticated ironic narrative style that turned on the mauve and yellow rhetoric she had once imitated and espoused. This ironic turn dominated Mansfield's literary output for Orage's modernist magazine, the *New Age*, and might be seen as the mark of her entrance into modernist culture, a tendency that was consolidated with her association by Middleton Murry and the magazine *Rhythm*, which carried an explicit attack on Aestheticism in its editorial statements. These statements were frequently loose and untheorized, but Murry's line of attack was certainly direct when he insisted that 'a fantastic and reactionary aestheticism is art's greatest enemy'.[2] Considering Mansfield's close editorial association with Murry, we might be justified in assuming that she complied with these gestures of disavowal and, as I shall demonstrate, there is some biographical evidence that she turned violently against the ghost of Wilde, which had been haunting her since her teenage years. Yet she would ultimately recover her early Aestheticism as an essential influence on the form and ideas of her most important work.

Following the phase of her modernist immersion, Mansfield resuscitated her New Zealand childhood in 'Prelude', the groundbreaking prose experiment that she had written earlier as 'The Aloe', with an explicit debt to Pater, in a form of literary Impressionism that built on the legacy of Pater and James. The return from a metropolitan ironic voice to a sensuous evocation of childhood is as significant a turn as her initial break from Aestheticism and gives a dialectical structure to Mansfield's career. If her youthful Aesthetic phase was negated by the modernity of irony, it was later recuperated, both formally and psychically, in a flexible modernist prose style and in the renaissance of an Aesthetic dimension to experience that was vitally linked to childhood.

Mansfield's journals and notebooks are as important to this reading as her published fiction. In the journals, Aestheticism emerges as the provenance of youth and particularly adolescence; it is the mark of an impressionability and psychic fluidity that survives the cultivation of detachment in early adulthood. Such a condition contains an acute susceptibility to embarrassment – the shame of excessive identifications between the passional and the aesthetic – and in some cases it was the work of Modernism to negotiate and cover this shame by new formal and technical prescriptions. In this sense Mansfield's career is representative of ways that Aestheticism was negotiated in the psychic life and cultural institutions of Modernism. Decadent Aestheticism was the disavowed adolescence of British Modernism, a phase which had to be

masked, internalized and overcome, either through direct attack, ironic deflation or a more complex process of concealment. Yet in another sense modernist snobbery revealed the cultural unconscious of Victorian Aestheticism, since in Pater's and Wilde's work, an idealist dialectic of refinement and supersession always threatened to instate an etiolated model of psychic distance, positing a condition where nature and instinct had always already been surpassed in the life of art: aesthetic vampirism, or the cultural logic of metropolitan Modernism. Wilde himself had moved from a radical dialectical model of artifice as the motor of the ideal to a concept of critical self-consciousness as the basis of cosmopolitan culture. One of the historical ironies of Modernism was that it frequently cultivated a kind of detachment that had been one of the central values of Wilde's project for cosmopolitan criticism, yet it made strenuous efforts to disavow the decadent nineties. Considering Modernism's internationalism and the cultural predominance of the émigré, we might expect a figure like Wilde to have been among its heroes, but modernist writers spent an extraordinary amount of energy in suppressing this affinity.

Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*, although in many ways the heir of nineties periodicals like *The Yellow Book* and *The Savoy*, was anxious to establish its distinction from the yellow decade from the outset.[3] In one of the more interesting sallies of *Blast* 2, the artist, poet and prose vorticist Jessica Dismorr launched an attack on Wilde's 'The Decay of Lying', specifically attempting to 'blast' his provocation that 'Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life'.[4] Her tone is conspicuously Whistlerian: 'Let us take up this old aesthetic quip, and set ourselves the light holiday task of blasting it indolently away'.[5] Dismorr might be said to protest too much, considering the obvious legacy of Wilde's theories of transposed form and the mask for modernist literary and performance culture. But her evocative demonization of fin de siècle dandyism is suggestive of the state of Aestheticism in global literary culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the earlier years of the century she has observed that London was still overrun by 'the Beardsley stock, as vigorous and vampire-like as when the ink was still dried on Smithers' catalogues'.[6] But, as in Stoker's *Dracula*, the trope of vampirism describes both cultural reversion and geographical exclusion. In the age of the vortex, the vampires have been retired from modern London:

> That debile and sinister race of diabolic dandies and erotically bloated diablesses and their attendant abortions, of Yellow Book fame, that tyrannized over the London mind for several years, has withdrawn from the capital, not to the delicate savagery from which it was supposed to come, but certainly to a savage clime.

Like Pater's figure for Prosper Merimée's literary descendants as a 'vampire tribe', Dismorr positions Aestheticism within a contradictory anthropology:

they are of primitive origins yet possess hyper-modern sensibility, epitomized by the oxymoronic characterization of sophisticated urbanism as 'delicate savagery'. Yet Dismorr's grotesquery suggests the ways in which fin de siècle Aestheticism might have been powerful precisely for those at the margins, outside the London culture industry's cycle of reinvention and disavowal, refinement and counter-refinement, excessive modernity and reactive primitivism. Mansfield herself was striving towards the literary metropolis in her youth, and if its defining figures had some of the erotic promise of Dismorr's 'diabolic dandies' they were in no sense grotesque to her.

Striving Towards Music: Aesthetic *Bildung* in Mansfield's Notebooks

The intensity of Mansfield's adolescent Aestheticism was successfully concealed until well after the high period of Modernism. When Middleton Murry edited a highly successful edition of her journal in 1927, he does mention 'an admiration for Oscar Wilde and the English "decadents"',[7] but he emphasizes musical ambition as the keynote of her adolescence. According to Murry's notes on the brief entries included from 1910, Mansfield destroyed most of her journals from the period 1909–1914. This effectively rendered her Aestheticism invisible – either she or Murry, or both together, had colluded with the modernist disavowal. Yet in his 'definitive edition' of the *Journal*, published in 1954, Murry restored the years which 'for various reasons were suppressed in the original edition'.[8] This revealed Mansfield's cultural and sexual identifications with Aestheticism, and significant Wildean sections were now printed. But the extent of her immersion in fin de siècle culture was only fully demonstrated in Margaret Scott's edition of *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks*. This offers an extraordinary account of Mansfield's aesthetic *Bildung*, but it also presents a series of brief and often exquisite moments of impressionist prose, unfinished narrative and lyric poetry. The inchoate form of the *Notebooks* invites the comparison with Schlegel's idea of the Romantic fragment, and they frequently contain miniature prose experiments that aspire to the elliptical and incomplete condition that Schlegel celebrated in the *Athenaeum* project as literature's highest possibility. Typically these fragments evoke or aspire to the condition of music, but they are also aspiring, culturally and geographically, to the trans-Pacific crossing that would determine Mansfield's literary life. Mansfield moved to London at the age of 13 for an exclusive college education, only to return to New Zealand at the age of 16, yearning for metropolitan culture and the aesthetic life. Her young life and writing was defined by two returns, first to New Zealand and then to London again. Within the space of this double crossing her literary identity was formed,

constantly aspiring towards the condition of music, or bringing literature and music together as sister arts.

The volume classified as 'Notebook 39' in Scott's edition covers the time that Mansfield was studying at Queens College in London through her return to Wellington. In London, Mansfield was tutored by the German aesthete Walter Rippmann, who introduced her to the breadth of fin de siècle and decadent culture, including Pater, Wilde, Symons and Maeterlinck. Although she declares that 'I find a resemblance in myself to John Addington Symonds' (*Notebooks*, 102), her primary identification at this time was with Wilde, and the volume begins with a series of Wilde's epigrams, interspersed with her own aspirational attempts at decadent wisdom.[9] An early fragment of poetic drama, 'The Yellow Chrysanthemum', is flagrantly indebted to Wilde's *Salome* and mimics precisely the compelling and grotesque interchange between Salome and Jokanaan.[10] This is the initial speech of Radiana:

> Ah? how beautiful! They are like little pieces of perfumed gold falling over my hair. . . . They are like little drops of pure amber falling, falling into the darkness of my hair. . . . They are like flakes of golden snow . . . (*she leans far back among the purple cushions*) O, I am wrapt in the perfume of the chrysanthemums. The air is full of the perfume . . . it is as though there had been a dead body in the room. (*Notebooks*, 191)

Considering the rhetorical excess of such passages, Mansfield's later turn against Aestheticism might be considered unsurprising, particularly since its imitation of Wilde's *Salome* is so direct as to inevitably generate an embarrassing anxiety of influence in maturity. Sydney Janet Kaplan has argued that Wilde's 'influence' was a matter of conscious reflection for Mansfield from the outset, and for this reason *Dorian Gray* would have had a compelling power in its narrative of Basil Hallward's artistic obsession.[11] This would have made Mansfield's own imitative identifications with Wilde all the more difficult to negotiate. If her juvenile works are flagrantly indebted to Wilde, what is important for Mansfield's career and her position in modernist culture is that they highlight a doubly accented capacity for embarrassment – both for rhetorical excess and for emphatic cultural allegiance. Yet the compelling power of Wilde on Mansfield outlasted Mansfield's early school years and was perhaps strongest on her return to New Zealand at the awkward age of 16. At this point, Wilde embodied both the London life she had left and the cosmopolitan artistic identity she might fashion for herself in a future return.

When Mansfield had returned from London to New Zealand she was living in a liminal zone of acute anticipatory anxiety, but the encounter with Wilde opened up for her a reflexive condition. Like the 'white sister' of Swinburne's 'Before the Mirror',[12] she frames herself as nothing but a spectral and incomplete artistic image, rapt in the admiration of her own aesthetic possibilities:

> A year has passed. What has happened. London behind me, Mimi behind me, Caesar gone. My music has gained, become a thing of 10000 times more beauty and strength. I myself have changed – rather curiously. I am colossally interesting to myself. One fascinating Day has been mine. My friend sent me Dorian. (*Notebooks*, 102)

This literary initiation will have the same effect as Dorian's own 'yellow book', being a compact of aesthetic and sexual suggestion. Even in these personal notebooks Mansfield is careful to circumnavigate her homosexual desires, but she gives considerable space to her heterosexual attachments, declaring her love for the cellist Arthur Trowell as the defining influence of her life. But even the love for Trowell is subsumed under the image Wilde: 'I love him – but I wonder, with all my soul – And here is the kernel of the whole matter – the Oscar-like thread' (*Notebooks*, 103). The kernel here is ambiguous, as is the thread-like consistency of her soul; it might be the spirit of Wilde, her desire for Trowell or the music he embodied.

Mansfield's dominant aspiration at this time was towards a musical life. This was not limited to the ambition towards professional musicianship, although she was a serious cellist at this time. Music encompasses the sexual instinct and motivates an aspiration towards a state of absolute play: 'all musicians, no matter how insignificant, come to life emasculated of their power to take life seriously. It is not one man or woman but the complete octave of sex that they desire' (*Notebooks*, 102–3). This equation of sexual obsession and musical Aestheticism projects a form of Romantic irony that incorporates reality into fictive play. The consequence is an oscillation between spleen and ideal that deprives the adolescent Mansfield of solid foundations. At the same time, Mansfield was dedicated from an early age to the cultivation of a literary persona and the shaping of an artistic life. Her musical aspirations are central to this idea of artistic identity, but they also introduce a model of aesthetic subjectivity that is more dangerous and subsident.

The artistic ideal of *Bildung* is necessarily linked with an affirmation of self-reliance, since it insists on the unique shape of the artistic life, a shape which is self-invented, composed on the model of musical form. But in Mansfield's notebooks the encounters with music are frequently moments of dispersal and radical self-loss. Her trick as a youthful diarist was to exploit this insubstantiality for the cause of the aesthetic moment. According to a familiar aesthetic alchemy, abjection is translated into ecstatic but transient fulfilment. In this twilight street scene from 1908, she encapsulates the condition of the Romantic lyric, but within the form of the prose fragment:

> Then in the Abenddämmerung I went out in to the streets. It was so beautiful – the full moon was like a strain of music heard through a closed door – mist over everything, the hills mere shadows tonight. I became terribly

> unhappy, almost wept in the street, and yet Music enveloped me – again – caught me, held me, thank Heaven. I could have died. I should be dead but for that, I know. (*Notebooks*, 102–3)

Although this recounts a specific moment of listening to a 'strain of music through a closed door', the Giorgionesque incident is subsumed within a fundamental condition. 'Music' is a general concept for the life-world's striving towards an aesthetic unity, but true to Baudelaire's oscillation between spleen and ideal, the musical unity is both poison and cure; it generates the despair of being excluded from a musical universe, while simultaneously offering the apparent solution to this despair. Mansfield constructs her own aesthetic subjectivity according to this ambivalent condition: even as it volatizes and disperses the aesthetic subject, the music holds and envelops her. According to its unique conditions as airborne medium, music is both enveloping and disappearing, transient in the street air, yet projecting an invisible and timeless condition of harmony.

In 'Notebook 2', mostly from 1907, Mansfield cites Pater's determination of the Pythagorean impulse towards musical totality: '"Philosophy is a systematic appreciation of a kind of music in the very nature of things" (Plato & Platonism)' (*Notebooks*, 160). Plundering Pater's text for epigrams, Mansfield is little concerned with his critical turn against the Pythagorean ideal. In her prose fragments at this time, music stands for the total aesthetic being that Pater had aspired towards in 'The School of Giorgione' and 'A Study of Dionysus', before the skeptical withdrawal he articulated in *Plato and Platonism*. Just as Pater had located the musical impulse in early childhood, Mansfield sought to recover moments of embodied music that encapsulated the sensuous conditions of her early life.

One of the most poignant of these moments is narrated in a story that once again has the suggestiveness and incompletion of the Romantic fragment. 'Notebook 39' concludes with 'The Story of Pearl Button', a miniature narrative evocation of a moment in early childhood. This explicitly signals its subject as the beginning of aesthetic *Bildung*, the imposition of order on inchoate experience: 'Life was a very vague scheme of things until Pearl Button went to school in the Spring of 1897' (*Notebooks*, 112). Its young heroine Pearl arrives at school anxious that her afternoon will be full of song, and the primary impression of the story is a Giorgionesque interval before the emergence of music. At the outset the young girl is talking to her teacher Mr Dyer, but after the conversation dies down Pearl sits in silent anticipation of music, 'watching the shadows chase each other across the ceiling' (*Notebooks*, 112). Her teacher is rapt in a moment of attention to her small hands. Then, at this moment of attention and repose, the focalization becomes imprecise, the listening subject is dispersed, and the central impression of the story unfolds. Like Pater's Giorgionesque mode, this is an interval of listening that is attentive to the

qualities of air and light as much as sound. It begins with the sound of a lawn being mown outside, then moves in to the apprehension of song:

> Far away Mr Atkinson was mowing the front paddock – the swishing of the scythe seemed to fill the empty sunlit air. The sound was lost in the high clear voices of the children that floated through the windows into the room where little Pearl Button was lying so quietly. The child did not move but tears poured down her face. 'Oh, Mr Dyer' she said, 'That's the song I came to school with. It's my favourite song Mr Dyer.'
>
> Oh Forest green & fair
> Oh Pine trees waving high
> How sweet their cool retreat
> How full of rest
>
> In the pause which followed the first verse Mr Dyer heard the sharpening of the scythe. 'It was rather wobbly [?]' said the child. 'I hope they'll sing it again – ah there it is.' Once more, but softer, they seemed to be singing to the rhythmic swishing of the scythe. (*Notebooks*, 112)

Pater defined such 'exquisite pauses in time' as both plenitude and anticipation: the Giorgionesque image intimated a kind of play which was not quite that of the musician's applied technique; it was a kind of attention in which the subject surrenders itself to atmosphere, is played with by the wave-instilled air. In 'The Story of Peal Button' the singing children are absent in body, but their voices are made immanent to the scene of listening, which is expanded in the virtual space projected in the song, the 'pine trees waving high', and finally in the rhythm of the scythe in the 'empty sunlit air'. Mansfield's delicate and sentimental fragment has the naivety of a childhood tale, but it is equally testament to an experience of dispersed consciousness and ecstatic identification that will define many of Mansfield's accounts of musical attention.

'The Story of Pearl Button' suggests how important the presence of childhood was to Mansfield both in late adolescence and at the maturity of her literary career. In 'Notebook 39', overcoming some embarrassment, she declares that a book of child verse she has written is 'exquisitely unreal' (*Notebooks*, 102). But this was written during the time that Mansfield had returned from London to New Zealand, a liminal zone of acute anticipatory anxiety. This condition of exclusion and longing was imprinted on the development of her impressionist prose. In another musical fragment, simply titled 'Vignette',[13] Mansfield is looking out a window at a rhododendron bush which 'sways restlessly', as 'in the next room someone is playing the piano' (*Notebooks*, 200). The uncanny effect focused in this fragment emerges from the spatial ambiguity of the music itself, which focuses an anthropomorphic fantasy of the sound touching and communicating with the plants outside: 'Does the music float out through this

room – and out of the window to the garden? Does the plant hear it, and answer to the sound? The music, too, is strangely restless . . . it is seeking something . . .' (*Notebooks*, 201). The anthropomorphism is continued, with its subject modulated, in a second metaphorical transition: Mansfield attributes restlessness to the music itself, as if the music is seeking an as yet unidentified object of desire. Carrying the metaphor to its logical spatial conclusion, Mansfield speculates that this may be the 'mystic, green plant, so faintly touched with sun colour', but immediately undercuts her own anthropomorphism to reveal that the trajectory of the music is objectless: there is 'only a restless mysterious seeking, a stretching upwards to the light – and outwards'. Music has figured Mansfield's restless trajectory, not only by its emotional content, but also in its identity as an inchoate spatial medium. It inspires her narrative of personal development and cultural enlightenment by dislocating her, effecting her dispersal, then figuring a condition of emancipated spirit that cannot be reduced to organic belonging, either though landscape or the symbol.

At this stage in Mansfield's life, the Giorgionesque life is elsewhere, but this painful distance from the ideal is the motor of *Bildung*. Such is the proximity of childhood that its sensuous promise is still recuperable, yet the narrative of development that is the dominant note of Mansfield's journals effects a different trajectory: against nature and belonging. In her early notebooks, Mansfield is willing her literary identity into being, and she is quite clear about the cultural and geographical determinations that will shape her career and define the limits of her literary forms: 'I am sitting right over the fire as I write, dreaming, my face hot with coals. Far away a steamer is calling, calling, and – Good God – my restless soul' (*Notebooks*, 103). The calling of the trans-Pacific passage erupts in a fireside meditation that recalls Isabel Archer's famous moments of reflection: at the window in Albany, dreaming of a possible future, then later, at the fireside in Rome, in her famous reflective vigil on the failure of her marriage. Isabel Archer's temporal situation suggest the conditions of Mansfield's *Notebooks*. The most compelling sections of her journal are from her early life, in which she is anticipating a future aesthetic identity which is as yet inchoate and undecided.

Mansfield's own narrative of aesthetic *Bildung* will have much in common with James's heroine, as her early Aestheticism is tempered by the sophisticated demands of a new set of metropolitan influences. Her later stories will either turn against the discourse of aesthetic intensity ('The Modern Soul', 'Bliss'), attempt to narrate the emergence of aesthetic subjectivity ('Prelude') or uncover the narcissism of a self-fashioned aesthetic subject ('*Je ne parle pas français*'). But whether they privilege irony or narrative genealogy, the stories occupy the temporal condition of belatedness. The narrative position is that of knowledge achieved, looking back at the stage of its consciousness, or separating itself from aesthetic subjectivity as if this were both culturally outmoded and psychically juvenile. In contrast, her journals exemplify the

contrary condition of anticipation, with its compound of objective stasis and inner restlessness. Far from having surpassed Aestheticism through irony and detachment, the young Mansfield is caught between the evocation of sensuous immediacy in the present and the anticipation of future freedom.

Throughout her early notebooks, Aestheticism's legacy is not limited to the expansion of cultural and sensuous life; it is the basis of her image of independence and self-development. It is also the example of Aestheticism and Wilde in particular that allows her to reflect on the 'self-fashioned' chains of modern women and 'what women in the future will be capable of achieving' (*Notebooks*, 110). But in a significant entry of May 1908, just before her return from New Zealand to London, her identification with Wilde is balanced with a striving towards cosmopolitanism which, although informed by Wilde himself, demands that she regulate her singular attachment to Oscar and open herself up to a 'wider vision' woven from multiple 'harmonious skeins':

> Now where is my ideal and ideas of life? Does Oscar – and there is a gardenia yet alive beside my bed – does Oscar still keep so firm a stronghold in my soul? No! Because now I am growing capable of seeing a wider vision – a little Oscar, a little Symons, a little Dolf Wyllarde, Ibsen, Tolstoi, Elizabeth Robbins, Shaw, D'Annunzio, Meredith. To weave the intricate tapestry of one's own life it is well to take a thread from many harmonious skeins, and to realise that there must be harmony. Not necessary to grow the sheep, comb the wool, colour and bran it, but joyfully take all that is ready and with that saved time go a great way further. Independence, resolve, firm purpose and the gift of discrimination, *mental clearness* – here are the inevitables. Again, Will – the realization that Art is absolutely self-development. The knowledge that genius is dormant in every soul, that that very individuality which is at the root of our beings is what matters so poignantly. (*Notebooks*, 110)

The prerequisite for her passage away from sheep cultivation is an aesthetic will defined by a combination of Emersonian and Paterian virtues; she will require independence and resolve, but also sufficient discrimination to 'weave the intricate tapestry of one's own life'. Mansfield pays close attention to the condition of the will that does the weaving; her capitalization of 'Will' suggests a vague appropriation of Schopenhauer or Nietzsche, but Mansfield is again closer to the legacy of Friedrich von Schlegel as it had been refracted in Wilde's individualism. Such emphatic declarations of the independence of the artistic will can have quite different consequences. At this point, Mansfield might go on to identify her freedom with the exercise of the poetic imagination and the faculty to produce the symbol. Or alternatively, she might define the principle of all literary freedom as irony. Both of these alternatives were present in the German Romanticism of the 1790s and in the aesthetic culture of the 1890s, but their cultural presence in the age of Modernism was as yet uncertain.

While Yeats was promoting the myth-making faculty under the auspices of an organic national aesthetic, Wyndham Lewis would cultivate and reflexively examine a mode of extreme detachment. At the threshold of the modernist era, in 1909, Mansfield straddled both these possibilities, and within this same year she made quite contrary gestures towards the culture of Aestheticism. This was the beginning of irony's turn against the excesses of the 1890s, both culturally, in the emergence of a modernist literary identity, and psychically, in the effort towards the cultivated detachment typical of early adulthood and its anxious performance of authority. Mansfield returned to London in the summer of 1908, and while her writing of this time was still clearly indebted to fin de siècle culture, her path towards repudiation began.

At some point in early 1909 Mansfield articulated her disavowal of Aestheticism with shocking force, writing to Ida Baker of Wilde's 'decadence' with a tone that approximates Max Nordau's famous demonization of the fin de siècle:

> Did you ever read that life of Oscar Wilde – not only read it but think of Wilde – picture his exact decadence? And wherein lay his extraordinary weakness and failure? In New Zealand Wilde acted so strongly and terribly upon me that I was constantly subject to the same fits of madness as those which caused his ruin and his mental decay. When I am miserable now – these recur.[14]

Such is the intensity of this reversal that the question of its psycho-biographical sources becomes compelling. If we read this confession against the details of Mansfield's early life, then her rejection of Wilde appears to be motivated by the disavowal of lesbian desire. In her earliest notebook entries she had clearly associated Wilde's image with sexual freedom, and Wilde's image gave her the courage to pursue her desires at a young age. In 1909 she turned against Wilde at a moment of extreme tension, which her biographer Claire Tomalin has identified as the defining point of Mansfield's life.[15] Her romance with Garnet Trowell had been ended by Trowell's parents. Following this crisis, she had a bizarre one-day marriage to George Bowden, became pregnant in Germany, retreated to a Bavarian spa, miscarried, then continued to live peripatetically in Germany under a variety of assumed names.

An extraordinary poem of 1909, 'Spring Wind in London', carries the prophetic sense that what she imagined in Wellington as a liberating voyage out would only consolidate her rootlessness: 'I blow across the stagnant world / I blow across the sea / For me, the sailor's flag unfurled / For me, the uprooted tree' (*Notebooks*, 188–9). Just as the identification with the spirit of music in her earlier writing combines the effect of dispersal with a compensatory sense of universality, the identification with the wind makes Mansfield's lyric voice both abject and omnipotent. Her sense that 'The world must bow to me' is elaborated

through a Romantic mimesis of divinity, as the wind both orders reality and masks itself in its changing forms. This lyric appropriation of a restless and rootless spirit has a tripartite structure of abjection, compensatory omnipotence and a subsequent move towards sympathetic imagination: 'Oh stranger in a foreign place / See what I bring to you, / The rain is tears upon your face / I tell you – tell you true / I came from that forgotten place / Where once the wattle grew' (*Notebooks*, 189). Just as Coleridge's 'conversation poems' relieved lyric alienation through a return to familiar objects or family, Mansfield's lyric rootlessness is relieved of its alienated distance by a sudden movement of sentimental poetic emotion. Yet in this case the melancholy of transience is the fundamental and final note that defines the alienation of the lyric mode. It is striking that Mansfield should locate the origins of this lyric condition in London, in spring, although the universality she aspires to echoes medieval and Romantic lyrics. This duality between form and experience would be repeated in a much more sophisticated form in the urban lyric fragments of Eliot's *The Waste Land* nearly two decades later. Such consonances between the lyric experience of Romanticism and Modernism, in spite of the radical difference in poetics and form, says much about Mansfield's literary self-fashioning at this point in the early twentieth century, but the legacy of Romanticism and Aestheticism was about to be suddenly and ruthlessly overturned in Mansfield's writing.

Mansfield and Modernity: Performing Irony / Ironizing Performance

Mansfield's first literary project on her return to Europe would be to translate her rootless experience from the conditions of the Giorgionesque fragment and Romantic lyric to that of the professional modernist émigré. She would cultivate a detached and ironic style suitable for the demolition of precisely those aesthetic identifications that she had cultivated so excessively in her notebooks. At this point in London literary and artistic culture, the most significant influences on Mansfield were modernist magazines and their outspoken editors: Orage and his radical journal the *New Age*, then later Middleton Murry with *Rhythm*. Mimicking the strategy of Wyndham Lewis's *Blast*, Murry voiced his repudiation of the Victorian fin de siècle from the first issue: 'Aestheticism has had its day and done its work. Based on a reaction, on a foundation essentially negative, it could not endure; with a vision that saw, exquisitely, it may be, but un-steadily and in part'.[16] It is typical of such critiques that the rejection of Aestheticism is curt and theoretically unfocused – the assertion that Aestheticism is essentially reactive is far more applicable to the facile aggression of the modernist need for manifestos than to Pater's diaphanous style. But Orage's *New Age* presents a more ambivalent and complex relationship to aesthetic culture. Orage himself was deeply immersed in Edward Carpenter's

utopian ideas, and the journal published a series of articles that were intended to revivify the socialist Arts and Crafts vision that William Morris had developed as an alternative to decadent Aestheticism.[17] Yet significantly, the *New Age* had printed a damning assessment of Wilde, specifically directed at his social comedies: 'As it was, he achieved only a magnificent bluff, his gifts were used in irony and contempt of his fellow-creatures'.[18] Although an assessment of Mansfield's motivation at this point is purely speculative, it is quite likely that her turn against the excessive rhetoric of aesthetic culture was part of an attempt to cultivate the kind of literary identity appropriate for Orage's journal, and more generally for metropolitan literary culture at this time. What Mansfield needed was an authoritative narrative voice capable of alchemically transforming what had previously been experienced as Romantic alienation into professional detachment. Yet there is an irony around this turn in Mansfield's career that emerges from the condition of irony itself. At the moment that Mansfield repudiated Wilde to develop a narrative voice shorn of the fin de siècle excesses of her tutelage, the voice she developed was precisely that mode of 'irony and contempt' that the *New Age* had rejected in Wilde's career as a dramatist. In rejecting the rhetoric of Aestheticism she fulfilled its cultural logic.

The products of Mansfield's new cultivation of detachment were the Bavarian stories published in the *New Age* from March 1910 and later collected as *In a German Pension* (1911).[19] This series of vignettes is largely set in the Pension Muller, where Mansfield was staying during 1909, and are for the most part satirical observations of its transient guests, particularly those who fashioned themselves according to excessive or conventional aristocratic manners. Mansfield's performance of detachment in these stories suggests that she is following Orage's prescription for a literature projected to 'Mathew Arnold's fourth class' – that is the 'aliens',[20] the class who stand outside Arnold's tripartite division of barbarians, philistines and populace. This cosmopolitan ambition demanded the cultivation of a particular personality and style, and again Wilde would appear to be the exemplary model. But Mansfield constructs her narrative voice on a far more humble scale which is closer to the position of Jane Austen: marginal yet wise, lacking the absolute independence of Romantic lyric yet alert to the contingency of class-bound performatives. This point of view is epitomized in the story 'Frau Fischer'. At the outset the narrator is sitting in an arbour, watching a bustling entrance. From such a position, entrances and appearances invariably attain a parodic dimension – the perspective is close enough to perceive a singular detail that might concentrate the essence of character, but at such a distance that any performative exaggeration will be ruthlessly framed. Sympathy is not explicitly disavowed, but it is implicitly ironized, even when it is professed by the narrator herself. When she observes of the Frau's reception that 'the greetings were so loud and long that I felt a sympathetic glow' (*Stories*, 697), the sympathy has already been undercut by the sentence in which it is announced.

Mansfield's ironic turn also involves a level of play which holds back from the volatized reality of Romantic irony, while allowing herself a homeopathic dose of its delights. This is an aesthetic spectator who makes it clear she is eager for distraction and willing to engage in playful duplicities, demonstrated in this case by her fictional marriage to a sea captain. Like the garden with which James begins *The Portrait of a Lady*, another space where émigrés interact with cultivated conventions, the garden of the pension affords Mansfield a particularly flexible space to manage an economy of detachment and engagement, critique and play.

The sharpest demonstration of Mansfield's irony makes Aestheticism its direct object. In 'The Modern Soul' Mansfield explicitly turns against the discourses of Aestheticism and the excesses of fin de siècle self-fashioning. The ironies of this piece are already implicit in the title. One of the central premises of Aestheticism was to promote the idealist notion of soul in form as an essential aspiration of aesthetic modernity, yet it framed this modern ideal as the revival of previous eras – ancient Greece and the Renaissance. Aestheticism was both modern and belated. And in order to maintain the ideal space of art it had to insist on the autonomy of style and form. So at the same time that Aestheticism promoted the indivisibility of soul and form, it radically separated surface from substance, with the proviso that a dialectical solution to the 'Romantic' alienation of art was forthcoming. In the Hegelian schematics that Pater inherited, the 'modern soul' was the alienated form of Romantic irony – epitomized by the media of lyric and music – but Aestheticism sought to recover from this condition by a return to the Hellenic ideal of sensuous form. According to this influential evolutionary paradigm, narratives of aesthetic modernity will tend to posit a purgatorial condition where the aesthetic subject is striving to overcome a condition of disintegration or detachment. When Katherine Mansfield stages a 'modern soul' we might expect it to carry the spirit of Romantic irony, detachment and revolt, or, in its decadent manifestation, neurasthenia, irritability and 'refinement upon refinement'. But Mansfield's representation of the 'modern soul' is chosen precisely to emphasize the belatedness and obsolescence of Aestheticism as a discourse of modernity.

The brief narrative of 'The Modern Soul' is centred on a performance and on the pretensions of a star performer, but it begins by attacking precisely the kind of musical rhetoric that the young Mansfield had developed in her notebooks. Its initial presentation of aesthetic discourse is the speech of a German professor whose professions of taste appear to directly mimic and inflate the Paterian aspiration towards music:

> I have just returned from a party in the wood. I have been making music for them on my trombone. You know, these pine trees provide most suitable accompaniment for a trombone! They are sighing delicacy against sustained

> strength, as I remarked once in a lecture on wind instruments in Frankfort. (*Stories*, 711)

As a musician as much as a literary ironist, Mansfield's satirical choice of instrument is cruel and ingenious: the timbral excess of the trombone makes it an easy target for the severe discipline of literary irony, but it is not only the grandiosity of brass but the Professor's claims to inhabit a pastoral acoustic space that Mansfield mocks. If we have taken Pater's image of the Olympian religion in 'A Study of Dionysus' in earnest, Mansfield's framing of this 'sighing delicacy' among the pine trees may be chastening. But it is worth asking if such irony stands up to the scrutiny it directs against the rhetoric of Aestheticism. Is Mansfield's satirical turn working against excessive aesthetic discourse in general, or specifically against the Professor's claims for musical distinction, or even more specifically his unique claim of being attentive to the qualities of acoustic space?

Contemporary sound installation artists would find Mansfield's ironies withering, as much as symbolist aesthetes. But the generality of her tone and the speed at which she transfers satirical focus will not allow for a defence of the particular against irony's wider claims. This mode of discursive irony tends to subsume the specific object or speech act under a general concept – the vacuity of aesthetic self-fashioning, perhaps, or the absurdity of the Professor's acoustic anthropomorphism. Yet these broader concepts are implied in a momentary ironic gesture, rather than developed to the point where the ironist would be dialectically accountable. The irony of Mansfield's satirical narrator is not dialogic in this sense, since while she is present on the scene she never stays there long enough to frame a direct response, and nor does she deal in the clarification of abstract values. If the abstract category was articulated, then the ironic subject would be dragged into a scene of conflicting discourses. But irony cultivates authority through evasion. Its success in the textual moment is achieved either by the apparent absenting of the subject from the effect of truth, or by a performance with sufficient sleight of hand to hold together its panoply of ironic effects under a general project that is suggested but never quite revealed.

Mansfield's narrative position is in fact identified by the Professor at the beginning of the story as 'my little English friend [. . .] the stranger in our midst' (*Stories*, 714), and this strangeness and detachment has been identified by the narrator as an affectless condition: 'I was grateful, without showing undue excitement' (*Stories*, 712). She also presents herself in possession of double vision; 'I shrugged my shoulders, remarking with one eye that while the Professor had been talking the Godowskas had trailed across the lawn towards us' (*Stories*, 713). Although she is part of the narrative scene, Mansfield maintains all of the qualities of the omniscient narrator. In the garden of the pension, this has the effect of setting a stage which has intrinsically ironic boundaries. The modern soul who makes her entrance on this stage is

Sonia – a celebrated performer who exemplifies decadent and symbolist theatricality. Like the actress Georgette Leblanc, who had been Maeterlinck's muse and was still influential into the twentieth century, Sonia exists somewhere in between the operatic diva and the new kind of actress that had emerged with the forms of symbolist drama, particularly through the interface of music and spectral theatre that Maeterlinck inaugurated.[21] And like Eleanora Duse, she considers her offstage self-fashioning as important a manifestation of theatrical being as her stage appearances.

Mansfield would have been well aware of the great performers of the fin de siecle through her deep immersion in Arthur Symons's criticism, but she directs her ironic attack precisely at that symbolist conflation of being and acting that Symons had promoted, particularly in his essays on Duse.[22] Mansfield divests Sonia of all ironic knowledge, assuming all of irony's claims to knowledge for herself as a narrator. In this case the narrator's irony exerts a consistent critical pressure against one of the fundamental concepts of idealist aesthetics; the manifestation of soul in form. Sonia enters in grand theatrical style: 'She swooped over a rose growing in the embryo orchard, then stretched out her hand with a magnificent gesture to the Herr Professor'. She subsequently apprehends the narrator herself according to the categories of idealism: 'Sonia absorbed my outward and visible form with an inward and spiritual glance, then repeated the magnificent gesture for my benefit' (*Stories*, 714). Once again, Mansfield undercuts a dominant conceptual note within the sentence in which it is introduced: the coincidence between outward form and 'spiritual glance', with its claim to the immediate presence of truth, is implicitly put into question by Sonia's gestural repetition. If stage and soul are coincident for Sonia, Mansfield as narrator enforces their divergence.

The spit between Mansfield's mode of narrative irony and the actress's claims to absolute aesthetic being are representative of a general cultural condition that had developed between the fin de siècle and early Modernism. In Aestheticism after Wilde, the idealist discourse of manifestation increasingly came into conflict with the performative demands made on the artist in consumer society. The figure of the actress bore the weight of this demand, but star performers such as Sarah Bernhardt were equally testament to the increasing tendency of the global media spectacle to co-opt the gestures and conventions of classical theatre. Wilde was able to maintain the polarities of spectacle and soul in a dialectical tension that was resolved in his own performance of life as art, but in the nineties the largely imported cultures of decadence and symbolism registered an unbridgeable split between the sphere of autonomous spectacle and the strain towards a spirit that might only be hinted at by the symbol. Symbolism was a discourse motivated by deferred spiritual objects, and its theatre was necessarily spectral and oblique. The consequent reaction of performers like Eleanora Duse was to claim a spiritual immediacy which was beyond theatricality itself, but this might be regarded as a symptom of the

increasing divide between symbolist abstraction and consumer spectacle as much as its solution.

In registering the excessive claims of symbolist performance, Mansfield is also consolidating the space of fiction as textuality and irony. 'The Modern Soul' culminates in a closet performance typical of fin de siècle salons, and when the performance is first announced, Sonia once again insists on an expressive immediacy that is irreducible to text:

> 'What do you intend to recite, Fraulein Sonia?'
>
> 'I never know until the last moment. When I come on the stage I wait for one moment and then I have the sensation as though something struck me here' – she placed her hand upon he collar broach – 'and . . . words come!' (*Stories*, 716)

Literature and performance are at odds here and enforce against each other the competing priorities of textuality and manifest surface, a divide that was demonstrated most dramatically in decadent Aestheticism, then repeated a century later in the contrary prerogatives of avant-garde performance art, with its shock of physical immediacy, and literary post-structuralism, with its neo-decadent promotion of textual autonomy. In signalling the developing clash between these cultural systems, Mansfield apparently takes the side of textuality and irony, yet she also retains a kind of immediacy that is unique to the ironic gesture. As de Man argued, irony always works by the instantaneous effect,[23] and in this instance it is the revelation of an exposed safety pin at the back of Sonia's dress that undercuts the actress's claim to expressive immediacy. Like Sonia's theatrical art, narrative irony works by exposure, yet irony is more covert in its reliance on immediacy.

In 'The Modern Soul', Mansfield completes her ironic turn by a sudden change of register. The effect may be bluntly comic, even farcical, but Mansfield minimalizes dramatic bathos in order to maintain her conceptual pressure on the discourse of Aestheticism, as in the Professor's reaction to Sonia's performance: 'tem-per-ament! There you have it. She is a flame in the heart of a lily'. This conflation of Pater's 'gem-like flame' with Wilde's lily prepares for the Professor's extraordinary variation upon Wilde's aspiration to live up to his blue china: 'Tonight you shall be the soul of my trombone'. Following this hyperbolic demand, Sonia once again promotes the coincidence of being and acting in her dialogue with the narrator; '"I am always successful," she said to me, "You see, when I act I *am*"' (*Stories*, p. 718). It is this claim which is made to stand in the most direct light of the narrative point of view. Once again, narrative irony asserts its covert and rational mode of exposure against the idealist model of exposure as auto-poiesis, and Mansfield manages to deftly implicate the key tropes of symbolist Aestheticism. The final victim of her ironic turn is Baudelaire's idea of correspondences, which is presented as the

narcissistic fantasy of an aesthetic subject projecting itself onto the universe. When Sonia takes the narrator into the garden she articulates her sense of infinite resemblance:

> 'What a night!' she said. 'Do you know that poem of Sappho about her hands in the stars. . . . I am curiously Sapphic, I find in all the works of the greatest writers, especially in their unedited letters, some touch, some sign of myself – some resemblance, some part of myself, like a thousand reflections of my own hands in a dark mirror.'
>
> 'But what a bother,' said I. (*Stories*, 719)

This evocation of aesthetic narcissism is the penultimate moment of 'The Modern Soul', before Sonia faints theatrically on a night-time walk and then disappears in the morning, apparently destroyed by the narrator's insouciance.

Mansfield's ironic tale may appear slight, but it has more serious implications about the condition of aesthetic subjectivity at the turn from Aestheticism into Modernism. The lightness of Mansfield's parodic gestures betrays her deeper sense of the 'bother' involved in attachments and belonging. Within the German pension stories she goes on to define her own soul by a precisely opposite quality. In 'The Advanced Lady', another parodic portrait of an intellectual woman who compulsively performs her own modernity or advancement, Mansfield is herself involved in a performance of modernity as detachment. At the prompting of a friendly walking companion she articulates another significant 'bother': 'the bother about my soul is that it refuses to grapple anybody at all – and I am sure that the dead weight of a friend whose adoption it had tried would kill it immediately. Never yet has it shown the slightest sign of a hoop!' (*CSS*, 761). After all its evasions and sophisticated turns, irony goes some way towards declaring the ennui of its hoopless condition. Yet Mansfield is still polemically insistent on irony's enlightenment value. She is implicitly promoting modernity as cosmopolitan distance in order to reject the Advanced Lady's concept of womanhood, which appears to be symptomatic of the tendency of decadent discourse to appropriate the primitive and negate its own claims to critical self-consciousness. Mansfield's is an enlightenment model of femininity and modernity that demands the freedoms of irony and cultivated detachment, pitched directly against a Victorian and aesthetic model of femininity revealed in manifest soul, revealed gesture and natural productivity.

Mansfield's cultivated irony has a double face at this point in her career. It is symptomatic of a 'hoopless' condition of compulsive detachment, but it is also a necessary weapon against both obsolescent idealist rhetoric and the conservative gender performatives that aesthetic idealism and Victorian domestic conventions frequently promoted. The anti-aesthetic impulse of Mansfield's German pension tales would be repeated in a number of her later stories.

In *Bliss* a cultured woman's delusion of ecstatic union with another beautiful woman is undercut by a shocking revelation of the emptiness of her marriage and of her aestheticized embrace of a set of bourgeois bohemian friends. Then later, in '*Je ne parle pas français*', Mansfield turned on the condition of literary subjectivity itself, framing a combination of aesthetic narcissism and compulsive detachment that has much in common with both her early diaries and her *New Age* stories.[24] Yet at the same time, Mansfield's most successful work recuperated her early Aestheticism, recovering Pater's example for a new kind of literary impressionism.

'Prelude', Pater's Aloe and the Recuperation of Aestheticism

In her early notebooks Mansfield had celebrated what she described as an aesthetics of objectivity, but she used the term to support precisely the kind of idealism that she ironized so heavily in 'The Modern Soul':

> The partisans of analysis describe minutely the state of the soul, the secret motive of every action as being of far greater importance than the action itself. The partisans of objectivity give us the result of this evolution sans describing the secret processes. They convey the state of the soul through the slightest gestures – i.e. realism, flesh covered bones, which is the artist's method for me. In as much as art seems to me pure vision I am indeed a partisan of objectivity. (*Notebooks*, 156)

The passage is written upside down in *Notebook 2*, inserted in the midst of an impressionistic personal reflection of a visit to Island Bay, where the 'peacock shade of water' is elided into aesthetic analogies: 'Blue it is with the blueness of Rossetti, green with the greenness of William Morris' (*Notebooks*, 157). If we might intuitively associate literary objectivity with the detachment of Flaubert or Maupassant or the irony of Mansfield's *New Age* stories, this was a quite different concept of literature's relationship with the material real. Its closest theoretical precursor in late Victorian culture was Bernard Bosanquet's *History of Aesthetic* (1892), where 'objective idealism' was the overriding term for a philosophy that legislated aesthetic sensuousness, reconciling the material practices of Arts and Crafts with the quickened aesthetic subjectivity promoted in Pater's *The Renaissance*.[25] Clearly Mansfield was still deeply involved in the rhetoric, culture and philosophy of Aestheticism when she promoted objectivity against analysis, but the artistic method that she envisaged was to survive the analytic turn of her modernist periodical work. It is significant that when she first theorizes the kind of 'objectivity' she wanted to achieve, it was associated with the beauty of Island Bay, the childhood space that she would

revive in her New Zealand works, where the imaginative return home was also a return to the aesthetic priorities of her adolescence.

Mansfield's return to Aestheticism began with an attempt to emulate Pater's evocation of the childhood home. In December of 1908, immediately before Christmas, Mansfield had noted her aspiration to write an aesthetic Bildungsroman.

> I should like to write a life much in the style of Walter Pater's 'Child in the House'. About a girl in Wellington; the singular charm and barrenness of that place, with climatic effects – wind, rain, spring, night, the sea, the cloud pageantry. And then to leave the place and go to Europe, to live there a dual existence – to go back and be utterly disillusioned, to find out the truth of all, to return to London. To live there an existence so full & so strange that Life itself seemed to greet her, and, ill to the point of death, return to W. & die there. A story, no, it would be a sketch, hardly that, more a psychological study of the most erudite character. I should fill it with climatic disturbance, & also of the strange longing for the artificial. (*Notebooks*, 111–12)

In this instance Mansfield projected a trans-Pacific Bildungsroman that encapsulated the geographical divides of her early life. She attempted this in her plans and fragments of a novel called 'Maata', which was sketched in 1913, after her involvement with the modernist periodicals *New Age*, *Rhythm* and the *Blue Review*. Claire Tomalin has argued that the idea of 'Maata' was directly inspired by her reading of Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, and it can be no coincidence that Mansfield began to think about locating the origins of her sensibility in childhood at this point. But 'Maata' is largely concerned with her return to London and her love for the musician Garnet Trowell (called Philip in the story). It is significant in that it begins to recuperate her early evocation of musical experience, but it is largely focused on the metropolitan existence of a young, aesthetically inclined woman. In its fragmentary form it suggests an inconclusive attempt to overcome the narrative detachment she cultivated in her *New Age* period: in spite of the example of the Lawrentian Bildungsroman, Mansfield was not able, at this point, to develop a form capable of synthesizing Paterian impressionism and psychological realism. The revolution in Mansfield's literary style would demand her imaginary return to New Zealand, and it would only be fully realized in her evocation of her childhood home in 'Prelude'.

In a journal entry of 22 January 1916, Mansfield announced a multiply oriented process of return. This was in the first place geographical: 'Now – now I want to write recollections of my own country. Yes, I want to write about my own country till I simply exhaust my store' (*Notebooks*, 32).[26] But this store is also the historical residue of childhood impressions, justifying the Wordsworthian echo of her title. For 'Prelude', Mansfield formulated a poetics which is neither

that of Romantic poetry nor of the modernist novel. She cultivated a form of perception and feeling modelled on poetry which takes place outside poetry's formal conditions. The poetic ethos she professed at this point was more than a formal prescription: Mansfield was defining a condition of experience – a sensuous renewal that was the legacy of Romanticism and Aestheticism. This emerged most strongly when she was speaking to the memory of her dead brother: 'I feel always trembling on the brink of poetry. The almond tree, the birds, the little wood where you are, the flowers you do not see. . . . But especially I want to write a long elegy to you – Perhaps not in poetry. Nor perhaps in prose – almost certainly in a kind of *special* prose' (*Notebook*, 32–3). The importance of Pater's legacy in cultivating this '*special* prose' is clear from Mansfield's adolescent journals, and in this case it is manifested most powerfully in the fragment. Mansfield returned to the ideal of the notebook at the same time that she conceived of 'The Aloe', and at this point she promotes the open form of the journal as the literary mode to which all others aspire: 'And lastly, I want to keep a kind of *minute notebook*, to be published some day. That's all. No novels, no problem stories, nothing that is not simple, open' (*Notebook*, 33).

Mansfield's ideal of an open literary form fulfilled Pater's assessment of the virtue of incompleteness in his essay 'The Poetry of Michelangelo': 'he secures that ideality of expression [. . .] by an incompleteness, which [. . .] as I think, no one regrets, and trusts to the spectator to complete the half-emergent form' (*R*, 59). For Pater, this ideal poetry achieved a 'penetrative suggestion of life' without the direct rendering of natural objects; offering instead the 'most elementary shadowing of rock or tree' (*R*, 60). The substitution of suggestion for detail 'penetrates us with a feeling of that power which we associate with all the warmth and fullness of the world, the sense of which brings into one's thoughts a swarm of birds and flowers and insects. The brooding spirit of life is there, and the summer may burst out in a moment' (*R*, 60). Pater imports the formal categories of Romantic modernity – incompletion, fragment, suggestion – but he does so in service of an animistic sense of life, such as he later articulated in 'The Study of Dionysus': this is the form of Dionysian modernity, but suitable for a condition where the Dionysian promise is deferred, suggested only in glimpses and traces.

Mansfield cited Pater's essay on 'The Poetry of Michelangelo' at the beginning of 'Prelude', her most celebrated prose experiment and an exemplary experiment in literary impressionism. Its original title, 'The Aloe', was taken directly from an image from Pater's essay: 'A certain strangeness, something of the blossoming of the aloe is indeed an element in all true works of art: that they shall excite or surprise us is indispensable' (*R*, 57). The aloe blooms only once every hundred years, and this makes it a suitable symbol for Pater's general project: such botanical eccentricity encapsulates the strangeness of art's sensuous promise, but it also suggests an apocalyptic dimension of renaissance and renewal: the anticipation of a bloom is both singular and contagious.

In 'Prelude', the aloe works as a unifying symbol within a subtly orchestrated system of relations. Mansfield recreates her family life in Wellington with a specific focus on the psychic life of Kezia; the most sensitive of the young children; Linda, her unsatisfied and dreaming mother; and Beryl, Linda's restless sister, whose only satisfaction after being removed from town life is the enjoyment of her own beautiful image. All of these female characters exemplify, in different degrees, a dimension of experience that is radically separate to that of Stanley, the father figure who unknowingly yet belligerently asserts a material and economic order that excludes the aesthetic dimension. Just as Mansfield's earlier work has exemplified quite different concepts of aesthetic objectivity, 'Prelude' brings together contrary visions of materiality and sensuous life. At the middle point of 'Prelude' is the shocking but pragmatic slaughter of a duck, and the insouciant acceptance of violence to animals is further emphasized when Stanley Burnell carves the same 'bird' at the family table. Yet Linda's dream of a superabundant garden instates a virtual aesthetic dimension which co-opts the receptivity and animistic potency of childhood imagination in a struggle against the law of the father.

'Prelude' is the account of a moment of renewal and return, and on the eve of the Burnell family's move to their new house, the primary aesthetic impression is that of the child Kezia, who wanders around the empty rooms of the old house. Mansfield's representation of the child at the window locates aesthetic subjectivity in its early emergence, at play with colour, form and perspective:

> The dining-room window had a square of coloured glass at each corner. One was blue and one was yellow. Kezia bent down to have one more look at a blue lawn with blue arum lilies growing at the gate, and then at a yellow lawn with yellow lilies and a yellow fence. As she looked a little Chinese Lottie came out on to the lawn and began to dust the tables and chairs with a corner of her pinafore. Was that really Lottie? Kezia was not quite sure until she had looked through the ordinary window. (*Stories*, 14)

There are two important precursors in the history of literary impressionism for Mansfield's representation of childhood perspective here. One is James's Maisie, who cultivates 'the sharpened sense of spectatorship'[27] in a way that is both emancipating and alienating: 'It gave her often an odd air of being present at her history in as separate a manner as if she could only get at experience by flattening her nose against a pane of glass'.[28] Mansfield is Jamesian in so far as she emphasizes the ambivalent condition of this spectator subject in its emergence, but her broader sense of an aesthetic being resident in childhood is more closely comparable to Pater's evocation of Florian's return in 'The Child in the House'.

In his imaginary portrait of childhood, Pater is more attuned to the organic connection with place, but equally his affective memory is dominated by the present emptiness of the childhood room:

> But as he passed in search of it from room to room, lying so pale, with a look of meekness in their denudation, and at last through that little, stripped white room, the aspect of the place touched him like the face of one dead; and a clinging back towards it came over him, so intense that he knew it would last long. . . .[29]

Where Pater focuses on the psychic life of maturity in its encounter with childhood memory, Mansfield uses the recently departed home to frame the emergence of play. This intimates the possibility of a Bildungsroman in which Kezia might have a central role (like James's Maisie, she is in the process of cultivating her capacity for duplicity and play), but in the broader framework of 'Prelude' Kezia is ultimately a subsidiary character. In spite of this, her aesthetic potential remains alluring, and she is invariably singled out as Mansfield's projection of her own childhood. But the miniature portrait of Kezia's burgeoning aesthetic potential also creates a meta-textual suggestion that signals the emergence of Mansfield's play with form and her position in literary culture as a whole. Kezia's uncertain play and subsequent return to the real reflexively tracks the condition of literary impressionism. As in Pater's 'Conclusion', the analytic movement of aesthetic subjectivity performs an empirical reduction of objects into perceptual attributes, and this has the effect of valorizing a realm of autonomous semblance, prising aesthetic impressions from their objects.

If we force Kezia's moment at the old house into an allegorical cultural significance, then at this point, after Pater's gesture of aesthetic reduction, a series of choices is left open: either to nervously seek an affirmation that the real still exists beneath its constituent impressions, as Kezia does in her return to the 'ordinary window', or to affirm the realm of autonomous spectacle in a dogmatic insistence on artifice, as in the playful decadent manifestos of Baudelaire, Wilde and Beerbohm. The third alternative is to turn against 'semblance' altogether, as in the proto-mystical negations of symbolism. But Mansfield's method is distinct from fin de siècle symbolist aesthetics, in spite of her use of a unifying symbolic form in the story. Any symbolic resonance in 'Prelude' is present in so far as it is a vital element of the psychic life of the Burnells, in so far as it is the receptacle for affective ties or desires. The aloe consistently represents a form of experience that is not available to consciousness in the immediate conditions of the Burnells' life – a sensuous possibility that is not reducible to the perspectival play and empirical discrimination that Kezia cultivates in her experience of the empty house. While Kezia's experience introduces aesthetic subjectivity within the element of play, the aesthetic dimension will increasingly acquire

a greater resonance throughout the narrative, so that childhood experience accumulates something of the apocalyptic promise of aesthetic renaissance.

Adorno described this kind of millenarian possibility in a prose fragment which is equally focused on the child in the house, also in a moment of return which creates the effect of sensuous renaissance:

> To a child returning from a holiday, home seems new, fresh, festive. Yet nothing has changed since he left. Only because duty has now been forgotten, of which each piece of furniture, window, lamp, was otherwise a reminder, is the house given this Sabbath peace, and for minutes one is at home in a never-returning world of rooms, nooks and corridors in a way that makes the rest of life there a lie. No differently will the world one day appear, almost unchanged, in its constant feast-day light, when it stands no longer under the law of labour, and when for homecomers duty has the lightness of holiday play.[30]

In 'Prelude' the law of labour is instated by the preternaturally jovial Stanley Burnell, an expert carver of the Sunday joint, and in a typically Adornian critical turn, his material happiness masks what is experienced as an oppressive instrumentality by his wife. These two orders of experience are held apart in 'Prelude': its fragmentary and elliptical form disrupts narrative progression, so that *Bildung* is forestalled.[31] But as with the later modernist emphasis on epiphany, Mansfield's open form retains the possibility of an apocalyptic eruption.

Within this form the sensuous force of experience appears as haunting. The first example of this is Kezia's fear of an invisible presence in the house: 'IT was just behind her, waiting at the door, at the head of the stairs, at the bottom of the stairs, hiding in the passage, ready to dart out at the back of the door' (*Stories*, 15). Although such haunting appears to be specific to the psychic life of childhood, it is reiterated when the narrative consciousness shifts to Linda Burnham in the fifth section. This begins with a roseate impression of the emerging dawn, apparently from an external narrative point of view, which is subsequently revealed to be the content of Linda's dream, a vision of transformation where a child emerges from the swelling body of a bird. Her subsequent entry to waking life clearly involves a submission to Stanley's material order of things, and 'Linda did not rest again until the final slam of the front door told her that Stanley was really gone' (*Stories*, 26). At this point she hears her children playing in the garden, and the name of Kezia has the effect of subtly reinstating the dimension of aesthetic impression, dream and vision. When the children's voices subside, Linda's dream of an animated garden is carried back into the day, as if a homeopathic dose of childhood consciousness has restored the aesthetic dimension. This is clearly a form of experience predicated on anthropomorphism: tracing the figure of a poppy on her wallpaper 'she could feel the sticky, silky petals,

the stem, hairy like a gooseberry skin, the rough leaf and the tight glazed bud. Things have a habit of coming alive like that' (*Stories*, 27).

The isolated Linda's visionary experience of her wallpaper inevitably suggests Charlotte Perkins Gilman's narrative of psychopathology and social entrapment, *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892),[32] but the echo is as much a signal of difference. In a narrow reading the analogy might support a psychopathological reading of Linda's condition, since at the end of the fifth section she experiences, like Kezia, the haunting of an unspecified alterity:

> The strangest part of this coming alive of things was what they did. They listened, they seemed to swell out with some mysterious content, and when they were full she felt that they smiled. [. . .] THEY knew how frightened she was; THEY saw how she turned her head away as she passed the mirror. What Linda always felt was that THEY wanted something of her, and she knew that if she gave herself up and was quiet, more than quiet, silent, motionless, something would really happen. (*Stories*, 28)

At this point Linda's consciousness appears to be subsumed by animistic fantasy, but by privileging the resonances that exist between Kezia's childhood state of aesthetic consciousness and Linda's broken dream, Mansfield deflects any definite ascription of pathology, even though her echoes of Gilman raise a comparative question about the relative positions of animistic and anthropomorphic consciousness in the conditions of childhood, psychic trauma and the experience of a woman's imagination in a coercive materialist order. Mansfield's method from this point is to gradually open and explore these archaic and aesthetic dimensions of experience, which resonate throughout the story; in the guiltily hidden presence of the servant Alice's dream book, in Linda's empathic appreciation of her mother's hands, in Kezia's discovery of the aloe in the garden and in the compelling resonance of the aloe as a carrier of Linda's inarticulate desires.

The pivotal moment of 'Prelude' takes place in the actual garden, but its virtual dimension is preserved and then transfigured in what appears to Linda as the manifestation of a communal dream life. As Linda looks out into the garden, the moon is perceived by Lottie and Kezia – once again the children mediate the return of the aesthetic. Then, in the garden, Linda's mother questions the possibility of the aloe's flowering; 'Are those buds, or is it only an effect of light?' (*Stories*, 52). In spite of this uncertainty, the possibility of the aloe's renewal has a virtual force greater than the reality of the house they have just left:

> As they stood on the steps, the high grassy bank on which the aloe rested rose up like a wave, and the aloe seemed to ride upon it like a ship with the oars lifted. Bright moonlight hung upon the lifted oars like water, and on the green wave glittered the dew.

> 'Do you feel it, too,' said Linda, and she spoke to her mother with the special voice that women use at night to each other as though they spoke in their sleep or from some hollow cave – 'Don't you feel that it is coming towards us?' (*Stories*, 52–3)

Carried by the symbol of the aloe, the emotion of this moment is as elliptical and imprecise as the yearning of the three sisters for Moscow or the melancholy of the imminent severance of the cherry orchard. As in Chekhov's theatrical application of a subjective symbolist method, the affective power of this central moment of 'Prelude' is all the greater for this anticipated and displaced object. The possibility of the aloe's flowering suggests the indefinitely deferred arrival of an aesthetic life, which is nevertheless preserved in an apocalyptic and potentially violent dimension of experience. In this order of things, the aesthetic forces an extreme negation of the real and insists on the greater force of its virtual dimension; 'How much more real this dream was than that they should go back to the house where the sleeping children lay and where Stanley and Beryl played cribbage' (*Stories*, 53). The intensity of this impression brings to consciousness Linda's submerged hatred of her husband Stanley and the dominance of his practical order; 'For all her love and respect and admiration how she hated him. [. . .] She could have done her feelings up in little packets and given them to Stanley. She longed to hand him that last one, for a surprise. She could see his eyes as he opened that' (*Stories*, 54).

After the opening of this violence, Linda recognizes the absurd contingency of her behaviour (she persists in conventional subservience to her husband), but she still retains the hope that the aesthetic moment might be retrieved and expanded as she looks into the orchard with her mother: 'Now she looked about her. They were standing by the red and white camellia trees. Beautiful were the rich dark leaves spangled with light and the round flowers that perch among them like red and white birds. Linda pulled a piece of verbena and crumpled it, and held her hands to her mother' (*Stories*, 55). Yet if Linda imagines that this exchange might secure a moment of shared transport, this is undercut, at least on the level of communicative rationality, by her subsequent question: '"What have you been thinking about?" said Linda. "Tell me."' Her mother's answer appears to undermine the possibility of establishing a female aesthetic community, since she hadn't 'really been thinking of anything', except for the orchard's potential for jam production.

The blankness of Mrs Burnell's response after the aloe's virtual flowering is partially a symptom of a transitional moment in women's consciousness of independence, and such moments of forestalled generational communication would once again be recorded forcefully by Virginia Woolf in *To the Lighthouse* (1927), a novel which has frequently been read as a younger yet more developed sister to 'Prelude'. In Woolf's novel, the younger woman, Lily Briscoe, is fulfilling her aesthetic possibilities in the practical sphere, in the act of

painting. But she still looks to the older woman, Mrs Ramsey, to restore the link between aesthetic subjectivity and community, through her domestic and personal arts. Angela Smith has noted how both Mansfield and Woolf struggled with the 'phantom' of the maternal figure who 'mediates the Father's Law for her daughters',[33] but in 'Prelude' Mansfield underplays the ties between the elder mother and the paternal law. Linda's mother clearly lacks a consciousness of patriarchal order as oppression, and equally she lacks the apocalyptic sense of the aloe symbol, since for her the aesthetic dimension of the garden is reduced to the uncomplicated materiality of jam production. But the responsibility for the continuance of Stanley's order lies elsewhere. The narrative inevitably raises the question of the relative efficacy of aesthetic renaissance in disrupting an order that has been inscribed both economically and behaviorally on Linda's life, but it is still the aesthetic dimension that carries the imaginary possibility of personal and social transformation. For Linda Burnell, the autonomy of the virtual aesthetic realm is the source of both its promise and its weakness. The aloe as metaphor of sensuous renaissance establishes a separate sphere, but after the triumphant moment in the garden, the aesthetic vision appears to be fragile and threatened.

If 'Prelude' attempts to recuperate the potency of Aestheticism as a vision of sensuous renewal, it is equally attentive to the limits that were inscribed into Pater's subjective conception of the aesthetic moment. In the conclusion to *The Renaissance*, Pater represented the isolation of aesthetic consciousness as tragic, in a Hegelian sense – the manifestation of a rent between separate but equally necessary spheres of experience. Mansfield represents the division between aesthetic subjectivity and the public sphere as a specific problem for women's domestic conditions, and in making this analytic turn she preserves the critical irony that she originally developed against the rhetoric of Aestheticism.

In the conclusion of 'Prelude', Mansfield specifically targets the iconography of femininity promoted in Pre-Raphaelite culture. The focus of this critique is Linda's sister Beryl, who is caught in a binary condition of abjection and self-regard that echoes the conditions of women in Victorian Aestheticism.[34] Where Linda uncovers a violent yet ultimately ineffectual energy of resistance to patriarchy, Beryl finds a comfort in narcissism. From the outset she has been presented in moments of fantasy and self-regard. As Beryl plays the guitar in the dining room, her musical attention is narcissistic rather than Giorgionesque, 'watching herself playing and singing' and imagining herself outside of the window looking in, being 'rather struck' by her performance (*Stories*, 39). The portrait of Beryl consolidates Mansfield's representation of the gendered division of the aesthetic dimension, but it also allows her to discriminate between different versions of aesthetic experience and fantasy. We might assume from Mansfield's later story, 'Bliss', that she regards fantasy as an inherently dangerous aspect of aesthetic experience, but 'Prelude' deliberately

places Beryl's fantasy of personal beauty against Linda's apocalyptic dream of the aloe. There are two orders of fantasy here – one confirms the tie to a materialist order, while the other instates a radical possibility of transformation.

One of the structural surprises of 'Prelude' is that Beryl dominates the final section of the piece. This begins with her disillusioned letter to her friend Nan, inaugurating a reflexive sequence that moves from the linguistic to the visual medium. In contrast to the elliptical ironic method of the German pension stories, Mansfield clarifies her critical terms in order to provide a retrospective moral clarity to the narrative as a whole. Through Beryl's consideration of her letter, Mansfield introduces the evaluative categories of the 'real' and 'false' self within the representation of Beryl's divided consciousness, through free indirect discourse. Beryl's 'real self' considers her letter to be a 'flippant and silly' product of her 'other self' (*Stories*, 57), but Mansfield's assertion of a Manichean ethical psychology demands an awkward narrative method which directly introduces her evaluative terms within the inner discourse of her subject. To some extent the evaluative discourse is justified as an aspect of the character's narcissism, since Beryl uses the rhetoric of authenticity to assert a hidden power unrecognizable to her friends: 'Good heavens, if she had ever been her real self with Nan Pym, Nannie would have jumped out of the window with surprise. . . . My dear, you know that white satin of mine. . . . Beryl slammed the letter-case to'. The final clause of Beryl's inner monologue here is a quotation from her letter, and the representative of her own false consciousness, so that the final slamming of the letter-case is an ambiguous act that may express self-critique or a deliberate refusal to contemplate her own emptiness. Mansfield appears to be framing the spontaneous act in order to demonstrate a transition between a direct consciousness of self-division and an unconscious response to abjection. The subsequent narrative transition signals a formal uncertainty about the ascription of consciousness:

> She jumped up and half unconsciously, half consciously she drifted over to the looking glass.
>
> There stood a slim girl in white – a white serge skirt, a white silk blouse, and a leather belt drawn in very tightly at her tiny waist (*Stories*, 57)

At this point, Beryl's liminal condition is clarified, not by the overly emphatic moral rhetoric of real and false selves, but by allusion to the self-fashioning of Pre-Raphaelite culture. In the subsequent elaboration of Beryl's self-image, her 'lovely, lovely hair' has 'the colour of fresh fallen leaves, brown and red with a hint of yellow' (*Stories*, p. 58), but the keynote of this impression is the image of the woman in white, inevitably recalling the subject of Whistler's painting 'Symphony in White No. 2' and Swinburne's poem on the painting, 'Before the Mirror'.

Swinburne's ekphrastic lyric evoked the spectral condition of Whistler's white girl contemplating her own image, suggestively evoking the transience and fragility of this virtual dimension as a basis for a woman's identity.

> Art thou the ghost, my sister,
> White sister there
> Am I the ghost, who knows?
> My hand, a fallen rose,
> Lies snow-white on white snows, and takes no care.[35]

The woman's sense of her image as a ghost that has a power more compelling than the actual conditions of her existence generates the corresponding perception of herself as a spectral being, but in this case the register of the term is changed. The woman is less real than the virtual existence before her in so far as she is acutely aware of herself as both transient matter and spectacle. In the next movement of 'Before the Mirror', the woman retreats from the anxious knowledge of transience and decay into the compensatory vision that 'one thing knows the flower; the flower is fair'. Mansfield repeats this movement in her prose translation of Swinburne's white girl, as Beryl goes on to appreciate herself as a 'lovely thing', but the narcissistic satisfaction is immediately undercut by the return of the critical sense. Beryl's introjection of the narrator's critique is increasingly conspicuous from this point:

> 'I'm always acting a part. I'm never my real self for a moment'. And plainly, plainly, she saw her real self running up and down the stairs, laughing a special trilling laugh if they had visitors, standing under the lamp if a man came to dinner, so that he could see the light under her hair, pouting and pretending to be a little girl when she was asked to play the guitar. Why? She even kept it up for Stanley's benefit. (*Stories*, 58–9)

Up to this point 'Prelude' has maintained a successful balance between irony and sympathy, although the division of the two qualities has been meted out quite rigidly against the gender divide. In the final portrait of Beryl this balance is eschewed in order to introduce a category of authenticity that reorientates the narrative according to an explicit ethical psychology.

Mansfield's least subtle narrative gesture does have the value of finally clarifying her revisionary perspective on Aestheticism. 'Prelude' concludes with a testament to a dichotomy that had operated in Mansfield's prose from the outset, from the moment that she identified herself as an aesthetic subject, fashioned on the model of Oscar Wilde, yet dissolved and unwoven in the enveloping power of music. The jargon of authenticity through which Beryl is made to castigate herself focuses the critique of aesthetic self-fashioning that Mansfield had inaugurated in the ironic turn of 'The Modern Soul'. What this

allows Mansfield to do now is enforce a distinction between a Wildean performative Aestheticism and a more radical Paterian model of aesthetic subjectivity, latent in the aloe, emerging with apocalyptic force in Linda's dream, but also current in Kezia's playful consciousness. *Prelude* is effectively restoring that aesthetic dimension of experience that Mansfield had ironized so savagely in 'The Modern Soul', but on the level of dream, inchoate impression and unformed imaginary ideals, rather than theatricality, public manifestation and emphatic gesture. In this sense it encapsulates the legacy of Paterian Aestheticism that would be equally strong in Virginia Woolf's modernist work, beginning with *Jacob's Room* (1922) and culminating in *The Waves* (1931). Modernist prose would follow an anti-theatrical turn as it attempted to recuperate Paterian Aestheticism, and both Mansfield and Woolf revived Pater's ideal of a musical prose in order to ally literature with a musical dimension of experience.[36]

In one sense, Mansfield's literary relationship to Aestheticism obeys the dialectical shape of negation and return, and we might equally ascribe this structure to her aesthetic *Bildung* as it is developed in her notebooks. Aestheticism is sacrificed according to the via negativa of irony and modernity, then sublated and carried forward in the third way of modernist impressionism. But such a narrative too easily allows Modernism to claim for itself a progressive shape. The force of the aloe stands outside the conditions of critical consciousness, and Mansfield's attempt to impose a critical rhetoric against aesthetic self-fashioning works within a quite different order of narrative. The portrait of Beryl is a development of the critical method of the German pension stories that is more closely associated with Jane Austen's stable narrative irony than the methods of modernist prose Impressionism. As such, the rift between this ironic narrative mode and aesthetic Impressionism is the sign of a wider division between the communicative rationality of irony and the Dionysian promise of sensuous renaissance. It is for this reason that Mansfield's relationship with Aestheticism continued to take the form of a haunting as much as a narrative of dialectical recuperation and containment.

The afterlife of Aestheticism in Mansfield's psychic and literary life was condensed by two moments of fantasy that encapsulate the torn halves of Aestheticism's cultural legacy in Modernism. The first is a dream of Oscar Wilde, printed in her unbound notebooks from around 1920. The dream is the subject of a psychoanalytic interpretation by Sydney Janet Kaplan and concludes her analysis of Mansfield's relationship to Wilde, but its significance is such as to crystallize the ambivalent position of Victorian aesthetic self-fashioning in the twentieth-century literary imagination. In the dream, Mansfield is in a café and meets her friend the sculptor Mark Gertler, who declares emotionally that he has Oscar Wilde with him:

> When he spoke of Wilde he began to cry – tears hung on his lashes but he smiled [. . .] Oscar Wilde was very shabby. He wore a green overcoat. He kept

> tossing & tossing back his long greasy hair with the whitest hand. When he met me he said "Oh *Katherine*!" – very affected. But I did find him a fascinating talker. So much so I asked him to come to my home. He said would 12.30 tonight do? When I arrived home it seemed madness to have asked him. Father & Mother were in bed. What if Father came down and found that chap Wilde in one of the chintz armchairs? Too late now. I waited by the door. He came with Lady Ottoline. I saw he was disgustingly pleased to have brought her. (*Notebooks*, 2: 242–3)

Gertler's emotion suggests the depth of the affective tie that bound Modernism's bohemian culture to Aestheticism, in spite of the rhetorical gestures of disavowal by the *Blast* bombardiers. As we might expect, the undead Wilde has cultivated these ties cleverly and sought his clearest descendant in Bloomsbury – Lady Ottoline Morrell – but his disgusting pleasure reveals the desperation of the decadent to secure an aesthetic lineage.

Wilde consequently justifies Mansfield's critique of 'The Modern Soul' and 'Prelude' by his flagrantly theatrical construction of an ideal image of taste. As they sit down at the Mansfield's house he proceeds with his 'fatuous and brilliant' diatribes, recounting how in his time in prison he was 'haunted by the memory of a *cake*. It floated in the air before me – a little delicate thing *stuffed* with cream and with the cream there was something *scarlet*'. But the spectral pastry is a 'torture' to him:

> 'Katherine, I was *ashamed*. Even now . . .'
> I said 'mille feuilles à la crème?'
> At that he turned round in the armchair and began to sob, and Ottoline, who carried a parasol, opened it and put it over him . . .

Ottoline's parasol signals the closure of Aestheticism in twentieth century culture, its retreat into a shadow demanded partly by the danger of exposed sexuality and partly by the aggressive manifestos of both Modernism and realism. This is an image of an aesthetic life irreparably damaged and obscured. Its poignancy is exacerbated by the absurdity of Wilde's cream cake, his delicate haunting by a phantom of taste and his almost immediate collapse against Katherine's appropriate display of wit. The withering effect of Mansfield's interjection suggests how modernist irony, in spite of its claim to the rational negation of fantasy, was itself satisfying a certain fantasy of regulation and control. As Sydney Janet Kaplan has argued, 'The dream combines Mansfield's own sense of herself as Wilde and as not-Wilde (a privilege of the dreaming subject), thus encapsulating her fear of *being* him and her separation from him through irony and humour'.[37] For Kaplan, Wilde was a 'continuing model and terror' for Mansfield.[38] But it is important to recognize the extent to which she had worked to control this influence, contain her terror, and had finally begun

to impose what she believed to be an ethical rationality against what had been an ineradicable passion. Mansfield's effort to contain decadent Aestheticism was both a symptom of the work of disavowal that Modernism had begun and an attempt to discriminate a different current in Aestheticism's legacy. Yet her stories were more radical than her modernist self-fashioning, and the divide between Aestheticism and Modernism was surpassed in her subtle reanimation of Paterism.

Mansfield's second fantasy of an aesthetic afterlife recuperated the Giorgionesque and the Dionysian dimensions of Pater's legacy, but it survives most forcefully at second hand, through the testament of Wilde's Bloomsbury ally. Immediately after Mansfield's death, Lady Ottoline Morrell wrote a memorial essay that cited a letter from 1918, in which Mansfield imagined the recovery of a sense of immanent beauty;

> My secret belief – the innermost 'credo' by which I live is – that *although* Life is loathsomely ugly and people are terribly often vile and cruel and base, nevertheless there is something at the back of it all – which if only I were great enough to understand would make *everything* indescribably beautiful. One has just glimpses, divine warnings, signs. Do you remember the day when we cut the lavender? And do you remember when the Russian music sounded in that half empty hall? Oh those memories compensate for more than I can say. . . .[39]

This sense of an intangible beauty which permeates space and memory like music is the direct inheritance of Pater's Giorgionesque vision in early modernist culture. After the studied negation of aesthetic self-fashioning, Mansfield professes her belief in the immanence of beauty, carried by scent and music in a 'half empty hall'. She considers herself belated, capable only of glimpses, recovered memories of a sense of beauty that is no longer inscribed as a cultural value. Yet even as a ghost or dimly felt presence, the afterlife of Aestheticism has a disruptive and utopian potential: modernity's profession towards dialectical sublation, critical rationality and significant form is judged within this glimpse of musical space.

Chapter 5

Sacrificing Aestheticism: The Dialectic of Modernity and the Ends of Beauty in D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*

After Katherine Mansfield and her husband Murry had both suffered vicious personal attacks from D. H. Lawrence, she wrote to Murry that 'one must always *love* Lawrence for his "being"'.[1] Mansfield's citational appeal to the novelist's being suggests her ambivalent desire both to ironize Lawrence's claim to ontological supremacy and to maintain the sense that his genius asserted a different order, outside and beyond the conditions of the cosmopolitan literary culture that she and Murry inhabited. There is perhaps an admission on Mansfield's part that Lawrence's 'being' had the force of a nature which she had disavowed in her own modernist self-fashioning. This is the alienated metropolitan indulging the savage art and life of her provincial adversary. But Mansfield's quotation marks are the sign that she would maintain her irony to the last. Conversely, in the name of a germinal and vital force of being that cosmopolitan literary culture had turned away from, Lawrence came to demonize irony as the sign of both instrumental subjectivity and decadent Aestheticism. When Gudrun Brangwen emerges as the representative figure of bohemian Aestheticism in *Women in Love* (1920), Lawrence diagnoses an irony in her soul that defines her sensuous and cultural condition: 'Everything turned to irony with her: the last flavour of everything, was ironical'.[2] Gudrun is generally taken to be a portrait of Katherine Mansfield, but her absolute assertion of art's autonomy is quite distinct from Mansfield's development of literary Impressionism. Gudrun's refined, compulsive and obdurate irony is the signature of her advanced position at the end of the journey of European *Bildung*, and Lawrence's avatar, Rupert Birkin, represents this as a path of disintegration to which he is equally drawn.

'Disintegration' is a concept which haunts *Women in Love*, but in this later novel the evolutionary path towards this modern condition is largely invisible. Yet in *The Rainbow* (1915), Lawrence had already traced the genealogy of modernity, culminating after two generations in the emergence of a

cosmopolitan and ironic consciousness, experienced according to a familiar dialectic of modern experience as both alienation and freedom. Although the two novels are original partners, their separation is testament to a fundamental rupture in historical experience – the gap between the novels is the fissure of modernity itself, and Lawrence's project is both to narrate this split and seek its salve, to fold back *The Rainbow* within the fractured texture of *Women in Love*. In this double attempt to establish a genealogy and cure for modernity and its discontents, Lawrence will frame irony and Aestheticism as his sacrificial subjects – the scapegoats for an alienated culture in need of violent purgation. But ultimately his vision of ceaseless change, the immanence of beauty and the force of dialectics mimics the vital utopian current of Victorian Aestheticism, the vision of sensuous life it had staged before it was translated into decadent self-consciousness and modernist formalism.

It is this dual condition of danger and promise that makes Lawrence's fictions of decadence and regeneration such necessary subjects for critical study; the history of the twentieth century demands a rigorous critique of Lawrence's proximity to the most dangerous forms of ideological organicism, and recent work by Anne Fernihough has clarified his associations with the *völkisch* ideologies that were later appropriated by Nazism.[3] At the same time, Lawrence's fiction evokes a germinal life that cannot be reduced to these ideological coordinates, even though it would be precisely the qualities of potency, embodiment and blood-consciousness that Fascist ideology would appropriate from vitalist and organicist philosophies. In Lawrence's fiction, particularly in *The Rainbow*, all modes of human existence are measured against a sensuous dimension that is in excess of the ideological and structural containment of modernity and the novel itself. This is Lawrence's poetic imperative; a vision of germinal life in excess of instrumental reason. Against the rhythmic reaping of corn or the naked dance of a pregnant woman, culture appears as alienated spirit, irony is diagnosed as the symptom of disintegrated will, and Aestheticism appears as a discourse of culture at its end. Yet vitality can be the blindest and most belligerent of gods, and Lawrence's work continually oscillates between the conditions of visionary epiphanic promise and sacrificial danger. This duality emerges from Lawrence's historical and conceptual imperative, which is to narrate all experience in relation to a category of modernity.

Lawrence's poetic and critical projects are in one sense inseparable, since his vision of germinal life demands a critique of modernity, and all his characters can be judged by the degree to which they affirm this sensuous dimension outside of instrumental reason and the aesthetic cognition which works within its domain. But to the extent that he articulates an anti-modern stance, he risks the imposition of precisely the kind of overarching system that his poetic vision is continually challenging and disrupting: in Lawrence's case this will be a sacrificial system which accumulates a series of victims from the concept to the individual – disintegration, irony, bohemian culture, the artist, the Jew. In order to

rescue Lawrence's work from this sacrificial logic, it is necessary to insist on both the autonomy of his poetic vision and the dialectical content of his critique of modernity. *Women in Love* ends with the most vibrant human form of dialectics in action; another of Ursula and Birkin's interminable arguments, while *The Rainbow* narrates a dialectic of modernity on the level of evolutionary history.

The concept of modernity inevitably relies on the historical hypothesis of a break, and this tends to become an ever receding point, pushed backwards to artistic Romanticism, to enlightenment rationalism or to the Renaissance or, further back in Hegelian history, to Rome and the spiritual condition of early Christianity.[4] Lawrence signifies modernity in the ineradicable difference between *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*; in the latter novel modernity appears to have already happened – we are faced with the reality of 'disintegration', the affectless conditions of a transient bohemian life and a separation from locality and region, to the extent that a metropolitan consciousness appears to have been fundamentally internalized by temporary home-comers and interminable drifters such as Gudrun Brangwen, Rupert Birkin and Loerke. In contrast, *The Rainbow* is a novel of generational emergence which narrates the path towards personal freedom according to an evolutionary dialectic of modernity, which is to say that it continually presents a process in which the force that emancipates is also the force that alienates, producing both mobility and disintegration, cosmopolitanism and stasis. But this dialectic can come to an end, and it does so in the final phase of *The Rainbow*, so radically that when we arrive at the alternative landscape of *Women in Love*, its traces have become obscured to the point at which the idea of evolutionary movement appears obsolete. At the same time, the aesthetics of the nineteenth century appears to have become obsolescent. The idea of beauty appears to be the ideological property of the aristocracy rather than a sensuous force in the present. The concept of development appears to have been halted and replaced by the instrumental appropriation of nature, so that the subject no longer moves in history but exerts its power from a point of abstraction. Pater's Mona Lisa has been translated from the realm of the aesthetic absolute to the conditions of industrial organization, so that an absolute subject or will appears to be both the mediator or servant of modernity and its essential productive force.

Horkheimer and Adorno described this process as the reification of enlightenment, which may operate as a form of reflexive and autonomous thought, into a monumental idea of dialectical history as the progressive domination of reason over nature. According to this process, the 'self-dominant intellect [. . .] separates from sensuous experience in order to subjugate it' (*DE*, 36). *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a radical variation on Hegel's critique of modernity which extrapolates the analytic of lordship and bondage, enlightenment and 'culture as alienated spirit' from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[5] Hegel's master/slave dialectic is being played out on the level of the subject (the ego's relationship to its unconscious or affective ties), the relationship between

technology and nature (the industrial organization of agriculture and energy resources), class politics (the relationship between the monopoly capitalist and the worker) and culture (the instrumental subjugation of the masses by the 'culture industry'). The essential critical turn of this theory is that the apparently progressive separation of consciousness and nature has fundamentally regressive consequences; 'Mankind, whose versatility and knowledge becomes differentiated with the division of labour, is at the same time forced back to anthropologically more primitive stages'. As a consequence, 'imagination atrophies', and to this extent, in spite of Horkheimer and Adorno's total critique of the 'culture industry', they retain the aesthetic dimension as a thwarted utopian possibility. Lawrence's own critical project shares these two central points with *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the dialectical critique of rational progress as reversion, and the holistic (but not organicist) vision of an imaginative and sensuous life released from the conditions of alienated labour and instrumental domination.

The critique of modernity can work across a series of different value spheres, and it invariably works by forcing an overdetermined equation between different modes of existence. Modernity can be defined in the political sphere as the advent of capitalism, the dominance of monetary exchange and private property, and the emergence of the nation state as a dominant form of organization. Sociologically, it can be defined by the move from the local to the global, enforced by industrial technology and its consequent effects on mobility, urbanization, secularization, cultural cosmopolitanism and the emancipation of women. In one important transformation of German Idealist philosophy, popularized by Oswald Spengler and culminated in Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics, this social dimension became an expression of an ontological condition; modernity can express nothing less than the relationship of the human subject to 'being', which is altered fundamentally by the domination and exploitation of nature and animal life through technology.[6] This ontological condition might then be said to be revealed in a psychological relationship between consciousness and nature; according to the model of the technological domination of nature the subject assumes a position of instrumental control. Within the sphere of aesthetics and epistemology, this is manifested in an instrumental condition of artistic subjectivity (Hegel's irony), a reduction of all relations to conditions of knowledge, and what Habermas describes as the autonomization of the value spheres of science, morality and aesthetics.[7] We can go on to include what Frederic Jameson describes as that new consciousness of time which continually posits a break in the historical continuum, and at this point the relationship between the social, ontological and aesthetic categories of modernity becomes circular. Modernity finds its destiny in the modernist art object that both reveals and manifests a fundamental break, which stands as both the symptom and overdetermined object of modernity as well as the vehicle of its critique.

It is for this reason that modernist art and critical theory is frequently characterized by an overdetermination of its object; the critique of modernity works by bringing together different value spheres in various ways. Thus Horkheimer and Adorno bring together the Weberian social critique with a Freudian concept of psychic self-division. Or in the following instance, Jameson brings together the Marxist critique of industrial development with Horkheimer and Adorno's idea of the culture industry:

> complete modernization [. . .] can be summed up in two achievements: the industrialization of agriculture, that is, the destruction of all traditional peasantries, and the colonization and commercialization of the Unconscious or, in other words, mass culture and the culture industry.[8]

Lawrence's vision of modern relationships, sexuality and culture will incorporate the broader process of industrialization and its effect on a local community and the new experiences of urban culture, entertainment and consumption, and all of these processes will be related to fundamental changes in the conditions of being. This is not to say that Lawrence asserts a normative concept of a fundamental underlying substance, but that the vast canvas of his evolutionary narrative is ultimately focused on the sensuous and moral conditions of living and that these conditions are rooted in process and growth, articulate division and ecstatic union. As much as Pater's 'Conclusion', the two novels of Lawrence's *The Sisters* voice a carpe diem within and against the sphere of beauty and the aesthetic.

Modernity, Instrumentality and Decadent Consciousness in *The Rainbow*

The Rainbow spans the Victorian period up to the fin de siècle and the early twentieth century, culminating in the forestalled Bildungsroman of Ursula Brangwen and her doomed romance with the soldier Skrebensky. In *The Rainbow*, the category of the aesthetic is as yet in the process of emergence. *Women in Love* deals from the outset with the condition of aesthetic modernity and its discontents – bohemia, the technical subjectivity of the artist, the alienated irony of modern(ist) culture. Taken together, the two novels develop a genealogy of modernity in which Aestheticism and irony have a constitutive role. Yet *The Rainbow* does not explicitly admit the category of the aesthetic into its vast framework; its only artistic worker is the craftsman Will Brangwen, who is the subject of the novel's most pitiless critique, and whose own conception of culture is rooted in an Arts and Crafts vision that predates the onset of Paterian Aestheticism and decadence. But the categories by which Aestheticism constructed experience are integral to the evolving texture of

Lawrence's vision of modernity. By the end of the novel Lawrence has diagnosed the malady of Aestheticism and Modernism as conjoined cultural forms, focusing his critique on the epistemology of what we might call a gothic Modernism. I use this retrospective category for a cultural condition that was being consolidated in the negative cultural diagnostics of canonical modernist works, such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Ford's *The Good Soldier*, and Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Such works project a negative theory of knowledge, where character and the civic realm are experienced as inaccessible and empty surfaces and the aesthetic category of the mask loses its positive Wildean inflection in the move to a general perception of depthless and duplicitous semblance. This epistemology is tied to a subjectivist method – the extreme focus on isolated subjectivity that Lukács would later identify in 'The Ideology of Modernism' as a confirmation of the bourgeois subject in its isolation.[9] In this form, exemplified for Lukács by the interior monologue of Joyce's *Ulysses* and Eliot's 'The Hollow Men', 'the disintegration of personality is matched by a disintegration of the outer world',[10] to such an extent that the works exemplified a negative ontology that supported both the idealized form of the bourgeois subject and its consequent subsumption into the burgeoning ideologies of nationalism. Lawrence's trans-generational Bildungsroman might be taken as an exemplary target for this critique *or* as its original voice. His most expansive and germinal novel is both a genealogy of modern subjectivity and a teeming representation of a germinal life that precedes and underlies it.

The Rainbow begins with an evocation of the Brangwen family's organic relationship to land, sky and animal life, in order to situate a contrary tendency towards knowledge, development and the cosmopolitan aspiration to education – a 'higher form of being', 'a finer, more vivid circle of life'.[11] This is gendered from the outset, since it is the women who look out towards the possibility of *Bildung*; yet they do so according to the model of a masculine authority, in this case the vicar. It is also historically located at 'about 1840', when the building of the canal connects the Brangwen's farm with the nearby collieries, instating a link with industrial production. Within a few pages, Lawrence establishes an anthropology and a psychology of modernity that manages to encompass a mythic breadth of presentation without recourse to abstraction or scientism.

In the first two phases of the novel, concentrating on Tom Brangwen, then on his stepdaughter Anna's relationship to her cousin Will, Lawrence delineates a 'widening circle' which has the developmental structure of *Bildung*. The process of *Bildung* has a powerful motor – sexual desire that is sometimes inflamed and sometimes forestalled by the encounter with a cultivated consciousness who manifests otherness in detachment. For Tom Brangwen, the fundamental encounter in his life is the Polish Lydia Lensky, who presents him with a cosmopolitan consciousness that will always remain beyond his own conception, although they become joined in marriage. As an exemplary

figure of refinement and difference, Lydia has a forerunner – a foreign man in a pub who presents Tom with an example of 'exquisite graciousness [. . .] tact and reserve, and [. . .] ageless, monkeylike self-surety' (*R*, 25). This model of style and self-sufficiency will later be manifested in *Women in Love* in the figure of Loerke, the Dresden artist who asserts dogmatic avant-garde principles and exemplifies the condition of aesthetic modernity – autonomous, insisting on his own difference, yet implicitly promising an absolute vision of an aesthetic life. By this point Lawrence has constructed a complex and overdetermined system of ethical and cultural values which mutually demonize irony, the cultivation of detachment, aesthetic autonomy and the instrumental form of modern subjectivity. *Women in Love* wastes no time in delineating its critique on the level of discourse, character and cultural conditions, but *The Rainbow* is a novel of slow emergence; if it finally arrives at a dogmatic ethical and ontological critique, this is more cumulative and less intrusive than the later novel, which insists on repeated hearings for Birkin's rancorous diatribes. Within the widening sphere of *The Rainbow*, Lawrence lays the grounds of his critique during the slow emergence of a particular form of subjectivity, which will later be signified as both aesthetic and instrumental. This is originally named by a concept of irony that has clear affinities to that mobilized by Pater and James. Lawrence is clear from the outset that irony is not merely the sign of aesthetic subjectivity but, as in Kierkegaard's more absolute formulation, the constitutive sign of subjectivity in its autonomy and revolt.

In the world of the Marsh farm, Cossethay and Ilkeston, irony arrives as an import from Poland. If Lydia Lensky suggests the idea of cosmopolitanism, this is manifested in the appearance of the Skrebenskys, a family of Polish émigrés with aristocratic affiliations. When Tom Brangwen encounters the sophistication of the new Baroness Skrebensky, 'She seemed to struggle like a kitten within his warmth, while she was at the same time elusive and ironical, suggesting the fine steel of her claws' (*R*, 183). If we take the game of rock/paper/scissor as a blueprint here, Tom's rough matter has the power to blunt the edge of the Skrebenskys' intellectualism, whereas his stepdaughter Anna is an as yet unwritten script who both fears and desires the incisive scissor edge of the baron's ironic consciousness. His detachment contains the ambivalent promise of autonomy, objectivity and death:

> She recognized the quality of the male in him, his lean, concentrated age, his informed fire, his faculty for sharp, deliberate response. He was so detached, so purely objective. A woman was thoroughly outside him. There was no confusion. So he could give that fine, deliberate response.
>
> He was something separate and interesting; his hard, intrinsic being, whittled down by age to an essentiality and a directness almost death-like, cruel, was yet so unswervingly sure in its action, so distinct in its surety, that she was attracted to him, She watched his cold, hard, separate fire, fascinated by it. (*R* 184)

For Anna, the encounter is Faustian, the element of modernity that simultaneously emancipates and alienates; it is the opening of 'another, freer element, in which each person was detached and isolated. Was not this her natural element? Was not the close Brangwen life stifling to her?' A series of possible relationships and conflicts are suggested in the encounter between the Brangwens and the Skrebenskys. While the seeds of *Bildung* are sown in Anna's mimetic desire for the baron, her husband, Will, has no attraction to the baroness, and in turn 'she despised his uncritical, unironic nature' (*R*, 185). This moment of polarization is particularly significant, since it suggests the evolutionary position of irony in relation to the more general emergence of instrumental subjectivity and in relation to gender. Although it is exemplified for the Marsh farm by the vicar and then by Baron Skrebensky, Lawrence does not replicate the masculine gendering of irony that typifies Victorian culture in both the professional and bohemian spheres.

Will Brangwen's position at the house of the Skrebenskys is one of unique vulnerability. He lacks the granite obduracy of Tom Brangwen, even though he is ostensibly a manifestation of nothing but *the will*. Lawrence's schematic nomination is extraordinarily crude, and Will constantly teeters on the brink of being a demonstration of a theoretical critique. But he has a special significance in Lawrence's critical project, which is brought to a head in the conflictual relationship between Gudrun Brangwen and Gerald Crich in *Women in Love*. Like Gerald, Will Brangwen represents a phase of the instrumental will which has not yet achieved ironic self-consciousness. Yet Will, Gerald, Gudrun and Loerke share a condition that Lawrence will ultimately determine, under the sign of irony, as a satanic state of self-division. Irony is a constitutive mode of representation: it solicits desire, which in turn reconstitutes those subjects it solicits towards a series of values which it suggests all the more powerfully for its vagueness – autonomy, instrumental power, spiritual aristocracy, the promise of authority in negation.

According to the example of George Eliot, the novel was the ideal form to delineate a moral psychology, which in her case was underpinned by a Hegelian ethics of organic community and civic responsibility.[12] Lawrence's form of ethical narration is in one sense related to this Hegelian tradition, since across the two novels that emerged from 'The Sisters' project he develops an ethical ontology. By this I mean that the ethic is deduced in the relationship between self-consciousness and 'being' in general, as much as it is deduced from action and intention. The primary terms of this critique are instrumentality and detachment, and Will exemplifies these in his craft, in his marriage and in his general relationship to being: 'there was about him an abstraction, a sort of instrumental detachment from human things. He was a worker' (*R*, 359). Through this consistent definition of Will's consciousness as isolated and instrumental, Lawrence starts to position his broader critique of modernity in general. Ultimately this will allow

him to implicate the categories of aesthetic modernity in his wider critique of instrumental reason, the machinic reconstruction of social relations and the alienating consequences of subjectivism.

In spite of this critical project, the early and middle stages of *The Rainbow* are dominated by the impression of a sensuous life that is always in excess of instrumental consciousness. In Tom Brangwen's marriage to Lydia he finds 'the powerful source of life', which is both a vital energy and an opening of vision to immanent beauty and energy: 'A new, calm relationship showed to him in the things he saw, in the cattle he used, the young wheat as it eddied in the wind' (*R*, 57). When Anna reveals her love to Will, the experience is a vast opening of freedom: 'The veils had ripped and issued him into endless space, and he shuddered' (*R*, 112), but the anxiety of such 'infinite space' is allayed at the corn harvest with Anna. The rhythmic gathering of the corn sheaves is one of the most famous scenes in the novel and appears to represent a germinal life in the coming together of the two lovers in work with nature, restoring to them the teeming life to which Tom Brangwen has been closest. Anna Lensky manifests a kind of sensuous life that is not connected to the aesthetic dimension, while Will manifests that instrumentality which will later be exemplified by Gudrun Brangwen's aesthetic subjectivity. Gudrun, the figure of the absolute ironist, will achieve a form of instrumental mastery over things that eludes Will, who is ultimately defeated by Anna, remaining in the shadow of her sensuous freedom. At this point in Lawrence's trans-generational narrative, Anna offers a vital sensuous alternative to the form of negative detachment that inspires the outward movement of the Brangwen family. After her brief encounter with Baron Skrebensky, Anna seems to have surpassed the temptations of cosmopolitan irony, and her naked dance during pregnancy is represented according to the biblical and mythic rhetoric that consistently forces an extra dimension of experience into *The Rainbow*, against the time of novelistic *Bildung* and independent of Lawrence's schematic narrative of development.

But modernity and the instrumental subject once again enter the scene. They are brought home when Will absorbs the culture and impression of the modern city. The scene of his transformation is a trip to the Empire music hall in Nottingham, and at this point Will belatedly achieves an ironic consciousness. In this Saturday afternoon encounter Lawrence introduces the dimensions of popular culture and leisure – football in the afternoon followed by the music hall – but the consequences are epochal, since Will has now arrived at modernity as both cultural formation and style of being. At the music hall he meets a modern young woman, exchanges insouciant remarks and then pursues a sexual encounter through a newfound consciousness of his instrumental powers. Saturday afternoon promises nothing less than a reformulation of Will's being according to the epistemological categories of modernity. At the Empire he discovers empiricism, with its reduction of sensuous experience into properties and categories, and as in Pater's 'Conclusion',

the moment of empirical reduction is also the moment of isolation, autonomy and sensuous renewal, with a consequent resistance to any organic experience of nature and community: 'he was purely a world to himself, he had nothing to do with any general consciousness. Just his own senses were supreme. All the rest was external, insignificant, leaving him alone with this girl he wanted to absorb, whose properties he wanted to absorb into his own sense' (*R*, 213). The language of empiricism is applied very closely to the sexual experience: it is the 'properties' of the girl he wants to absorb into his senses. This is an effort of abstraction, separation and distinction: 'He could see distinct attractions in her; her eyebrows, with their particular curve, gave him keen aesthetic pleasure. Later on he would see her bright, pellucid eyes, like shallow water, and know these' (*R*, 212–3). This empirical reduction clearly delineates the woman into a series of objective attributes, but the separate properties are subsequently resolved into an experience of 'absolute beauty'. Once again, these terms will recur in *Women in Love*, in Gerald Crich's encounter with Gudrun. As with Gerald, Will's incipient individualism, his 'free sensation of walking in his own darkness', is a fantasy of sexual mastery; 'he wanted to overcome her resistance, to have her in his power, fully and exhaustively to enjoy her' (*R*, 213).

The full implications of Will's Nottingham experience are realized on his return home. He seems 'quite indifferent', with a 'queer, absolved look on his face, a sort of latent, almost sinister smile, as if he were absolved from his "good" ties' (*R*, 217). Will's newfound indifference affords a 'critical' moment for Anna and effectively rejuvenates their relationship: 'She was very glad to welcome a stranger. She had been bored by the old husband. To his latent, cruel smile she replied with brilliant challenge'. Her compound of cruelty and challenge reformulates her sexual and social relationship with Will according to the cultivation of detachment. If this is not irony in the full literary and aesthetic sense as yet, it sets the ground on which the ironic and decadent consciousness will flower, ultimately producing what Ursula will later identify as the *fleurs du mal* which are revealed to her in a widening of the sphere so radical that all organic ties with the Marsh farm will be broken. It is the grounds and emergence of this rift that concentrates Lawrence's critical project, which works both with and against the poetic and mythic evocation of a germinal life. Lawrence is establishing a genealogy of modernity that is also a phenomenology – a representation of the experience of consciousness at a fundamental moment of historical transition.

At this middle point of the trans-generational narrative of *The Rainbow*, before the focus has shifted definitively to Ursula, Lawrence has mobilized a series of shapes of consciousness according to what appear to be constitutive features of modernity in its emergence. The Marsh farm's first encounter with otherness involves a mimetic desire for a spiritualized aristocracy, which subsequently inspires the cultivation of cosmopolitan detachment, the

'widening circle' of the Brangwen family into the world of the Skrebenskys. Will subsequently manifests a form of consciousness that mimics the social and philosophical categories of modernity – instrumentality, empirical reduction, sensuous objectivity – although he does not have a self-conscious cultural relation to modernity as such. In so far as it works according to this form of evolutionary schematism, *The Rainbow* implicitly posits a developmental anthropology in which the dialectic of modernity appears as a phase of emergence – a necessary negation which may show the path towards a new way of integrating subjectivity with nature.

In *The Rainbow*, the critique of Aestheticism is not yet voiced: at this point in Lawrence's anthropology of modernity, the primary categories are indifference, abstraction, detachment and irony, but it is important to point out that the terms of the later critique are implicit in his construction of the emerging desire of an urban, cosmopolitan consciousness defined by detachment and desire. Although the sphere of 'art' as such has not yet been identified, the novel's tri-generational historical narrative constructs a cultural anthropology in which the aesthetic dimension emerges – from a consciousness that is organically related to its natural environment, to a consciousness that continually attempts to recapture this connection by an effort of will, to a modern consciousness that experiences its own detachment as an ambivalent condition of freedom and horror. The final phase of *The Rainbow* evokes this alienated condition, which I have characterized as gothic modernity. In spite of its attempt to conclude with the reconciliatory image of its title, the novel culminates in a negative dialectic: modernity is not a phase on the way to a moment of return or reconciliation, it is an ineluctable force of disintegration which will force its subjects to live and work on its terms.

As it moves progressively towards the representation of cultural disintegration and epistemological crisis, *The Rainbow* establishes the social and aesthetic conditions of *Women in Love*, and this will involve a radical break with the form of trans-generational *Bildung*. Immediately after the transformation of Will and Anna's relationship, Tom Brangwen is introduced; he provides another influx of cosmopolitan consciousness into the Marsh, with a London education and a 'subtle, quick, critical intelligence, a mind that was like a scale or balance' (*R*, 223). Tom is one of those static and demonstrative Lawrentian characters who represent a phase of decadent consciousness without having any dynamic narrative presence. But his form of critical intelligence is brought to an acute and dynamic pitch in Ursula Brangwen's experience, during the last phase of the novel, where the encounter with urban modernity and isolated subjectivity effectively brings the evolutionary dialectic of the novel to a standstill, opening up the decadent condition which Lawrence would explore in *Women in Love*.

During her relationship with Skrebensky, Ursula begins to feel the pull of London. As she walks along the canals and the 'whole black agitation of

colliery and railway', hints of the greater metropolis emerge 'through the grim, alluring seethe of the town' (*R*, 287). She declares herself a romantic and begins to harbour 'a sense of potent unrealities' (*R*, 288). But this is a late Romanticism which gathers together the rhetoric and emotion of decadence. Nature makes a 'keen, poignant and unbearable music to her' (*R*, 285), and when she dances with Skrebensky, Lawrence deliberately invokes the decadent motif of the shadow dance: 'Shadowy couples passed and re-passed before the fire, the dancing feet danced silently by into the darkness, it was a vision of the depths of the underworld, under the great flood' (*WL*, 295). The specific allusion here is to Arthur Symons's 'At the Alhambra', the most self-consciously decadent of his essays for *The Savoy* and a piece that Lawrence may well have encountered through Katherine Mansfield's fin de siècle interests. In Symons's evocation of the ballet rehearsal, the dancers 'passed, re-passed, dissolved, reformed, bewilderingly [. . .] as the music scattered itself in waves of sound'.[13] Symons has already claimed his position as the spokesperson for a 'perverse' vision of decadence at the beginning of this essay, and following his description of the shadow ballet he attempts to promote a dialectical return to nature: 'In this fantastic return to nature I found the last charm of the artificial'. In this instance the critical Impressionist is attempting to forestall or evade dialects by a piece of critical sleight of hand. Symons mimics the process of dialectics – the negation of nature by artifice, followed by a moment of *Aufhebung* in which nature is recuperated – but he does so to assert the independent space of a bohemian Aestheticism *against* nature. In a similar way, Ursula's revolt against nature must be read against the arc of the novel's trans-generational *Bildung*. Her sensuous awakening coincides with a radical cessation of that germinal life to which personal development had previously been answerable.

As Ursula and Skrebensky's dance continues, the presence of the moon is gradually given such symbolic import that the couple are positioned in a sacrificial rite. Ursula takes on the condition of the decadent Pierrot, yearning for a lunar completion which Birkin will later come to interrupt with evangelical rage. The lunar thematic positions Ursula as a somewhat chilled Salome: 'Oh for the coolness and entire liberty and brightness of the moon. Oh for the cold liberty to be herself, to do entirely as she liked' (*R*, 296). By pathologizing this cold liberty as part of a decadent condition, Lawrence is beginning to establish the critique of aesthetic individualism that he will develop in *Women in Love*, and his engagement with the fin de siècle aesthetics is continually demonstrated in his typically symbolist strategy of subliminal discursive suggestion. When Ursula feels that 'she is bright as a piece of moonlight, as bright as a steel blade', Lawrence gathers together the lunar motifs of the symbolist fantasy *Pierrot Lunaire* (1884); the cycle of Albert Giraud's poems which had been recently been revived in Otto Hartleben's translation and Schoenberg's song-cycle of 1912.[14] In the poem Hartleben translated as 'Der Mondfleck'

(The Moonfleck),[15] Pierrot leaves home to seek his fortune with a white speck of moon stuck to his jacket, a shadow version of Wilhelm Meister condemned to identify with a lunar fragment. Yet even before this voyage out his condemnation has been secured in the poem 'Enthauptung' ('Beheading'), where the moon becomes a 'shining Turkish sword upon a black and silken cushion',[16] to which Pierrot lurches forward as if in unconscious acceptance of his punishment.

Similarly afflicted by the moon and the steel blade, Ursula becomes passive in the dance, allowing herself to be 'appropriated' by Skrebensky while maintaining in herself a 'subdued, cold indomitable passion' (*R*, 297), becoming the blade that Skrebensky insistently clasps. This set of symbolist images establishes the conflictual psychodrama that is now taking on the dynamics of lordship and bondage which had hitherto operated in Lawrence's more abstract critique of modernity. The metaphorical currency also helps to subliminally reinforce the dimension of cultural history, since Ursula and Skrebensky's romance is set on the eve of the second Boer War, at the very zenith of the fin de siècle. But this is not cultural history in the contemporary sense, where experience is reduced to the invariably arbitrary specificity of 'material culture'; it is an evolutionary narrative method where cultural forms are constitutive conditions of experience as well as its reflection. In this sense Lawrence is trying to subtly represent decadence as a form in the evolution of consciousness in the way that Hegel had represented scepticism and irony as evolutionary modes of the self-conscious subject. The key difference is that it is at this point, for Lawrence, where dialectics and *Bildung* cease. Ursula passes through decadence to arrive at a cultural experience which is no longer tied to the evolutionary dialectic of modernity and enlightenment. At this point the cultural discourse of Modernism asserts its primacy and metropolitanism, epistemological doubt and cultural fragmentation emerge as the primary categories of experience.

Just as Tom Brangwen's encounter with otherness had a forerunner in a beautiful male stranger, Ursula's encounter with modernity has a forerunner in her schoolteacher, Winifred Inger – a feminist, Hellenist and representative of London's aesthetic culture. In their brief erotic and intellectual relationship Winifred gives Ursula the example of an intensity and refinement that is both self-propagating and self-negating. It is when Winifred returns to London for a time that Ursula faces a 'black disintegration' that not only begins her turn away from Cossethay but instigates her turn against Winifred, who now comes to seem 'clayey [. . .] big and earthy'. In her absence Ursula has brooded upon Winifred's refinement to establish the image of a 'fine intensity, instead of this heavy cleaving of moist clay' (*WL*, 319). This Paterian sense of intensity and fineness instigates Ursula's condition of decadent stasis, which is subsequently consolidated and volatized in her encounter with urban modernity.

As with her father Will, Ursula's encounter with modernity is staged in Nottingham, and her vision of urban life as shadow without substance recalls the spectrality of Wordsworth's London:

> 'These stupid lights,' Ursula said to herself, in her dark, sensual arrogance. 'The stupid, artificial, exaggerated town, fuming its lights. It does not exists really. It rests upon the limited darkness, like a gleam of coloured oil on dark water, but what is it? – nothing, nothing'.
>
> In the tram, in the train, she felt the same. The lights, the civic uniform was a trick played, the people as they moved or sat were only dummies exposed. She could see, beneath their pale, wooden pretence of composure and civic purposefulness, the dark stream that contained them all. They were like dark little paper ships in their motion. But in reality each was a dark, blind, eager wave urging blindly forward, dark with the same homogenous desire. And all their talk and all their behaviour was sham, they were dressed-up creatures. She was reminded of the Invisible Man, who was a piece of darkness made visible only by his clothes. (*R*, 414–5)

Ursula's vision is a constellation of the key tropes of gothic Modernism – civic life as masquerade, the emptiness of the image and – according to the rhetoric of Schopenhauerian pessimism – the blindness of the will. It is consolidated by her lover Skrebensky, for whom the freedom from civic ties allows a continual 'glimmering grin':

> He knew no-one in this town, he had no civic self to maintain. He was free. The trams and markets and theatres and public meetings were a shaken kaleidoscope to him. [. . .] He despised it all – it was all non-existent. Their good professors, their good clergymen, their good political speakers, their good, earnest women – all the time he felt his soul was grinning, grinning at the sight of them. So many performing puppets, all wood and rag for the performance. [. . .] He was curiously happy, being alone, now, The glimmering grin was on his face'. (*R*, 416)

Lawrence is recording a form of experience that was central to modernist literature and social thought – the 'voluptuous pleasure' of individualism, the sense of authenticity in the revolt against form and the concomitant volatilizing of reality as performance. It is essentially anti-theatrical; it recovers the epistemological categories of Romantic idealism without the compensatory dialectical movement towards inner spiritual discovery. As it thwarts the dialectical narrative of *Bildung*, it frequently appears to be borrowing the rhetoric of spiritual asceticism, epitomized by the medieval *theatrum mundi*. Once again the spectre of Hegel's critique of irony reasserts itself in literary culture at this point, since what this experience embodies is an absolute form of detachment

without play. Romantic irony has reached the point where, in absolutizing itself, it has become earnest, the obverse of the decadent play with surface.

Aesthetic Autonomy and Tragic Diaphaneitè in *Women in Love*

In *Women in Love* nationalism, war and the species being to which Skrebensky surrenders are deliberately oblique presences which are for the most part refracted in the cultural realm. The social and political coordinates of modernity are manifested in the aesthetics of primitivism and the rhetoric of decadence and disintegration that permeates the novel from the outset. But the conditions of experience that Lawrence evokes are a continuation of the final phase of *The Rainbow*. In the first chapter of *Women in Love*, Lawrence returns to the spectral perception of the social that Ursula experienced during her relationship with Skrebensky, in this case through the eyes of Gudrun, as the two sisters wander through Beldover and the collieries district. The crucial distinction between Ursula's experience in the final phase of *The Rainbow* and Gudrun's in *Women in Love* is that, from the outset, Gudrun is defined as an artist and ironist whose style and perception have been defined by an aesthetic culture. Ursula's initial focalization of Gudrun highlights her refinement and form: 'so infinitely charming, in her softness and her fine, exquisite richness of texture and delicacy of line. There was a certain playfulness about her too, such a piquancy of ironic suggestion, such an untouched reserve. Ursula admired her with all her soul' (*WL*, 10). The focus is first on Ursula's mimetic desire for Gudrun's independence, and then on Gudrun's separateness from Beldover and the collieries. This is clearly accentuated by her bohemian style, which is metonymically identified in her green stockings, which become both a fetish and an object of rebuke. Yet it is clear that Gudrun's ironic spirit will insist on her irreducibility to such appearances.

Lawrence represents this cultivation of detachment as only in part a relationship to personal style – he is not concerned to launch a critique of dandyism in the way that James and Wilde had. The key to Lawrence's critical representation of aesthetic detachment is that it is connected to an epistemological crisis which brings with it a spectral perception of the social realm. Gudrun tells Ursula that 'everything is a ghoulish replica of the real work, a replica, a ghoul, all soiled, everything sordid. It's like being mad' (*WL*, 11). After the final phase of *The Rainbow* it is curious that Ursula does not offer immediate assent to Gudrun's vision, but her artistic sister is clearly engrossed in the rhetoric of the grotesque to a far greater extent than she. Gudrun's sense of the grotesque is a direct product of her aesthetic perception and of the class distinction that is now acute on her return from a sophisticated metropolitan culture. Her acute

sense of the grotesque and her 'piquancy of ironic suggestion' are repeated throughout the novel as defining qualities of her aesthetic subjectivity. These are specific and highly developed qualities, and however much Lawrence derides her Aestheticism, she emerges as one of his most brilliant and vivid personalities. She embodies all the principles which Lawrence must overcome to instate his vision of a germinal life, but she is also the spirit to which the narrator's acolyte, Rupert Birkin, has the deepest hidden affinities.

The sophistication and complexity of Gudrun's characterization is in direct contrast to that of Hermione Roddice, a straw dog for Bloomsbury Aestheticism and well known caricature of Ottoline Morrell, the Bloomsbury patroness with whom the spectral Oscar Wilde had orchestrated his own afterlife, albeit in the confines of Katherine Mansfield's dream. Just as Mansfield's dream had married Bloomsbury to a revenant of the Victorian fin de siècle, Hermione allows Lawrence to situate Aestheticism as an afterlife and echo of an obsolescent class. But this social and ideological pressure is not his primary object of critique. Hermione continually talks culture, almost as much as Rupert Birkin talks against it, and their subsequent tiffs stage Aestheticism's position in early modernist culture.

Lawrence's first central point is that while the discourses of Paterian Aestheticism may appear to be predicated on modernity and refinement, they are in fact reversible. Their contrary claims to sensuous renaissance might easily collude with a primitivist assertion of animal being. Hermione's claims to primitivism are expressed within and against the discourse of Paterian Aestheticism. Speaking of children's consciousness: 'But do you think they are better for having it quickened, stimulated? Isn't it better that they should remain unconscious of the hazel, isn't it better that they should see it as a whole, without all this pulling to pieces, without all this knowledge?' (*WL*, 40). A 'quickened' life, stimulated and refined, is Hermione's natural state, and the Paterian language is her natural inheritance to such an extent that it has become an encumbrance, an etiolated rhetoric of modernity and refinement that she can only shake off only with a contrary assertion of the primitive.

Hermione is quite conscious of the dualistic imperatives of early-twentieth-century cultural politics here, and it is worth comparing her dichotomy of Aestheticism and primitivism with the contraries mobilized by Ford Madox Ford in *The Good Soldier* (1915), which was published in the same year as *The Rainbow*. In Ford's novel, John Dowell is compelled to maintain the illusion that his wife Florence is an emaciated model of European *Bildung*, administering to her discussions of 'the mental spirituality of Walter Pater',[17] while apparently blind to the Dionysian current of fin de siècle Aestheticism and hence subsequently unprepared for the manifestation of his wife's long sequestered maenadism. Lawrence's dualistic representation of aesthetic refinement is less obviously tied to a pessimistic vision of the will, which in Ford's case inevitably suggests either Schopenhauer or Catholicism. While Hermione will

later display maenadic and murderous desires, Lawrence is initially more concerned to orchestrate a discursive rather than a psychodynamic critique of the discourses of Aestheticism and Modernism, with Hermione espousing a binary compact of the two. Her fashionable primitivism immediately inspires Birkin's critique that animalism is the last refuge of intellectual refinement. Birkin's argument that 'It's all will' mutually demonizes Aestheticism and primitivism, with the latter as a symptomatic response to the subjectivism of the former.

In the first phase of the novel, up to 'Breadalby', Lawrence develops this discursive critique of Aestheticism into a larger representation of the cultivation of bohemian identity and the condition of the fallen aristocracy – that element of Bloomsbury which, like Hermione, has deliberately rejected the morality and culture of its aristocratic lineage while retaining the privilege of financial independence. Gudrun characterizes Hermione's arrogance with typical acuity as the performative privilege of 'these free women who have emancipated themselves from the aristocracy' (*WL*, 50), but once again there is an undercurrent of envy and mimetic desire in these relations. When Lawrence comes to document the cultural environment of London bohemia more specifically, it is clearly a scene where mimetic desire and envy have congealed into decadent stasis, in a manner that reflects the condition of the aristocratic retreat represented in 'Breadalby'. Birkin pays a backhanded homage to the bohemian set as he travels to London on the train with Gerald: 'perhaps they live only in the gesture of rejection and negation – but negatively something, at any rate' (*WL*, 60). Although this grants some validity to the negative freedom of bohemian life, the next chapter, 'Crème de Menthe', represents the Halliday set in London as emaciated degenerates. Gerald looks at Halliday, 'watching the soft, rather degenerate face of the young man' (68). Pussum's eyes maintain the 'slow full gaze' of a cultivated indifference, 'and on them there seemed to float a film of disintegration, a sort of misery and sullenness, like oil on water' (*WL*, 65).

The sexual charge between Gerald and Pussum appears to be generated by the mutual reflection of inner blankness, in a way that was echoed in Wyndham Lewis's representation of the sexual politics of bourgeois bohemia in *Tarr* (1918). Lewis's novel was originally serialized in the *Egoist* beginning in April 1916, during the time that Lawrence was writing *Women in Love* in Cornwall, and his representation of artistic life and of the psychological consequences of the devotion to autonomous art has much in common with Lawrence's, in spite of the extreme variance of their styles and voices.[18] On a wider yet more opaque canvas than Lawrence's 'Crème de Menthe', Lewis records the extreme conscientiousness by which indifference is cultivated in the cultures of metropolitan bohemia. Tarr is an artist who typifies the gestures of *Blast* – he is anti-Victorian, self-consciously detached and anxious to maintain the protective sovereignty of an avant-garde persona. When Tarr enters the 'bourgeois bohemian' den which he despises, he 'gave a hasty

glance at his "indifference" to see whether it were safe and sound',[19] but when he is confronted with the alternative indifference of his lover Bertha, the two engage in a subliminal contest between 'Her "indifference" = the great, simulated and traditional'[20] and his 'upstart and younger relative', which is the cultivated blankness of a modern urban intellectual. At the same time, the artist is concerned to distinguish his own cultivated detachment from the inhuman ironies of bohemia: 'Tarr had not brought his indifference there to make it play tricks, perform little feats. Nor did he wish to press it into inhuman actions. It was a humane "indifference", essentially'.[21] But just as Henry James's anxious attempt to distinguish himself from Flaubert's indifference revealed a disavowed affinity, Tarr cannot disguise his investment in an elite model of aesthetic subjectivity. As Rachel Potter has argued, Tarr relies on the 'bourgeois democratic banality' of his lover Bertha to focus his own contrary performance of ascetic rigour, and these relationships say much about the ways that Modernism consolidated traditional gender performatives.[22] As in James's representation of aesthetic self-fashioning, Lewis clearly genders the cultivation of aesthetic distance.

In Lawrence's alternative vision of the fate of art, the gendering of irony is more democratic, but his critique of aesthetic detachment is ultimately more systematic and vitriolic. Increasingly, the repetition of terms such as 'indifference', irony and detachment configure both a style of subjectivity and the alternative social space cultivated by bohemian culture. As the novel progresses, these thematics coalesce into a general vision of aesthetic autonomy and its discontents. 'Breadalby' sets out a critique of aristocracy, nostalgia and aesthetic autonomy that belies the democratic image of bohemian culture and Aestheticism's ideal of sensuous renaissance. Both Gudrun and Birkin immediately engage with the 'unchanging' image of the Derbyshire house, silently resisting urbanization. As the voice of irony and modernity, Gudrun resentfully appreciates the completion of the image, 'as final as an old aquatint' (*WL*, 82). Then Birkin presents the dialectical image of Romantic obsolescence as both promise of happiness and ideological lure:

> Birkin, sitting up in bed, looked lazily and pleasantly out on the park, that was so green and deserted, romantic, belonging to the past. He was thinking how lovely, how sure, how formed, how final all the things of the past were – the lovely accomplished past – this house, so still and golden, the park slumbering its centuries of peace. And then, what a snare and a delusion, this beauty of static things – what a horrible, dead prison Breadalby really was, what an intolerable confinement, the peace! Yet it was better than the sordid scrambling conflict of the present. If only one might create the future after one's own heart – for a little pure truth, a little unflinching applications of simple truth to life, the heart cried out ceaselessly. (*WL*, 97)

This is the spleen and ideal of aesthetic aristocracy, but it is not the static dichotomy that Baudelaire presented in his poetic visions of opium bliss and torment. Birkin presents the utopian image of art's promise of happiness, followed by its negation – the autonomous image's refusal of history – but he does not leave the argument at this point, suggesting that it may be possible to trans-value the retreat offered by this aristocratic prison as the opportunity to cultivate individual freedom. This value emerges in perhaps the most sentimental language that Birkin will use throughout the novel – the religion of the heart and its 'simple truth to life' – but we know that this discourse will not be sustained. What is important here is that Birkin's dialectical gesture is a manifestation of the heart crying out: this is not a systematic application of an evolutionary or conceptual schema – the restlessness of modernity is rooted in desires which are at once of the body and the imagination.

Birkin's articulate desires also bring into shadowy focus the question of the novel's generative absence – the unspoken war,[23] which explains the symptomatic need for the peace of Breadalby's aristocratic retreat: an 'intolerable confinement', yet the only available guarantee of autonomy and protection. The autonomous aesthetic dimension is experienced as a physical deficiency as much as an enclave, and at the end of this chapter Birkin retreats to illness after suffering the intolerable melodrama of a sculptural assault from a Bloomsbury maenad. Hermione's moment of violence hammers home Lawrence's lessons about the psychodynamics of aesthetic refinement. This might as well be Max Nordau's treatise on decadence as egotism and neurasthenia, fleshed out by a proto-Freudian lesson about civilization and the instincts. But Lawrence's narrative method and critique is not dependent on a simplistic psycho-dynamic theory of libidinal emancipation. Although Lawrence begins with a critique of the discourse, cultural space and psychology of Aestheticism, he proceeds according to a different strategy which is in line with the ethical ontology of *The Rainbow* – this is to say, he continually frames and elaborates a mode of aesthetic or instrumental being as the dominant note of a character, rather than the specific psychological history and discursive constructions of the aesthetic personality. Where Katherine Mansfield directly ironized the discourse of Paterian Aestheticism, Lawrence concentrates on a technical model of subjectivity in which Aestheticism is implicated. Crucially though, he does not apply this exclusively to aesthetic subjectivity, although this is a central concern of the novel.

As the novel increasingly focuses on Gerald Crich, Lawrence introduces his broader critique of the dialectic of modernity. Lawrence, like Horkheimer and Adorno two decades later, will argue that Enlightenment rationality is fatally implicated in the machinic apparatus of modernity, and that the isolated subject cannot enforce its autonomy without mirroring the instrumental will that is ordering modern technocratic society.[24] The grand philosophical melodrama of the opening statement of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic*

of Enlightenment is worth rehearsing: 'Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as master. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity'.[25] One of the tenets of Horkheimer and Adorno's critique was that the enlightened subject's projection of reason as an absolute abstract value effectively supported the appropriation of nature, since all of the material world was considered to be brute otherness against the supremacy of the subject. One consequence of Enlightenment rationality is the total separation between science and art, since art is relegated to the realm of primitive anthropomorphism and magical thinking. But Horkheimer and Adorno describe this autonomization of science by a surprising comparison to what they label 'aestheticism':

> The practical antithesis of art and science, which tears them apart as separate areas of culture ultimately allows them, by dint of their own tendencies, to blend with one another even as exact contraries. In its neo-positivist version, *science becomes aestheticism, a system of detached signs devoid of any intention that would transcend the system* [my italics].[26]

The implication here is that Aestheticism, like the abstract science that informs the machinic appropriation of nature, has devoted itself to a formal conception of art's autonomy which implicitly disavows its material conditions and sensuous possibilities. It is a violent misreading which is typical of twentieth-century theoretical aesthetics from both Marxist and conservative sources, and it relies on a concept of Aestheticism that has little relation to the utopian current of Pater's expression of aesthetic renaissance. But it has a provocative force in the context of the decadent romance of autonomous artistic form and aesthetic subjectivity. Like Horkheimer and Adorno, but from quite different political coordinates, Lawrence was approaching the aesthetic conditions of decadence within the context of a broader conception of the scientific appropriation of nature, industrialization and the modern dialectic of freedom and deracination. As a consequence, the trajectory of his critique is just as forceful yet melodramatic, as provocative as it is overdetermined.

Lawrence begins to develop his critique of instrumental reason from early on, as Gerald's prowess as a swimmer suggests the compelling power of the isolate will: 'alone now, alone and immune in the middle of the waters, which he had all to himself. He exulted in his isolations in the new element, unquestioned and unconditioned' (*WL*, 47). Like a number of apparently disconnected scenes in *Women in Love* – the animal encounter of 'Rabbit', Birkin's revolt against lunar solipsism in 'Moony' – the vivid image reveals the hidden forces operating in a relationship. Gerald's experience here is not in itself compelling, but it reveals Gudrun's compact of envy and imitative desire: 'Gudrun envied him almost painfully. Even this momentary possession of pure isolation

and fluidity seemed to her so terribly desirable, that she felt herself as if damned, out there on the high road' (*WL*, 47). The rhetoric of damnation is reiterated in the final section of the novel, when Loerke embodies and articulates the position of Milton's Satan, insisting that the mind is its own place and that art both mirrors and produces this autonomy. Ultimately it will be Gerald who is damned, then finally a tragic victim in his belated flowering to a diaphanous and Christ-like state.

By the final phase of the novel, Lawrence's desolate Alpine backdrop has thrown into relief the psychodynamics of a small group of struggling characters, but by this point he has already prepared a sustained critique of aesthetic and technical rationality. In the chapter 'Coal Dust', having completed the first part of his critique of Bloomsbury Aestheticism, Lawrence instigates his new critical trajectory, signalled by Gerald's violent mastery of his mare against the backdrop of industrial machinery and its shocks. Then, almost immediately after this moment, which horrifies Ursula yet further provokes Gudrun's affinity with Gerald, Lawrence begins to develop his portrayal of Gudrun's aesthetic subjectivity as compulsive irony. When Hermione destroys her paintings, she reacts to her professions of concern 'with cool irony?'. Her blithe detachment from her own art contributes to her vivid impression on Gerald: 'There was a body of cold power in her' (*WL*, 122), and this power, which is no longer a force but a congealed sculptural body, is 'so finished, and of such perfect gesture'. Gudrun's isolate will recalls Henry James's Mark Ambient, whose cultivation of a 'cold, hard surface' became the highest achievement of his Aestheticism, above the actual art work, which could never properly emulate the immaculate negations of the vanishing artist. Such immaculate gestures cement Gudrun's future with Gerald: 'The bond was established between them, in that look, in her tone [. . .] a sort of diabolic freemasonry subsisted between them'. At this point in the novel, the mimetic bond between Gudrun's aesthetic and Gerald's machinic will is much stronger than the ephemeral subculture in which Gudrun has been schooled and which Gerald tasted blithely at the Pompadour. But the larger narrative irony is that Gudrun will be able to consummate her sense of an ideal aesthetic detachment only through Loerke, a figure who exemplifies that bohemian culture, while at the same time standing apart. This will necessarily be a paradoxical kind of exemplification; as the ideal avant-garde artist, Loerke manifests the negation inherent in bohemian culture so consummately that he must negate that culture itself.

The Gudrun/Loerke relationship emerges at the zenith point of an evolutionary narrative which is essentially disintegrative, while the Gudrun/Gerald relationship still appears to be locked into a dialectic of modernity in which art and the will are involved in the progressive sublation and subordination of nature. Lawrence's critique of modernity and instrumental subjectivity is effectively completed in the chapter 'The Industrial Magnate', which articulates the cultural logic of industrial modernity and machinic labour. This critique effectively

resuscitates the ethical ontology of *The Rainbow*, as Gerald's project for his family's mining business manifests a general relationship between will and matter:

> For this fight with matter, one must have perfect instruments in perfect organization, a mechanism so subtle and harmonious in its workings that it represents the single mind of man, and by its relentless repetition of given movement, will accomplish a purpose irresistibly, inhumanly. (*WL*, 227–8)

This discourse of harmony, subtlety and irresistible rhythm echoes the aesthetic discourse mobilized in the earlier chapter 'Water Party', when Gudrun performs Dalcroze movements with an 'unconscious ritualistic suggestion', a 'pure, mindless, tossing rhythm, and a will set powerful in a kind of hypnotic influence' (*WL*, 166). In this scene, Gudrun's rhythmic convulsions beside Wiley Water strain to transfigure the instrumental production of movement into a 'voluptuous ecstasy' (*WL*, 167), and for once Gudrun finds herself the subject of irony, as Birkin surprises the secluded sisters with a 'grotesque step-dance' (*WL*, 168). When Birkin maintains for Ursula 'an incredibly mocking, satiric grin on his face' (*WL*, 169), it is clear that Lawrence is flirting with a different kind of irony – Dionysian, grotesque and abandoned to a drift which is outside the conditions of instrumental rationality, dialectics and *Bildung*. Yet such Bacchic appearances are occasional and erratic. The overwhelming suggestion of 'Water Party' will be the immanence of death and disintegration in the efforts of the modern will, and Gudrun's Dalcroze movements are subtly implicated in the deathwards trajectory of this chapter, which concludes in an appalling double drowning. The association between will and thanatos is only implicit at this point, but in 'The Industrial Magnate', Lawrence incorporates a narrative of the death drive within his explicit discursive critique of modernity, as Gerald strives for 'an activity of pure order, pure mechanical repetition' (*WL*, 228).

The structural development and contrastive layering of Lawrence's argument against modernity and instrumentalism is essential to the conceptual and narrative force of *Women in Love*. At the very point that he has fully articulated his critique of the machinic will, Lawrence introduces a new element into his presentation of aesthetic subjectivity. Gudrun has been asked to tutor the Criches' young child Winifred, who is clearly gifted with an artistic sensibility from an early age. It is also clear that she will in some ways mirror the ironic subjectivity that Gudrun has perfected in her exposure to metropolitan bohemia: 'Winifred was a detached, ironic child, she would never attach herself' (*WL*, 235). Lawrence introduces the concept of irony as master trope for aesthetic being again, at the very moment that he is beginning to secure the parallel between Gerald's machinic will and Gudrun's aesthetic detachment. At the same time he reiterates the discourse of Paterian Aestheticism in his representation of the momentary being that the changeling child epitomizes:

'She was an odd, sensitive, inflammable child, having her father's dark hair and quiet bearing, but being quite detached, momentaneous. She was like a changeling indeed, as if her feelings did not matter to her, really' (*WL*, 219).

There is an appropriate fin de siècle rarefaction to Lawrence's neologism – 'momentaneous' – and Winifred's exemplary combination of flux and detachment fulfils the model of aesthetic subjectivity that Pater projected in his 'Conclusion', oscillating between Dionysian excess and Fichtean reduction. Pater's spectral carpe diem is well known as a precursor to modernist constructions of subjectivity, but it also allowed for its conflicting political parameters, particularly that tendency of aesthetic democracy to slide invisibly into aristocratic elitism that Linda Dowling has read in the founding discourses of Aestheticism.[27] Lawrence locates a similar duality in the sensibility of the child: 'She loved people who would make life a game for her. She had an amazing instinctive critical faculty, and was a pure anarchist, a pure aristocrat at once. For she accepted her equals wherever she found them, and she ignored with blithe indifference her inferiors' (*WL*, 220). The aesthetic child appears to exist outside the dialectics of modernity at the same time that she is an ideal representation of the political contraries of Modernism. It is particularly significant that Lawrence does not subject her to the critical pressure that he imparts on the adult ironists, Aesthetes and industrialists, and that Birkin is allowed to proclaim the child as the emissary of art's ideal space. Winifred embodies the Schillerian capacity for play as it was manifested in the blithe form of the Juno Ludovisi, and just as the Hellenic statue stood outside of history, the child is an image of the self-originating will: 'She was quite single and by herself, deriving from nobody. It was as if she were cut off from all purpose or continuity, and existed simply moment by moment' (*WL*, 220).

Winifred leaves a question that will resonate throughout the novel; is her autonomy and mercurial being a utopian possibility or a direct manifestation of the contemporary process of disintegration? The child is defined as both anarchist and aristocrat just before Gerald is criticized directly for wanting to 'revert to the strictest Toryism' (*WL*, 221), exemplifying 'the dullest conservatism'. Within a novel which slowly forces its argument about the affinities between aesthetic subjectivity and machinic consciousness, Lawrence is careful to discriminate aesthetic anarchism from conservative instrumentalism. Just as Birkin's Dionysian dance interrupts the rhythmic order of Gudrun's Dalcroze movements in 'The Water Party', the Nietzschean child interrupts the schematic order of *Women in Love*.

It is when Birkin considers the aesthetic education of Winifred that he makes his extraordinary claim for the ideal space of art: 'Only artists produce for each other the world that is fit to live in. And if you can arrange *that* for Winifred, it is perfect' (*WL*, 208). His utopian claim that 'every true artist is the salvation of every other' goes against the language of damnation that he has introduced in the fatal relations of Gudrun Brangwen and Gerald Crich,

and Birkin tentatively suggests a politics of aesthetics that is modelled on the child, and in service of the child: 'If you can put into her way the means of being self-sufficient, that is the best thing possible. She'll never get on with the ordinary life [. . .] It's awful to think what her life will be unless she does find a means of expression, some way of fulfillment' (*WL*, 208). It is possible from here to imagine a politics comparable to that suggested in Orage's *New Age* – an unlikely amalgam of socialism, aesthetic liberalism and Nietzschean egotism, where the duty of the family and the state is to facilitate 'the means of being self-sufficient' and where this self-sufficiency is ultimately defined by the development of the highest expressive capacities. But beside this possibility there is another politics which places precisely the opposite pressure on the aesthetic dimension. The critical logic by which Lawrence brings together instrumental reason and aesthetic subjectivity threatens to instate a sacrificial system, as Gudrun and Gerald increasingly accrue the status of chosen victims for Lawrence's conceptual and narrative mechanism. With the introduction of Loerke in 'Snow', the conceptual strands of the novel begin to coalesce into a fatal mechanism that ultimately threatens to close off the possibilities of Winifred's aesthetic anarchism.

At this point, Loerke emerges as the representative figure of autonomous art and once again, the concept of irony is the keynote of Lawrence's vision of Aestheticism. Exemplifying the Paterian qualities of fineness and singleness, Loerke asserts his disintegrative claims: 'his voice was mature, sardonic, its movement had the flexibility of essential energy, and of a mocking, penetrating understanding. Gudrun could not understand a word of his monologue, but she was spell-bound watching him. He must be an artist: nobody else could have such fine adjustment and singleness' (*WL*, 406). Loerke's penetrative mockery is in an important sense an echo of Birkin's in his more anarchic fits, but in the negative evolutionary schema that Birkin himself promotes, Loerke has reached a position beyond him. His aesthetic state has been achieved through a long experience of poverty, stoicism, negation and intensification. And at the beginning of that phase of the novel where Loerke becomes a presiding spirit, irony comes to permeate the texture of the work. As if the author himself were revealing his own mimetic desire for Loerke before the artist has even appeared in the narrative, Lawrence finally submits Birkin, his avatar, to the force of irony. In the episode of the Pompadour letter, Birkin's sagely rhetoric is inflated and exposed, as Halliday and his crowd circulate his most gnomic and inflated claims for 'the phosphorescent ecstasy of acute sensation' (*WL*, 383). If Gudrun was modelled on Katherine Mansfield, Lawrence himself finally accepts Mansfield as his formal model now, accepting irony's turn as the confirmation of a fatal process in which his own rhetoric appears as an earnest and apocalyptic shadow of Dionysian Aestheticism.

Loerke is subsequently introduced, as the spirit of Loki or Pan, with the Germans at the snowbound Tyrolese Inn 'doubled up with laughter hearing

his strange, droll words, his droll phrases and dialect (*WL*, 406). Ursula and Birkin are caught up in 'involuntary' laughter, which is magnified throughout the company of the inn into 'wild paroxysms'. Lawrence's narrative form changes subtly but definitively at this stage of the novel. As the multiple cultural and conceptual coordinates of his vision begin to coalesce, the novel assumes a tragic trajectory. Its tragic conditions are Euripidean rather than Aeschylean, which is to say that we cannot expect primitive violence and unconscious forces to be overcome by a move into modernity, the civic realm and the opening of democracy, the categories that would define the legacy of Hellenic culture in the Enlightenment. When the Bacchic dimension is opened up, a sacrifice will most likely be necessary. But sacrificial mechanisms emerge from modern reason as much as from primitive contagious violence, and Lawrence has already been building up a conceptual framework in which a variety of categories might coalesce to produce an overdetermined manifestation of 'disintegration', decadence or dissolution – a sacrificial object who will embody the alienation and stasis that Birkin has been preaching against and allow for it to be purged.

In the final phase of *Women in Love* there are a series of candidates that might assume the overdetermined status of a sacrificial object. Gerald has embodied a condition of the instrumental will that Lawrence needs to overcome to instate his alternative vision of germinal life; Gudrun lives by an irony which Lawrence has consistently demonized as the cultural reflection of that same instrumental will; and finally, Loerke embodies the condition of irony as the performance of aesthetic autonomy. In the dialectic of modernity which Lawrence has instated, then brought to the point of entropy, it is Loerke who exists at the vanguard – a representation of the artistic avant-garde as disintegrative force. Birkin imagines that Loerke has travelled 'a good many stages further' than himself in the path of dissolution, and he represents this endgame with a violent rhetoric of corruption: 'He is a gnawing little negation, gnawing at the roots of life' (*WL*, 428). It is in this identification that Birkin betrays himself, and Lawrence, by an anti-Semitic overdetermination of Aestheticism, irony and negation: 'He lives like a rat, in the river of corruption, just where it falls over into the bottomless pit. He's further than we are. He hates the ideal more acutely. He hates the ideal utterly, yet is still dominates him. I expect he's a Jew – or part Jewish'. At this point the anti-aesthetic tendency of the novel becomes implicated in a much more dangerous anti-Semitic gesture, as Loerke's Jewishness is made to accumulate and contain all the negative associations of cosmopolitanism, Aestheticism and modernity.

Any discussion of Lawrence's cultural politics must confront this anti-Semitic moment, and the most compelling account of its conceptual underpinnings in recent criticism is Anne Fernihough's seminal *D. H. Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology* (1993). Fernihough begins with the claim that

Lawrence 'almost always uses the term "aesthetic" pejoratively',[28] since he was consistently targeting the subjectivist basis of Bloomsbury art theorists such as Clive Bell. But crucially, Lawrence's rejection of aesthetic subjectivism was linked to a project that was both anti-modern and specifically generated by the conditions of modernity – the *völkisch* ideologies circulated in early-twentieth-century industrial Germany that were ultimately appropriated by Fascism. Following Bourdieu's *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, Fernihough explains how *völkisch* ideologies and later Heidegger's 'conservative revolution',[29] operated by discursive binaries such as organic natural culture versus disintegrated urban experience, which were founded on a normative ontology. The disclosure of being and the recuperation of authentic interiority demanded a revolt against industrial modernity and technology. As Fernihough points out, this applied an evaluative concept of decadence and disintegration (*Zersetzung*) directly against urban and cosmopolitan culture,[30] and *völkisch* ideologies invariably identified Jewishness with the negative terms of their critique of modernity – urbanism, disintegration, the aesthetic. We can follow on from Fernihough's reading to say that for *völkisch* ideologies, anti-Semitism was part of an overdetermined conceptual structure that ultimately became a sacrificial logic. They refused the dialectic of modernity, but their logic worked very much within the terms of the dialectical narrative. Instead of positioning the negative phase of modernity within a process of supersession, its attributes were condensed into a sacrificial object. As Zygmunt Bauman argues in *Modernity and the Holocaust*, the Jew in such discourses was a 'semantically overloaded entity' who at the same time evaded signification and cultural systems.[31] If the figure of the Jew was without nationality, roots or consistency, it was in this sense 'characterless', like the model of an aesthetic personality that Pater projected in 'Winckelmann'. In *Women in Love*, in one moment of anti-Semitic overdetermination, these two negative identifications are brought together, as Jewishness and Aestheticism become a compact figure of modern decadence.

Birkin's lurch for an anti-Semitic characterization of Loerke suggests how disturbing his rootless condition was for Lawrence, and it is always tempting with such rabid gestures of disavowal to posit the convulsive negotiation of an unconscious affinity. Birkin, like Loerke, is the embodiment of drift, and at one point he considers the possibility of abandoning altogether the 'old effort at serious living' (*WL*, 302) to embrace this flux. In one sense Birkin might be regarded as an abject mirror of Loerke – a preacher of a gospel of sensuous being who has no art to confirm his realm of the senses; a drifting spirit without the legitimacy of an artistic destiny. If in manner and rhetoric he could not be more different, Birkin does share these common features with Gabriel Nash of James's *The Tragic Muse*: the itinerant preacher of an aesthetic gospel who is less an artist than an abstract influence, whose purpose is to instigate a

sensuous life which demands a declaration of independence from modernity and labour, a mode of being that can easily assume the guise of undirected languor. Birkin's consistent promotion of dialectical spleen and cultural negation belies this affinity, but there is a residual Paterism in Birkin nonetheless, not least in the insistence, which he shares with Gudrun, that progress demands a series of constant revolts and disgusts.

In the avant-garde milieu that Lawrence evokes, inchoate sensuous life has been formalized into a practice of self that tenuously balances Heraclitean drift with Stoic detachment. Yet in his guise as Loki, Loerke momentarily enacts a Dionysian affirmation of the state of drift, which Birkin has been able to envisage only as negation. This anarchic possibility appears to recede when Loerke becomes involved with Gudrun, a relationship which becomes a narcissistic mirroring of two ironists. The two artists become subsumed in a representative and self-reflexive condition, and both Loerke and Gudrun aspire to become the art work in its condition of ideal autonomy. In doing so, they replicate the condition figured by anti-Semitic discourses as the essence of Jewishness, except that what is disturbing to the anti-Semite is precisely the lack of essence, what Sartre identified as 'viscosity'.[32]

In spite of Birkin's spleen, Loerke does not take on the final sacrificial position in Lawrence's narrative. The avant-garde sculptor appears to have achieved a unique position of freedom, and makes a strong claim to exist outside of the instrumental order which Lawrence has mutually demonized. Ultimately it is Gerald who comes to assume the status of the *pharmakos*, while for Gudrun, Loerke assumes the condition of Milton's Satan, asserting his own space and the independence of the artistic will:

> She knew that Loerke, in his innermost soul, was detached from everything, for him there was neither heaven nor earth nor hell. He admitted no allegiance, he gave no adherence anywhere. He was single and, by abstraction from the rest, absolute in himself. (*WL*, 452)

Aestheticism remains in *Women in Love* as an obdurate strategy of refusal, and Loerke and Gudrun come to manifest the aesthetic dimension as evasion and viscosity. In continuous conversational play, their discourse has the characteristics of symbolist poetry, cultivating suggestibility, elision and esoteric reference:

> Their whole correspondence was in a strange, barely comprehensible suggestivity. [. . .] The whole game was one of subtle inter-suggestivity, and they wanted to keep it on the plane of suggestion. From their verbal and physical *nuances* they got the highest satisfaction in the nerves, from a queer interchange of half-suggested ideas, looks, expressions and gestures. (*WL*, 448)

This is situated explicitly as the discursive strategy of autonomous Aestheticism: 'Art and Life were to them the Reality and the Unreality'.

In her promotion of the aesthetic as the sole reality Gudrun comes to identify with Cleopatra, Mary Stuart and Eleanora Duse as images of the female aesthetic will, but Loerke remains her model precisely because he performs the ironic subversion of all models: 'She knew he would be making ironical, playful remarks as he wandered in hell – if he were in the humour. And that pleased her immensely. It seemed like a rising above the dreariness of actuality, the monotony of contingencies' (*WL*, 468). Irony is beyond good and evil, an infernal beacon that lights Gudrun's way out of England with its static binaries of aesthetic aristocracy and organic class belonging, cultural consciousness and blood consciousness.

But irony's trajectory towards freedom is itself modelled on aesthetic stasis. As in the logic of desire that Wilde represented in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Loerke's continual ironic practice is read as a mimetic desire for an absolute ideal of artistic form. This is embodied in a specific object – the sculpture of a woman on a horse – which Barry Bullen has identified with the image of *Godiva* (1906) by Joseph Moest.[33] The girl represented is 'a mere bud', and her legs, which are 'just passing towards cruel womanhood, dangled childishly over the side of the powerful horse', while the horse is 'rigid with its pent up power', an image of the imposition of form on energetic matter; 'Its neck was arched and terrible, like a sickle, its flanks were pressed back, rigid with power' (*WL*, 429). It is worth remembering that Loerke does not present the actual sculpture but a photogravure reproduction, and this remove has a double function of abstracting the object from its sensuous form and at the same time emphasizing the monstrosity of the image as the disfigurement of a woman.

Another close analogue for Loerke's image would be Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's woodcut *Standing Nude with Crossed Arms* (1905), which Jill Lloyd sees as a representation of the 'frozen angularity' of Jugendstil style.[34] This is precisely what Ursula so vehemently rejects in Loerke's sculpture. For Gudrun the image of the object immediately becomes an exemplification of the discourse of aesthetic autonomy, whereas for Ursula it is the direct representation of a woman's imprisonment, which she subsequently reads back to the condition of the model and to Loerke's physical treatment of his subject. Since this appears to Loerke and Gudrun as an unsophisticated biographical reading, the two Aesthetes are able to cultivate and maintain a counter-argument without undue stress. But Gudrun's and Loerke's insouciance is clearly defensive, and their derision of Ursula's emotional response ultimately supports Lawrence's critique of Aestheticism. Ursula's argument is ineffective within her immediate circumstance, but forceful within the critical scheme of the novel. Through her immediate revulsion, Lawrence instigates a revelation of Loerke's misogyny, allowing him to orchestrate a dramatic critique of

aesthetic autonomy through a return of the repressed – the woman's body, and the materiality of the art work that the modernist formalists so emphatically deny when it is so clearly present to Ursula. That Lawrence should be so clearly using the strategies of materialist feminism, pre-empting feminist art history from the 1960s onwards, is at odds with much of his reception. But at the same time, the revelation of the repressed woman's body might be regarded as a strategic move in a project which has a different overall motivation and aim.

In his representation of Loerke and the autonomous art object Lawrence is attempting to launch a sophisticated attack on the modernist avant-garde.[35] The fact that this autonomous object is never presented only increases the pressure that Lawrence is placing on the aesthetic discourses of Modernism. Loerke holds a contradictory model of culture. While he asserts the absolute autonomy of his sculpture, he has also been involved in a form of industrial art, a painting of a frieze on a factory wall, which recalls the design of Mark Gertler's *Merry Go Round* – the 1916 painting that Lawrence acclaimed as both terrible and true in its figuring of industrial repetition.[36] Fernihough has emphasized the direct association between Lawrence's representation of Loerke and the language of Lawrence's letter to Gertler, where he figures Gertler's Jewishness as the basis of his particular insight into the 'lurid processes of inner decomposition'.[37] However it is notable that Lawrence sees Gertler's Jewishness as a protective force against this decomposition as much as a basis of insight into its process. While he sees Gertler as 'beyond me', he does, as Fernihough notes, still stress his affinity and similarity, 'I think I am sufficiently the same, to be able to understand'.[38]

The way that Lawrence uses Gertler's painting in *Women in Love* is more sophisticated than the rhetoric of degeneration in his letter suggests. By transposing the image from the condition of the framed painting to that of industrial 'decoration', Lawrence begins to describe how the status of the aesthetic will be transformed in Modernism's reaction to modernity. As Adorno would later assert, '*l'art pour l'art* was the mask of its opposite',[39] whether this 'opposite' was the kitsch of the culture industry or, in the case of Loerke, industrial culture. Loerke appears to celebrate the new conditions in which autonomous art collapses into something like a total social art work:

> Sculpture and architecture must go together. The day for irrelevant statues, as for wall pictures, is over. As a matter of fact sculpture is always part of an architectural conception. And since churches are all museum stuff, since industry is our business, now, then let us make our places of industry our art – our factory-area our Parthenon – ecco!! (*WL*, 424)

The contradictions that emerge from Loerke'e aesthetics are representative of Lawrence's attempt to save the dimension of sensuous experience from

both autonomous art and public culture. Having initially stated the claim for art's autonomy within modernity, Loerke articulates the futurist fetish for the machine within an all-embracing conception of industrial modernity as an aesthetic phenomenon: 'we have the opportunity to make beautiful factories, beautiful machine-houses – we have the opportunity'.

It is important to recognize that Loerke's statements are not merely the blithe provocation of a fashionable futurism, what the editors of *Blast* had decried as the 'melodrama of modernity'.[40] Loerke's programme is rooted in the aesthetic culture of early-twentieth-century Dresden, where the artist group called Die Brücke were attempting to reconcile the expressionist desire for a subjective and critical art with the functionalist and utopian claims that would later be articulated by the Bauhaus. For Jill Lloyd, Die Brücke embodied a double imperative within early modernist aesthetics: 'The language of international Modernism between c. 1908 and 1912, which recalled Symbolist aesthetics from the turn of the century [. . .] often sought to counteract the personal and subjective emphasis of the new "expressive" art by relating it to a monumental, public tradition of decorative painting'.[41] Loerke has two contrary ways of counteracting the subjective; one is to establish a relation with a monumental tradition, and the other is to assert the formal autonomy of the work: both appear to have the equivalent function of evacuating art of aesthetic subjectivity. Yet it is clear at the same time that both Loerke and Gudrun have secured a vision of the aesthetic will beyond art, in spite of their gestures towards aesthetic impersonality. Ultimately they will confirm the supremacy of aesthetic subjectivity through irony.

With Loerke as her aspirational model of negation, Gudrun increasingly seeks perfection through a series of disgusts. The consequence is a peculiar kind of ennui that emerges as irony's afterlife. Gudrun is at the end of experience, and at this evacuated zenith, 'everything was intrinsically a piece of irony to her' (*WL*, 418). Gudrun's irony achieves this absolute condition in the final stages of her relationship with Gerald, and it persists after his death. Even at the point that Ursula runs to comfort her on Gerald's death, 'still she could not escape the cold devil of irony that froze her soul' (*WL*, 476). In her conflict with Gerald, this irony supported a performance of mastery that directly challenged and supplanted Gerald's instrumental will. It is in this conflicting relationship, more than in the conceptual binaries of Loerke's avant-garde aesthetics, that Lawrence brings his critique of Aestheticism to a conclusion, but the way he does so has surprising results, which ultimately recuperate some of the central tenets of the Victorian aesthetic renaissance.

Gudrun and Loerke, it is clear, will persist as isolate models of art's autonomy, more autonomous that the art object itself in the implacable work of their irony. But Gerald becomes the tragic subject of the narrative precisely because his will breaks down – he fails to cultivate absolute irony and has no ultimate desire to do so. As Gudrun wins the struggle for mastery, Gerald is

only capable of conceiving of his own future in either of two ways. Either he will defeat her in a struggle to the death, following the logic of Hegel's master/slave dialectic in which the will to negation is the only genuine proof of autonomy. Or he will replicate her isolate will:

> It seemed to him that Gudrun was sufficient unto herself, closed round and completed, like a thing in a case. In the calm, static reason of his soul, he recognized this, and admitted it was her right, to be closed round upon herself, self-complete, without desire. He realized it, he admitted it, it only needed one last effort on his own part, to win for himself the same completeness. He knew that it only needed one convulsion of his will for him to be able to turn upon himself also, to close upon himself as a stone fixes upon itself, and is impervious, self-completed, a thing isolated. (*WL*, 445)

It is Gerald's ultimate unwillingness to achieve this state that makes his condition tragic, since in his failure we witness the belated opening of a new organ of sense. His fantasy of a final 'convulsion' of the will only induces a more profound rent in himself: 'This knowledge threw him into a terrible chaos. Because, however much he might mentally *will* to be immune and self-complete, the desire for this state was lacking, and he could not create it'. Lawrence makes a distinction between *will* and desire, where will is the conscious application of knowledge to fulfil the project of freedom in detachment. The whole force of Lawrence's representation of Gerald has been in its critique of this inviolate will, and the narrative trajectory appears to have framed Gerald's instrumental subjectivity as the sacrificial victim necessary for the rituals of Lawrence's vitalist cult.

The ideological framework for this sacrifice has already been established in 'The Industrial Magnate', which developed an explicit critique of industrial modernity. Following this statement of Lawrence's position, the continual emphasis on the correspondences between Gerald's and Gudrun's technical subjectivity implicated the aesthetic in his critique of industrial will. The difference in the final stage of the novel is that the equivalence between Gerald and Gudrun is violently rent: in Gerald's defeat he achieves precisely the kind of aesthetic consciousness that Gudrun might be said to have suppressed in her achievement of technical detachment and autonomy. In one of the most astonishing moments of transformation in the novel, Gerald experiences the belated opening of the aesthetic organ of the spirit. But rather than the Schillerian dream of liberation through play, this results in the translation of Paterian Diaphaneitè into nervous collapse and trauma. Typical of the decadent imagination, Gerald is identified by a mythic image of wounding:

> A strange rent had been torn in him; like a victim that is torn open and given to the heavens, so had he been torn apart and given to Gudrun. How should

> he close again? This wound, this strange, infinitely-sensitive opening of his soul, where he was exposed, like an open flower, to all the universe, and in which he was given to his complement, the other, the unknown, this wound, this disclosure, this unfolding of his own covering, leaving him incomplete, limited, unfinished, like an open flower of the sky, this was his cruelest joy. Why then should he forego it. Why should he close up and become impervious, immune, like a partial thing in a sheath, when he had broken forth, like a seed that has germinated, to issue forth in being, embracing the unrealized heavens. (*WL*, 446)

Germinate life is revealed by an infinite sensitivity, an unfolding of an unrealized state which only emerges belatedly in a diaphanous condition of victimhood. This is the language and experience of Aestheticism as a vision of aesthetic awakening and encounter rather than the consolidation of autonomy in subjective detachment. Gerald is tragically belated, in that he is able to experience this openness to the unknown only as he lays on a desolate Alpine rock face, defeated by the more supreme isolation of Gudrun and Loerke, yet releasing the sensitivity that the two Aesthetes have denied precisely through the opening of his wounds in defeat. Having thrown himself in a final submission to the immediate ecstasies of a 'momentaneous' life – Aestheticism's fantasy of epicurean ecstasy manifested in an orgy of being and skiing – Gerald subsequently uncovers a much deeper vein of late Romantic Aestheticism; not merely the Heraclitean urgency of transient becoming, but an exposure to the universe as he germinates and expands into the 'unrealized heavens'. Lawrence pre-empts the discourse and pathos of Heideggerian ontology here – Gerald is experiencing the disclosure of being in this moment of utmost solitariness – and to this extent his sacrificial moment confirms Fernihough's comparative sense of Lawrence's affinities with the post-Hegelian phenomenology of the twentieth century, with its well-known political dangers. Yet the rhetoric of disclosure here is radically abstracted from the organic ties of political ontology – clearing, ground, land and soil. Against Lawrence's intentions, its closest affinities are with Pater's vision of Diaphaneitè, sensuous renaissance and the awakening of the spirit.

The final question for this analysis is whether this is the confirmation of Lawrence's critique of the aesthetic dimension in a sacrificial mechanism, or the recuperation of the aesthetic at the very point of its apparent negation. The trace of Pater's diaphanous personality in Gerald's belated flowering is the sign of the persistence of the aesthetic dimension at the point where Lawrence has put it under the greatest narrative trial. This is a trial effected by the systematic reduction of a group of individuals in an isolated background of snow, but equally on trial are the founding conceptual categories of Aestheticism: artistic autonomy, irony and play, the freedom of aesthetic subjectivity and beauty.

The idea of beauty as an end in itself is put on trial precisely for its finality – the beautiful image is an end point which Lawrence narrates according to the familiar Romantic topos of the deathly Moneta.[42] Yet it is Gerald, rather than the ice woman of Romantic mythology, who embodies this beauty, which appears to his lover Gudrun as a condensation of the instrumental will revealed in flesh. In the chapter entitled 'Love and Death' (in case Lawrence's Romantic subtext was not already clear enough), Gudrun makes her sensual approach to Gerald with 'transcendent fear' (*WL*, 331), yet with 'infinitely delicate, encroaching, wondering fingers' that explore the 'mould of his face', caressing the mask in its implacable otherness. '"You are so *beautiful*," she murmured', in such a way that the word hovers out of the moment. Like Gerald at the moment of Gudrun's utterance, beauty is 'suspended', and this suspension defines its character as a constellation of force in form that remains insubvertible and distant, only approachable in a language that seems to astonish Gudrun as she utters it. Gudrun's murmurs are the sign that she has assented to an ideal or force beyond her, and it is these moments where her continuous will to irony breaks down. Before the image of Loerke's girl on a horse, she declares her appreciation of its material, 'Green Bronze!', only to follow this by a more subterranean assent to the dark power of the object: '"Yes, beautiful," she murmured, looking up at him with a certain dark homage' (*WL*, 429). In the final phase of Gudrun's relationship with Gerald, even at the point where her rejection of him seems complete, Gudrun is affected for a last time by the finality and distance of his beauty: 'he looked curiously innocent and pure, really beautiful. Sometimes it came upon him, this look of clear distance, and it fascinated her' (*WL*, 450). Gudrun's desire is incited by the familiar provocations of distance: 'She went to his room, hotly, violently in love with him. He was so beautiful and inaccessible', but Gerald's innocent cultivation of this distance is a sign of the fatality of his beauty. A curious recasting of Dorian Gray as industrial magnate, Gerald appears to complete the novel's critique of the ends of beauty, but Lawrence's intervention in the discourses of late Romantic Aestheticism does not end there.

In the consummation of Birkin's love for Ursula, Lawrence recuperates the force of beauty through the discourse of Romantic pantheism, much as Pater had in his essay 'Wordsworth' and in his later work on Platonism. When Birkin finally relents on his ranting critiques against the conventional idea of love, he comes to encounter Ursula as 'tenderly beautiful' and 'unfolded [. . .] undefined and glimmering with the unseen' (*WL*, 368). Lawrence has some trouble with this discourse, and Ursula is embarrassed by Birkin's newfound enthusiasm for the language of Romanticism. Even though this is the same discourse that Lawrence later uses to evoke the sacrificial unfolding of Gerald with such urgency, it repeatedly breaks down to the point of Romantic cliché when Lawrence uses it to voice Birkin's impression of Ursula. It is one symptom of this entropic tendency of Romantic discourse that as it slides into stasis, it

continually tempts a reversion to ironic disavowal. When a recycled language appears to choke the subject, then irony steps in, easing the convulsions of the throat while implicitly gesturing towards the consciousness of linguistic obsolescence. Yet in the case of Birkin's love for Ursula, it is precisely the emptiness of language that engenders a new vision of the immanence of beauty: 'There were infinite distances of silence between them. How could he tell her of the immanence of her beauty, that was not form or weight or colour, but something like a strange golden light!' (*WL*, 369). At this moment Lawrence recuperates the discourse of Romanticism in order to evoke the beauty of a germinal life which evades representation.

In the final moment of *Women in Love*, Birkin and Ursula are at a great distance from the teeming life of *The Rainbow*, but it exists within their past and in their future possibilities. In the scene where Ursula narrates her family history, a space opens up in *Women in Love* in which *The Rainbow* makes a brief but miraculous appearance, since what Ursula is narrating is Lawrence's earlier novel. In these conditions what appears is not so much the germinal life experienced by Tom Brangwen, then figured in the dance of his stepdaughter Anna, but an aesthetic afterlife that refracts and contains this life. This is what makes Lawrence's vision far closer to Aestheticism than his sacrificial critique of modernity allows. In the rift between *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*, a fissure that has already emerged in the later stages of *The Rainbow*, Lawrence acutely realizes the same historical pathos that animated the Victorian vision of a sensuous renaissance within modernity. In Birkin's realization of the immanence of beauty, in Ursula's recovery of narrative *Bildung* and in the final insistence on dialectical engagement rather than the instrumental appropriation of nature, Lawrence was reanimating the aesthetic even after he had put it to the flame.

Chapter 6

Aristocracies of Mourning: The Reconsecration of Aestheticism in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*

During Charles Ryder's first visit to Lord and Lady Marchmain's country estate in *Brideshead Revisited*, he is introduced to a new world of aesthetic possibilities in what are at first only tentative glimpses. Walking down a dark corridor, Sebastian Flyte unbars the shutters of an unused window, and light streams into an exquisitely decorated but empty room. For Charles, revealed beauty is all the more acute for its obliquity and absence of content. As Sebastian continues the country house tour, Charles is introduced to the deconsecrated chapel; a religious site which has been reupholstered for Aestheticism: 'The whole interior had been gutted, elaborately refurnished and redecorated in the arts-and-crafts style of the last decade of the nineteenth century'.[1] In a novel of aesthetic education which attempts to orchestrate a translation of artistic to religious passion, the symbolic content of the abandoned chapel is as overstated as its gaudy altar triptych. One of the primary gestures of Aestheticism was a deconsecration of religious architecture and painting, performed in order to emancipate the sensuous qualities of Renaissance culture. *Brideshead* engages with the fundamental issues of Paterian Aestheticism: aesthetic education, Hellenism and homosexuality, the compromises to art's autonomy under the conditions of patronage and consumerism and the attempt to live an aesthetic life based on the emancipation of play. But it is also a fiction of mourning – for youth as a state of languor and play, for an imaginary historical moment when homosexual love might have been unconcealed and, more generally, for Aestheticism before it was translated into Decadence, and before the excesses of Decadence led to a symptomatic retreat into Catholic austerity.

Jay Bernstein has argued that the foundational statement of art's autonomy in modernity – Kant's *Critique of Judgment* – is also a document of mourning; 'the experience of the beautiful, the pleasure we take in beauty as it is defined and delimited by Kant in the third *Critique*, is best understood *as if* this pleasure were memorial, a remembering that is also a mourning'.[2] What is mourned is the separation of beauty and truth, that ideal sisterhood that was promised

in 'The Earliest System Programme of German Idealism' and in the more fey and autumnal visions of English Romantic poetry. When Waugh's Sebastian Flyte, a translation of Dorian Gray into a Catholic aristocrat, writes that he is 'mourning my lost innocence' (*B*, 77), Charles finds his rhetoric conventional and insipid. His letter is a betrayal of the beauty that he has come to tacitly idolize. But the ephemerality of Sebastian's confession of mourning belies its seriousness. This is the lament of aesthetic subjectivity after it has claimed its freedom but lost its objective and purpose. No longer associated with the renaissance of beauty as a public project, Aestheticism has retreated to a moment that was enshrined in Pater's advocacy of Hellenic adolescence, but this transitional moment carries with it the shadow of its inevitable passing, as well as its inoperative condition, estranged from productive labour and identity.

The same melancholia was recorded by H.D. in the long lyric sequence she published the year before Waugh's novel of aristocratic mourning. In *The Walls Do Not Fall* (1944), H.D. imagines an aesthetic state increasingly divorced from a new world order in both its political and cultural manifestations:

> we are these people,
> wistful, ironical, willful,
> who have no part in
> new-world construction,
> in the confederacy of labour,
> the practical issues of art
> and the cataloguing of utilities[3]

It is unclear at this point if this is a lament or a boast on behalf of the 'wistful, ironical' people, but her warning to those who are 'occupied / in the bewildering / sand-heap maze / of present day endeavour' is that they shall be 'paralysed with inaction'[4], echoing the stasis of Eliot's 'The Hollow Men'. Eliot himself makes a brief appearance in *Brideshead*. When the Aesthete Anthony Blanche stands on an Oxford balcony and 'in languishing tones recited passages from *The Waste Land* to the sweatered and muffled throng that was on its way to the river' (*B*, 34), it is the sign that the idea of an aesthetic life has persisted without particular regard for cultural content but with a very performative regard for context. The scene is all, whether it be the 'languishing' space of Oxford's canals, the 'cloistral hush' of its colleges or the ideal transposed form of these impressions – the country house.

Waugh's 1930 article on the contemporary revival of the 1890s suggests that he regarded Modernism as essentially a continuation of fin de siècle Aestheticism; he singles out Cocteau in Paris (notably a friend of Anthony Blanche in the novel) as an addict of modernity, but more generally he is concerned with the 'many kind, rich ladies in London who think they are attaining this modernity'.[5] But Oxford remained the original scene of Aestheticism:

in spite of the decadent and modernist appropriation of the metropolis; it still allowed for a wistful and ironical resistance to labour and practicality. Waugh was scathing of Oxford's claims to be an ideal civilizing institution and warned against the sentimentality of the Oxford novel, but he still maintained its value as a space of civility and play that allowed for a certain autonomy, albeit temporary, from the 'dreary and futile' work life that characterizes the adulthood of most of its graduates.[6]

If Aestheticism had returned to the ideal spaces of its youth, so had its most vitriolic critics. In *Four Quartets* (1943), also published the year before *Brideshead*, Eliot reconsecrated the poetic space of his origins, and this conservative act of recovery could be seen as the end of Modernism, as a metropolitan and cosmopolitan project and as an avant-garde formal experiment. Eliot's late poetry reads like a spiritualized and exquisitely modulated version of James's syntax in *The Golden Bowl*, revolving around a spiritual centre through a combination of continual conceptual qualification and imaginative acts of recovered memory. As H.D. tarried with the negative in a 'wistful, ironic' limbo, brooding on the rebirth of myth, Eliot sought the solution to this ironic condition in a musical evocation of Anglican spirituality which also, at the risk of some dissonance, recuperated the conservative voice of his prose criticism. Yet to a cosmopolitan Aesthete such as Waugh's Anthony Blanche, *The Waste Land* would offer far greater opportunities: Wagnerian fragments of exquisite sensation, the reanimation of Hellenic and Elizabethan idylls, and the intoxicating disorientation of a new kind of poetic parataxis. Waugh's staging of Eliot may well carry the more blunt symbolic reference to the evisceration of contemporary cultural experience and the absence of God, but Anthony Blanche has enough abrasive resilience to carry the aesthetic gospel through the wilderness, in spite of his apparent absurdity and in spite of his creator's spiritual master plan. Blanche achieves a certain independence from Waugh's narrative irony since although he is presented as a parodic character, he is too self-conscious about his marginality to bear the brunt of an authorial critique, such as Lawrence imposes on Loerke or James imposes on Gilbert Osmond or Gabriel Nash. This independence is ultimately suggestive of the difficulty Waugh will have in fully banishing Aestheticism, in spite of his narrative attempt to orchestrate 'the operation of divine grace' (*B*, 7) in the lives of Charles Ryder and the Flyte family.

Waugh's strategy towards Aestheticism is radically different to the authors I have already discussed, although he incorporates James's example both stylistically and psychologically. Following from Jamesian experiments such as *The Aspern Papers* and *The Author of Beltraffio*, Waugh's narrator is himself an Aesthete of a peculiarly characterless kind; a 'man without content' perhaps, to adopt the phrase Agamben adapts from Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* to characterize the persistence of the Romantic ironist in modernity.[7] Charles Ryder's absence of identity is also the source of his tact, not only in the social

sense – his infiltration of an aristocratic family is masterful – but in the sense that Pater used the word 'tact' to describe the imbrication of taste and style.[8] This is not so much style in the Wildean performative sense as in the form of the sentence and the particular mode of experience that it projects.

Waugh was curiously reticent about the influence of Pater; although he made satirical snipes at Wilde, he made no reference to Pater's work in his essays. In *Brideshead* his explicit invocation of Pater is left until late in the novel, when Charles's reanimates Pater's ekphrasis of La Gioconda in an important meditation on the nature of beauty. But Pater's legacy has a more subliminal yet pervasive presence in the novel. One of the major achievements of literary Aestheticism was the development of a kind of sentence that uniquely facilitated the representation of aesthetic experience in both musical and visual dimensions, whether in the context of the concert space, the gallery or the life-world. Pater uses this method in his famous evocation of *La Gioconda*: 'She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas [. . .] and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes' (*R*, 99). This is the passage that Waugh will reanimate in the final movement of *Brideshead*, but there are many less elongated examples of ekphrastic prose in Pater's work which hint at this kind of extended impressionistic form.

Brideshead Revisited is saturated in a specifically Paterian style, and Charles Ryder continually rehearses the kind of sentence that Pater had brought to perfection in 'The School of Giorgione'. Pater's ekphrastic sentence has a tendency to accumulate a series of impressions without hierarchy or subordination. As Joseph O'Leary remarks, 'Pater's style was paratactic, setting one impression alongside another in a way that frustrates the search for logical order and hierarchy',[9] though we should certainly qualify this by noting that Pater's analytic and theoretical assertions are frequently framed in a hypotaxis just as complex, if more elegant, than that of the late Henry James. Stanley Fish cites Pater's 'Conclusion' as an example of the continual qualification and subordination performed by hypotaxis, noting specifically how this style is peculiarly appropriate to Pater's argument about the 'infinitely divisible' nature of impressions and experience.[10] This is an acute observation about the style of the 'Conclusion', but Pater's aesthetic prose continually modulates between this hypotactic analytic mode, which performs the capacity for refinement and discrimination that he continually promotes, and a paratactic poetic mode, which has a unique capacity to evoke an aesthetic life; languid, erotically ambiguous, existing in transitional states, refusing the completion of the single image and constantly modulating between different tonalities and states of being.

It is in Pater's ekphrastic prose that paratactic effects are the dominant and exemplary mode; when he takes us into a museum world of successive images, or when he allows a more unconstrained chain of associations, between image, landscape, musical impression, memory and desire. In the following example,

the form of the sentence presents an image of aesthetic democracy and musical life; the spirit of the Giorgionesque, embodied in Titian's sketches for the *Concert*, the musical image that Titian held in relief against 'the silence of Venice':

> 'In sketch of finished picture, in various collections, we may follow it through many intricate variations — men fainting at music; music at the pool-side while people fish, or mingled with the sound of the pitcher in the well, or heard across running water, or among the flocks; the tuning of instruments; people with intent faces, as if listening, like those described by Plato in an ingenious passage of the Republic, to detect the smallest interval of musical sound, the smallest undulation in the air, or feeling for music in thought on a stringless instrument, ear and finger refining themselves infinitely, in the appetite for sweet sound; a momentary touch of an instrument in the twilight, as one passes through some unfamiliar room, in a chance company' (*R*, 119)

I cited this passage at the beginning of my critical narrative of Pater's legacy, but the passage is worth repeating since it is a model of the Paterian style that will be echoed throughout *Brideshead Revisited*. Pater's Giorgionesque mode permeates the novel, whose symbolic centre is a baroque fountain and whose narrative pivot is a trip to Venice, but it a peculiar form of sentence that defines Charles Ryder's residual Paterism. This Giorgionesque mode of being is tied to an accumulative and successive prose style that produces paratactic effects. Even when Pater is not using parataxis in its strictest sense, which relies on the uses of successive and discrete clauses without subordinating or associative conjunctions, his Giorgionesque style tends to orchestrate a series of successive impressions that maintain a relative autonomy; 'music at the pool side [. . .] the tuning of instruments [. . .] people with intent faces'. When the passage I have quoted modulates into hypotaxis, as in the reference to the listeners in Plato's *Republic*, this is not to effect a sequence of Jamesian qualifications, but to effect an 'exquisite pause' before a sequence of images becomes a sequence of acts. Through an accretion of semi-colons and participle clauses, Pater does not so much build an image as orchestrate 'intricate variations', both of response ('fainting . . . listening . . . feeling'), and of subject, ranging from music's touch, to the air and the ear, and finally the 'unfamiliar room' with its musical and erotic promise. Pater's paratactic efforts have a special capacity to evoke a spatio-temporal continuum, since they both mimic gradual motion and gradually elucidate a space through the elaboration of perspectives. Adorno has argued that Holderlin's later poetry achieved a musical dimension precisely by paratactic effects, since 'dispensing with predicative assertion causes the rhythm to approach musical development'.[11] For Adorno, this observation was connected to a proto-modernist formal prescription; in Holderlin's poetry, 'the parataxis

are striking – artificial disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax'. Adorno defines this paratactic effect as a striving towards the condition of music; 'the transformation of language into a serial order whose elements are linked differently than in the judgment is musiclike'. This musical dimension has a utopian function; it presents an image of unsubordinated nature precisely by its formal freedom; and in one sense we might argue that this is precisely the effect of Pater's Giorgionesque and Dionysian prose, but Pater's paratactic effects are less easy to equate with the radical disjunctions of Modernist poetics. The Giorgionesque sentence is more languid and carefully modulated, and this is what constitutes the ambivalent legacy of his style. Pater may be the progenitor of a radical utopian vision of sensuous freedom, but he might equally be the legislator of an aristocratic Epicureanism. One of the most telling sites of this ambivalence was the afterlife of his style.

The aesthetic prose that Charles Ryder inherits from Pater has a number of qualities that are specific to the evocation of his idealized youth; it resists the arc of conceptual development, and it insists on a stately pace or deliberate languor. And this stateliness is precisely its appeal to Charles Ryder in his continual attempt to evoke the languor of an aesthetic life while he already claims to have moved towards Catholicism and come to 'accept the supernatural as the real' (*B*, 83). That this is an acceptance rather than an embrace suggests the grounds of Ryder's attempt to recuperate Aestheticism, as if the form of his recollection might ameliorate a reluctant move towards spiritual ascesis. At the same time, his evocation of Oxford suggests the converse desire to ameliorate the transient ecstasies of Aestheticism by recuperating the meditative properties of religious space:

> In her spacious and quiet streets men walked and spoke as they had done in Newman's day; her autumnal mists, her grey springtime and the rare glory of her summer days – such as that day – when the chestnut was in flower and the bells rang out high and clear over her gables and cupolas, exhaled the soft airs of centuries of youth. It was this cloistral hush which gave our laughter its resonance, and carried it still, joyously, over the intervening clamour. Here discordantly, in Eights week came a rabble of womankind, some hundreds strong, twittering and fluttering over the cobbles and up the steps, sight-seeing and pleasure-seeking, drinking claret cup, eating cucumber sandwiches; pushed in punts about the river, herded in the droves to the college barges. (*B*, 23)

This is one of the first examples of Ryder's Paterian style, and it is as uniquely attuned to the experience of Oxford as Pater's was to Giorgione's Venice. What Waugh manages to do here is to establish an initial overriding impression of the 'spacious and quiet streets' with their 'cloistral hush', and then extend this through the evocation of the laughter which is carried, 'still joyously, over the

intervening clamour'. He subsequently elaborates a series of impressions of the 'rabble of womankind'; 'twittering and fluttering [. . .] sight-seeing and pleasure-seeking, drinking claret cup, eating cucumber sandwiches'. The list of the constituent activities that make up the general clamour is extensive, but the proliferation has the effect of focusing the 'cloistral hush' of Charles's Oxford more acutely, allowing it to pervade the clamour. Charles's aim, from the beginning, is an aesthetic life which might preserve and maintain this 'cloistral hush'. His attempt to combine this serious model of ascesis with the Epicureanism to which he is introduced by Sebastian mimics the double imperative of Pater's Oxford.

Waugh is framing Aestheticism twice removed, since Charles looks back from the second world war to a period immediately after the first war, to a group of undergraduates who were living the afterlife of the Victorian fin de siècle. He admits that the image of his Oxford rooms decorated 'with Morris stuffs and Arundel prints' is a fantasy, but he did have a screen that was 'painted by Roger Fry with a Provençal landscape, which I had bought inexpensively when the Omega workshops were sold' (*B*, 29). Yet the two fundamental experiences which reveal his Aestheticism undermine the formalism of Roger Fry and the Omega workshops. The first is a gesture which supplants form with feeling: 'it was not until Sebastian, idly turning the page of Clive Bell's *Art*, read: "Does anyone feel the same kind of emotion for a butterfly or a flower that he feels for a cathedral or a picture?" "Yes. *I* do," that my eyes were opened' (*B*, 30). The expansion of the aesthetic realm and the insistence on affective response fulfils Pater's preface to *The Renaissance*, and the Epicureanism of their Oxford life together is characterized as a subversion of puritanical Ruskinism as much as a puritanical Modernism. Charles's articulation of these two cultural modes is acute, and when he begins his 'aesthetic education' at Brideshead he locates his artistic 'sentiments' against both Ruskin and Fry: 'though in opinion I had made that easy leap, characteristic of my generation, from the puritanism of Ruskin to the puritanism of Roger Fry, my sentiments at heart were insular and medieval' (*B*, 79). If we omit the final clause here, Charles has positioned himself in the exact cultural and historical space of Paterian Aestheticism.

Charles's omission of Pater's name is significant, since his general reluctance to identify himself with a Hellenist subculture may be symptomatic of his inability to confront his homosexual love for Sebastian. His 'insular and medieval' sentiments mask the cosmopolitan expansiveness and eroticism of Pater's sensuous Renaissance, but Brideshead teases him out into a pluralist embrace of historical style which he comes to define as baroque. Pre-empting the stylistic plurality of postmodern Aestheticism and setting a template for Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*, Charles Ryder experiences Schiller's aesthetic education, the emancipation of play, as a rococo profusion of gilded perspectives: 'It was an aesthetic education to live within those walls, to wander from room to room, from the Soanesque library to the Chinese drawing room, a dazzle with gilt

pagodas and nodding mandarins . . .' (*B*, 79). The sentence continues as such, with an accumulation of precious objects; furniture, tapestries, parchments. Charles has defined this moment as his conversion to the baroque, a term which Waugh himself used in his appreciation of Ronald Firbank to distinguish the late decadent novelist's 'structural' wit from the 'ornamental' wit and 'sentimental' vision of Oscar Wilde: 'Wilde is rococo; Firbank is baroque'.[12] In spite of his profession of the same values as Waugh himself, Ryder clearly embraces the profusion of ornamentation that he encounters in Brideshead's rococo interiors. Yet these beautiful empty rooms are only the forerunner to the typically baroque architectural majesty of Brideshead's vast terrace, framing a fountain that had been transplanted from southern Italy, 'imported and re-erected in an alien but welcoming climate'. Sebastian would have Charles draw the terrace with 'a *fête champêtre* with a ribboned swing and a Negro page and a shepherd playing the pipes' (*B*, 80), yet Charles declines. This is ostensibly due to his lack of technical prowess, but there is at least a trace of Waugh's rigorous regulation of sentiment here, even if the dominant note of Charles's encounter with Brideshead is Epicurean satiety.

In the continuation of Charles's 'aesthetic education', we see an escalation of those long paragraphs of parataxis which elaborate a series of pleasures, in such a way as to suggest a greater horizon against which those pleasures are both qualified and expanded. Parataxis is cumulative rather than analytic and hierarchical; it is the rhetoric of aesthetic freedom, but it is also the form in which aesthetic subjectivity relieves itself of its compulsive refinement without giving in wholly to an undifferentiated flow of experience. What this form uniquely evokes is the 'languor of youth' (*B*, 76), but it is also clearly the discourse of nostalgia:

> It was thus I like to remember Sebastian, as he was that summer, when we wandered alone together through that enchanted place; Sebastian in his wheel chair spinning down the box-edged walks of the kitchen gardens in search of alpine strawberries and warm figs, propelling himself through the succession of hothouses, from scent to scent and climate to climate, to cut the Muscat grapes and choose orchids for our button-holes. . . . (*B*, 77)

One crucial aspect of the rhetoric of Aestheticism at Brideshead is that Charles is already explicit about his memorializing process. The work of mourning is taking place, internalizing its ideal object within the same form of sentence in which Charles had recorded the flux of impressions as they impinged on his 'cloistral hush'. It is of little consequence that the content of this sentence might be a breviary of decadence: hothouse flowers, the deliberate invaliding of the sensitive youth, an excessive wave of Mediterranean sensations. It is the serial form which defines the mode of experience, and will recur throughout the novel.

The form of Paterian parataxis breaks down when the narrator addresses languor as a concept and a 'quintessential' value:

> The languor of Youth – how unique and quintessential it is! How quickly, how irrecoverably, lost! The zest, the generous affections, the illusions, the despair, all the traditional attributes of Youth – all save this one – come and go all our life. These things are a part of life itself; but languor – the relaxation of yet unwearied sinews, the mind sequestered and self-regarding – that belongs to Youth alone and dies with it. (*B*, 77)

Charles's declarative tone sits uneasily with the aesthetic languor that he is trying to articulate, so that we are unsure if he is nostalgically promoting his youthful aesthetic education or diagnosing its intrinsic ephemerality. His opening qualifications are clumsy; the verb 'lost' is deferred, then takes the form of an exclamation for which it is unprepared, pushing it over in to the next sentence where it might produce an uncharacteristically Latinate rhetoric: 'Lost the zest [. . .], the illusions, the despair'. But this is perhaps the only way that Charles can interrupt the flow of his endless paratactic elaborations of aesthetic experience; the chastening rhetoric of the pulpit is not so much an atonement as a stand-in for the ceaseless flux, which must reach a point of entropy. At this point in the novel, Ryder's narration is focusing a series of questions about the continuing possibility of a sensuous life. Is the aesthetic life predicated on languor? And can it be achieved outside of the protected spaces of English class privilege: the country house and Oxford? Can the right to be lazy be rescued from the aristocracy and transformed into a positive ideal of play? Does aesthetic experience have a fundamental imprint beyond the serial impressions gathered by an acutely sensitive consciousness drifting through a series of privileged spaces?

After Oxford and Brideshead, Waugh stages a third aesthetic space: Venice. But when Charles joins Sebastian to visit his father Lord Marchmain, his experience is more of speed and profusion than cloistral space: a succession of flash-lit moments in which the immanent beauty of an interior is never fully inhabited.

> The fortnight at Venice passed quickly and sweetly – perhaps too sweetly; I was drowning in honey, stingless. On some days life kept pace with the gondola, as we nosed through the side-canals and the boatman uttered his plaintive musical bird-cry of warning; on other days with the speed-boat bouncing over the lagoon in a stream of sun-lit foam; it left a confused memory of fierce sunlight on the sands and the cool, marble interiors; of water everywhere, lapping on smooth stone, reflected in a dapple of light on painted ceilings. (*B*, 92)

Waugh's paratactic swimming has barely reached half a length of the pool by this point, in a sentence which becomes so protracted as to be almost parodic

in its languorous strokes. It should already be clear that the movement of the prose is reflecting a certain painterly perception that is expected of Charles, the fledgling architectural painter in his visit to Venice, the seat of architectural Aestheticism. The breadth and profusion of the sentence is a mirror of Venice, but Charles's images are conventional at every point.

Convention being the sign of decadence, we might consider this the ideal syntax of the Venetian traveller in the twentieth century, but in fact the conventionality of the rhetoric works to undermine Charles's aesthetic identity. Rather than a decadent Aesthete, Charles is envisioning himself according to a Romantic image of Byronic artistic individuality, as the continuation of the above paragraph suggests:

> [. . .] a night at the Corombona palace such as Byron might have known, and another Byronic night fishing for scampi in the shallows of Chioggia, the phosphorescent wake of the little ship, the lantern swinging in the prow, and the net coming up full of weed and sand and floundering fishes, of melon and *prosciutto* on the balcony in the cool of the morning; of hot cheese sandwiches and champagne cocktails at Harry's bar.

I should apologize for quoting such a glutinously opulent sentence in full, but in this case Waugh is pre-empting a strategy typical of postmodernity: the narrator stages a representative banality of form, exemplified most famously and scandalously by the idiotic lists of consumer items and imaginary violence in Ellis's *American Psycho*. Charles Ryder's list has a more conventional trajectory towards bathos, as his consumption of Venetian style and Romantic trope degenerates progressively into appetitive prose; from the 'phosphorescent wake' to the 'floundering fishes', and finally to the cheese sandwich, surely the most flaccid image of the ends of beauty in the novel.

Reflexive form and sensuous flaccidity are not the only ways in which Ryder's decadence pre-empts postmodern culture; this is also the moment in which the subject begins to cultivate irony in an attempt to expiate the serial aesthetic consumption that threatens it with absorption and engulfment. The cultivation of irony demands a second form of aesthetic education which is emulative rather than sympathetic and subtractive rather than accretive. This is suggested only tentatively in the Venice episode in Charles's relation to the figure of Lord Marchmain, and more generally to his relationship to a pair of distant fathers. What Charles's rhetorical descent towards the cheese sandwich masks is that his acquisition of a Byronic rhetoric is also the sign of a mimetic aspiration. Charles is more careful and measured in his mimetic enthusiasm than James's Isabel Archer or Wilde's Basil Hallward, and his model is more likely to be Sebastian's father Lord Marchmain than the Dorian-like Sebastian. Lord Marchmain and Charles's own father are in some sense mirrored. Lord Marchmain does in some sense mirror Charles's

own father, who might be regarded as the novelist's arch-ironist – he submits Charles, his gullible dinner guest, and his own 'friends' to interminable games without ever quite revealing that his intent is ironic. At times, he resembles an impeccably respectable translation of Huysmans's des Esseintes; apparently living in complete isolation, his only social occasion is a deliberate experiment in tedium, where the dinner is chosen according to a Whistlerian harmony of colour, like the black mass to youth which des Esseintes demands, with aubergines, burgundy wine, caviar and the deepest grapes insisting on the last daub of virility even as he mourns its waning. Yet in contrast to des Esseintes's cornucopia of artifice, Charles's father cultivates a deliberate colourlessness; his profession unspecified, his identity is comparable to a highly positioned banker for whom invisibility masks a wealth that would otherwise appear grotesque. Although he might be regarded as the double of the elder Ryder, Lord Marchmain holds an irony of a different order, an irony which refuses to engage in the banality of actual ironic gestures. Marchmain is defined by his withdrawal from the realms of both the religious and the aesthetic; he is characterless, not in the sense of Sebastian's Hellenic ideality, but in his obdurate refusal of the grotesque identities of both Catholicism and the artistic Renaissance which surrounds him.[13] It is perhaps precisely because of his long acquaintance with his father's finely honed ironic play that Charles seeks detachment such as this: an irony all the more obdurate and unfathomable. Hence his 'curiosity', which we must read here in its Paterian sense as an admixture of sympathetic identification, mimetic desire and fidelity to the inexplicable:

> I was full of curiosity to meet Lord Marchmain. When I did so I was first struck by his normality, which, as I saw more of him, I found to be studied. It was as though he were conscious of a Byronic aura, which he considered to be in bad taste and was at pains to suppress. (*B*, 94)

This is James's Gilbert Osmond. Although he has been transplanted to a different Renaissance city, his attributes are the same: a studied conventionality of behaviour; a profession of humility or normalcy which is in fact the dissimulation of a greater egotism; and a refinement of taste so acute as to revolt even at his own aesthetic attitudes. James's Osmond reiterates his own lack of fixed identity as an aristocratic ideal, and Waugh continues James's representation of aristocracy as the model for Aestheticism's concept of autonomy. What is peculiar to the Flyte family is that the effect of autonomy in detachment is maintained even in the complete absence of an aesthetic disposition, as Charles later realizes in his miniature sketch of Bridey:

> he was usually preposterous yet somehow achieved a certain dignity by his remoteness and agelessness; he was still half-child, already half-veteran;

> there seemed no spark of contemporary life in him; he had a kind of massive rectitude and impermeability, an indifference to the world, which compelled respect. (*B*, 269)

Bridey is an-ironic, and his absurdity is a consistent temptation for Charles's irony as a narrator, but at the same time he embodies the aristocratic indifference upon which aesthetic irony is modelled and which others, such as his mother, are able to perform with far greater delicacy. We are told at one point that Lady Marchmain 'mocked herself [. . .] with that delicate irony for which she was famous' (*B*, 157), and she extricates herself from Rex Mottram's discussion of dipsomania 'with that sweet irony of hers' (*B*, 159). Considering her role as obdurate Catholic matriarch, this side of her behaviour is surprising, but it appears to be a hereditary trait that might, under different conditions, have facilitated more mobile social relations. Her 'delicate mischief' is close in character to Charles's father, and a union between the Ryder and Flyte elders would surely have simplified Charles's narrative of aristocratic aspiration and familial longing. Lord Marchmain's more absolute performance of indifference might even be motivated by his wife's more subtle mastery of social irony. Cara is surely pertinent about Marchmain's continual revolt against his wife's principles of existence, and even the obdurate invisibility of his irony might be determined by this contrary demand. Like Osmond's, Marchmain's indifference is revealed to be a mask for a 'volcano of hate' (*B*, 99), but the revealing comes from Cara, who has her own bitterness at being his 'shield' against Lady Marchmain.

All the perspectives of this brief Venetian episode are equivocal, but Cara's typically Venetian oscillation between masquerade and unveiling puts a particular pressure on Charles's sexual investments. 'Really, Cara, you ask the most embarrassing questions' (*B*, 98–9) is his callow response to her question about Lord Marchmain's love for her, but the deeper embarrassment concerns her questioning of his love for Sebastian, which even in this aesthetic playground he cannot fully admit. Hence his confession after a later discussion with Lady Marchmain: 'It was impossible for me to explain to her what I only half understood myself; even then I felt, "She will learn it soon enough. Perhaps she knows it now"' (*B*, 131). The Venetian episode of the novel should be regarded as a turning point in several ways, not least because the crucial fact that remains unspoken in the narrative is articulated here; the narrator only confesses to his love in hindsight. Since Sebastian's decline begins after this moment, we might regard the play of Venice as the momentary possibility in the novel for sexual and artistic freedom, cosmopolitan and bohemian identity. But just as the fatality of Sebastian's character is overdetermined, Charles has multiple reasons for withholding his love to both Sebastian and himself.

It would be reductive to translate *Brideshead* as primarily about a failure of erotic courage when the prohibition against homosexuality was so obdurate

at this historical moment, although Waugh does little to suggest such violent barriers of exclusion, except for Charles's cousin's pompous warnings about the Anthony Blanche set and Anglo-Catholics. Charles's aesthetic dimension encompasses order, serenity, and the unlimited profusion of beautiful spectacle, while the twinned erotic and metaphysical dimensions of the novel bring together sexual fulfilment with the absolute consummation of his soul in another, as they had done so for Wilde's Basil Hallward. If we are to read the novel from the point of view of late Romantic Aestheticism, rather than from the Catholicism that Waugh and ultimately Charles Ryder recommends, then this severance between the aesthetic and the spiritualized erotic might be regarded as the source of decadence in the novel. And decadence is also the ground of mourning, albeit a subdued form of mourning, whose object is barely defined and whose inaccessibility makes it all the more pervasive when unrecognized.

Venice, of course, is the symbolic site where decadence and decline becomes inevitable. Just as Wilde narrates the passing of aesthetic Hellenism into decadence in *Dorian Gray*, Waugh narrates a process of decline which is both entropic and tragic. For Sebastian it is tragic; he remains for Charles a symbol of the aesthetic life, but the languor and autonomy of this life prove unsustainable. The return to Oxford in the fall witnesses the break-up of Anthony Blanche's set, the contraction of Oxford's idyllic condition as a free space for aesthetic play and Sebastian's increasing reliance on solitary drinking. This might be represented in terms of naturalism and biological determinism, a perspective which is endorsed by the Flyte family and explicitly rejected by Charles, but this would effectively exculpate the Flytes and Charles himself from any responsibility for Sebastian's downfall. The vigour of Charles's argument with the Flytes on this front must also be taken as a diversion, in that it neglects one of the fundamental conditions of Sebastian's melancholia: Charles's overriding attachment to his family, which has clearly encroached on what Sebastian regards as a friendship of sublime detachment from all other identifications. Sebastian's ostensibly paranoid original insight – that Charles would fall in love with his family rather than himself – has proved once again to be more acute than his sentimental manner of expression had suggested.

From this point on, Charles Ryder's maturation and success as an artist must be considered in the light of the disavowal of his love for Sebastian, which is to say the disavowal of that homosexual attachment on which his Aestheticism is constituted. Such a disavowal is revealed in the undercurrent of mourning which pervades his lyricism. As Ellis Hanson has suggested, the same note was pervasive in Pater's evocation of the ephemerality of aesthetic experience; even the apparent abstraction of Pater's 'Conclusion' carries, for Hanson, the 'passionate desire and pitiful mourning of one man for another'.[14] The same force of mourning is carried in Charles Ryder's aesthetic prose. This makes *Brideshead Revisited* in some ways a more powerful narrative about authenticity

and homosexual desire than *Dorian Gray*, since the fall into decadence can be read as precisely a failure in personal courage; Charles's inability to learn the lessons of Venice, articulated by Cara, means that he returns to Oxford having gained nothing from Venice's promise of an aesthetic life, carrying instead only its conventional symbolic resonance as the site of decadence.

The comparison with *Dorian Gray* is worth dwelling on, since Charles is also in some sense a descendant of Wilde's Basil Hallward in a professional sense, ultimately becoming a portrait painter himself in his continual attempt to evoke the beauty of Julia. Yet in so far as he is an architectural painter Charles is a much more knowing kind of artist, one whose art expresses only his identification with the English aristocracy. Basil Hallward, in contrast, begins as a portrait painter whose acute realism, he believes, cannot fail to reveal his desires. As a consequence of his encounter with Dorian, Basil Hallward articulates his homosexual panic as a crisis of imitative desire; in his love for Dorian he has ceded that independence which he believed to have constituted his artistic identity, since all his passions are now absorbed in his model.[15] Basil's confession is one of the most compelling moments in Wilde's novel, but ultimately his narrative of aesthetic *Bildung* and sexual discovery is cut short; censorship, as much as narrative logic, demands that Basil be dispatched by a paranoid Dorian who has quickly recovered from an unconvincing heterosexual attachment. In *Brideshead*, Sebastian preserves the condition of Dorian at the beginning of the novel, before his decadent fall: Sebastian's downfall is in no sense moral – in fact he becomes increasingly spiritualized, with a Dostoevskian pathos that the Wilde of *De Profundis* would surely have appreciated. Charles, conversely, becomes an afterlife of Basil Hallward – a worldlier and more urbane version of Basil who has survived through the cultivation of Henry Wotton's decadent detachment. Charles's narrative is a compact of artistic and moral compromise, under-shadowed by what might be regarded as a failure of erotic courage. As he becomes a successful artist, he has no need of Anthony Blanche to act as an aesthetic conscience for him, to recognize that his career has taken the easiest path. His work as an architectural painter is planned according to the dictates of aristocratic patronage, while his subsequent South American tour appears to have been motivated by a strategic decision to subvert the expectations of this patronage by a spurious return to the primitive.

If Sebastian's fatality lies in his charm, Charles's lies in his taste; the twin temptations of aesthetic self-fashioning are both equally likely to compromise the project of aesthetic renaissance. In the middle section of the novel, 'Brideshead Deserted', when Sebastian's presence recedes, Charles increasingly appears as a complacent model of bourgeois consumption. In temporary exile from the Flyte family, he retreats to Paris, where his mastery of taste is completed, to the extent that his past desires and histories appear to have been placed under erasure. He narrates his dinner with Rex Mottram from such an

altitude and with such a highly developed sense of the grotesque that his own refinement itself seems increasingly grotesque.

Delighting in Rex's absence of taste, he notes how 'The sole was so simple and unobtrusive that Rex failed to notice it' (*B*, 168), but far from being the proof of Hellenic simplicity of outline, this is the sole of decadence. Charles's discrimination affords such absolute detachment from Rex's vulgarity that he is cocooned in an immaculate sphere of colourless consumption, a condition which seems increasingly like a disavowal of both the political and the aesthetic.

At this point, after the innocence of the novel's evocation of Oxford, it becomes increasingly difficult to ignore two levels of social history; the war from which Charles is writing (the narrator's present), and the social turmoil of the late twenties and thirties – the general strike, the rise of fascism – which constitutes Charles's historical time in the second and third phases of the novel. Yet at this historical moment, and from within this decadent condition that Waugh stages a rebirth of beauty. This is one of the crucial differences between *Brideshead* and *Dorian Gray*. Wilde records the cultural moment of aesthetic Hellenism as a brief moment before a subsequent lapse into decadence, but Waugh extends the moment of Hellenic youth at Oxford and Brideshead before sketching a decadent period in Venice and Paris. But this becomes the backdrop for the second renaissance of beauty, inaugurated by Charles's love for Julia. In Wilde's *Dorian Gray* there is no aesthetic afterlife, except for the artificial immortality of Dorian's vampirism. Aesthetic vampirism ultimately defeats the Hellenist ideal of soul in form, and the subsequent afterlives of beauty, such as the unfortunate Sibyl Vane, are clearly ersatz appropriations of a sentimental idea of culture. Waugh's narrative of decadence allows its central aesthetic subject no such illusions, but he stages Charles's renaissance of beauty with absolute seriousness. It also affords the novel's most explicit engagements with Victorian Aestheticism.

In the first instance Charles experiences what we might ultimately regard as a false promise of renaissance. When Bridey gives him his first artistic commission, to paint Brideshead, he considers that he has tasted of 'the great succulent pie of creation', a culinary metaphor perhaps related to the Venetian cheese sandwich that signalled the onset of decadence. But Charles's self-identification is a fully fledged Pre-Raphaelite fantasy:

> I was a man of the Renaissance that evening – of Browning's Renaissance. I, who had walked the streets of Rome in Genoa velvet and had seen the stars through Galileo's tube, spurned the friars, with their dusty tomes and their sunken, jealous eyes and their crabbed hair-splitting speech. (*B*, 213)

The irony of this fantasy is that the closest analogy to Charles's artistic life in Browning's work is Andrea del Sarto[16], the monologue of a technically brilliant but morally languid painter who sold his genius to Francis I, then returned

to Florence at the call of his demanding wife to live a life of artistically unfulfilled luxury. Browning's dramatic monologue is a representation of artistic compromise in an age where it became impossible to ignore the spiritual and artistic claims of individual genius. Del Sarto remains content that his technical brilliance is sufficient, while the genius of Raphael casts a shadow over his career. Vasari reports that he visited Rome to witness the genius of Raphael and Michelangelo, but did not stay long enough to be elevated by the encounter with genius and beauty.[17] Browning depicts him later in life: in the satiety of a twilit evening, the painter finds a moment of harmony in his wife's smile, but at the moment he evokes this harmony a note of decadence emerges; 'A common greyness silvers everything, – / all in a twilight, you and I alike'.[18] The silver note of late achieved harmony gathers increasingly autumnal suggestions, so that when his life achieves artistic shape it is only according to the immanence of decay:

> the whole seems to fall into a shape
> As if I saw alike my work and self
> And all that I was born to be and do,
> A twilight piece'.[19]

This is clearly not how Charles Ryder is imagining himself after his dinner with Cordelia, fresh with the pride of his first commission. And yet it is at this point in the narrative that Waugh instigates a ten-year-break, which is immediately identified as a period of deadness: 'For nearly ten dead years after that evening with Cordelia I was borne along a road outwardly full of change and incident, but never during that time [. . .] did I come alive as I had been during the time of my friendship with Sebastian'. (*B*, 215). Clearly artistic practice has not been the vehicle of aesthetic renaissance, and it is this distinction that makes Waugh's novel so accurate an evocation of the Paterian vision of sensuous renewal.

Brideshead Revisited is, in its way, as relentless a critique of the culture industry as Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, which emerged belatedly, at the end of the 1960s, with equally measured critical vision against both the avant-garde appropriation of newness and the consumer economy of art. While Adorno insisted on a negative dialectic of the autonomous object, in spite of the art work's various strategies of collusion with ideology and domination, Waugh evoked a mourning for an aesthetic life prior to artistic work and the object of consumption; a life which is ultimately surpassed in Charles Ryder's narrative by Catholic transcendence, but which still maintains a symbol or hint of a greater beauty, a promise of happiness revealed in beautiful form.

The form of this *promesse du bonheur*, and ultimately the agent of its denial, is Julia Flyte, who emerges as the force of aesthetic renaissance after Charles's 'dead years'. In the final section of the novel, 'A Twitch upon the Thread', Julia becomes the self-conscious vehicle of beauty's promise: Pater's Mona Lisa, the

reanimation of the Juno Ludovisi with its double promise of sensuous renewal and spiritual autonomy.

> She was not yet thirty, but was approaching the zenith of her loveliness, all her rich promise abundantly fulfilled. She had lost that fashionable, spidery look; the head that I used to think *quattrocento*, which had sat a little oddly on her, was now part of herself and not at all Florentine; not connected in any way with painting or the arts or with anything except herself, so that it would be idle to itemize and dissect her beauty, which was her own essence, and could only be known in her and by her authority and in the love I was soon to have for her.
>
> Time had wrought another change, too; not for her the sly, complacent smile of la Gioconda; the years had been more than 'the sound of lyres and flutes', and had saddened her. She seemed to say; 'Look at me. I have done my share. I am beautiful. It is something quite out of the ordinary, this beauty of mine. I am made for delight. But what do *I* get out of it? Where is *my* reward?'
>
> That was the change in her from ten years ago; that, indeed, was her reward, this haunting, magical sadness which spoke straight to the heart and struck silence; it was the completion of her beauty. (*B*, 226)

There is a surprising emotional power to this evocation of beauty which resides in the parallel linear movement of the prose; while the hypotactic qualification delays the object, the paratactic succession moves to the revelation of 'the love I was soon to have for her'. Charles introduces a series of artistic analogies for Julia's beauty in order subsequently to negate them, affirming the 'completion of her beauty' against the *quattrocento* image she had embodied in her youth. This appears in part as an attempt to emancipate Julia from the encumbrance of her own beauty, since he acknowledges the rift between Julia's experience of her own image, which offers her no reward, and his own, for whom Julia might be regarded precisely as the completion of an artistic life. Against this spectacle, Charles promotes an essential beauty. In order to evoke Julia's 'essence' Charles begins to qualify and encircle his subject, revolving around an indefinable quality which can only be expressed in repeated gestures of negation. This is precisely the method by which Pater attempted to evoke the beauty of the Mona Lisa, and yet Charles introduces the direct allusion to Pater's ekphrasis in order to perform his own gesture of negation. The way in which he turns against Pater's ekphrastic reanimation of La Gioconda ultimately reveals its primordial presence: the Mona Lisa, or Juno Ludovisi, is the passionate ground of his desire. What instigates his refusal of this fundamental ground is the Mona Lisa's aesthetic vampirism: her representative condition of compulsive negation, embodied in the 'sly, complacent smile' and the relegation of history and gesture to the 'sound of lyres and flutes'.

Charles, in his decadent phase, has come under the shadow of this absolute irony, and he is all the more insistent that Julia's beauty shall be his salvation

from the condition of opulent stasis into which he has fallen. But in his simultaneous manifestation and negation of Pater's La Gioconda Charles reveals the more fundamental basis of his desire and the condition of Aestheticism. Charles, Julia and Sebastian all share a condition of mourning, which is revealed now in Julia's 'haunting, magical sadness'. Beauty must appear as haunting, and it is only in its afterlife that Charles can affirm the power of aesthetic renaissance. It is only when he encounters beauty as a belated manifestation that he can gather together its traces throughout his life as the 'hints and symbols' of a possible future ideal. The operations of symbolism, these hints of an undiscovered life, contain a mourning for both the object that has been replaced, covered up, or translated, which is Sebastian, and the love which is to appear either as the breakdown or fulfilment of Charles's search for ideal beauty in love:

> perhaps you and I are types and this sadness which sometimes falls between us springs from disappointment in our search, each straining through and beyond the other, snatching a glimpse now and then of the shadow which turns the corner always a pace or two ahead of us. (*B*, 288)

Waugh's sense of the limits of Aestheticism is encapsulated in this mourning for the anticipated ideal, a paradoxical grief for what has not yet been born. And in the final stage of *Brideshead* he puts a much greater pressure on the rhetoric of Aestheticism in order to demonstrate this temporal disjunction.

In order to bring the rhetoric of Aestheticism to a crisis, Waugh invokes the strategy of Paterian parataxis once again, in what for Charles appears to be the culminating moment of his aesthetic aspirations and a final achievement of 'peace', as Julia is framed by the ideal space of Brideshead's grounds:

> The sun had sunk now to the line of woodland beyond the valley; all the opposing slope was already in twilight, but the lakes below us were aflame; the light grew in strength and splendour as it neared death, drawing long shadows across the pasture, falling full on the rich stone spaces of the house, firing the panes in the windows, glowing on cornices and colonnade and dome, spreading out all the stacked merchandise of colour and scent from earth and stone and leaf, glorifying the head and golden shoulders of the woman beside me. (*B*, 266)

After the repetition of the main subject; 'the sun' . . . 'the light'; this painterly sentence elaborates a series of participial phrases that refer back to the light of the setting sun. This delays the object, 'the woman beside me', who is revealed by the light and retrospectively becomes the repository of 'all the stacked merchandise of colour and scent from earth and stone and leaf'. The Giorgionesque series of impressions is now given a proper destination, as the painterly sentence culminates in Julia. The chapter has begun with Charles and Julia's recollection of the ten days that they have spent apart, with Charles

possessed by the attempt to recuperate lost time. He achieves this not so much in the act of painting but by framing Julia in relief with Brideshead, and hence the whole depth of his past, as a backdrop. Yet the acute strain to focus this presentness is symptomatic of Aestheticism's strain towards a distended moment: '"Sometimes", said Julia, "I feel the past and the present and the future pressing so hard on either side that there's no room for the present at all"' (*B*, 266).

Julia's anxiety is the first sign that Charles's attempt to instate a Giorgionesque idyll at Brideshead is the symptom of a decade of absence and mourning. The distension of Aesthetic temporality – a consequence of Aestheticism's massive inflation of sensuous time – ultimately leads to a breaking point, which Waugh seizes for its religious potential. Soon after Charles's final Giorgionesque moment, Bridey's Catholic disapproval unleashes in Julia a torrent of self-reprimand and revolt. What happens in Julia's extraordinary diatribe is that the whole aesthetic grammar of the novel is overturned in the elaboration of the attributes of sin, which become manifestations of Christ on the cross. The same syntax that Charles had used to reveal the object of his love through elaboration and postponement is now harnessed for the insistent serial evocation of Christ's suffering:

> Mummy dying with it; Christ dying with it, nailed hand and foot, hanging over the bed in the night-nursery; hanging year after year in the dark little study at Farm Street with the shining oilcloth; hanging in the dark church where only the old charwoman raises the dust and one candle burns; hanging at noon, high among the crowds and the soldiers; no comfort except a sponge of vinegar and the kind words of a thief; hanging for ever: never the oil and spices in the dark cave; always the midday sun and the dice clicking for the seamless coat. (*B*, 273)

This hallucinatory anaphora instates a poetic dimension which is at odds with Charles Ryder's narrative style and with Julia's character and speech. It pierces Charles's aesthetic vision, but in spite of this traumatic awakening there is still the temptation to dispose of the moment as an episode of 'hysteria'. This implicit pathological diagnosis is convenient for Charles, but it delays his recognition of Julia's religious seriousness, in a way that will have tragic consequences for their relationship. When Julia's crisis has abated, Charles attempts to reinstate an aesthetic and ironic prerogative as he stands with Julia by the Giorgionesque fountain, suggesting to her a theatrical model of reconciliation. Julia's response is the sign of that much greater rift between the spiritual and the aesthetic which Waugh is attempting to prise open:

> 'Oh don't talk in that damned bounderish way. Why must you see everything second-hand? Why must this be a play? Why must my conscience be a pre-Raphaelite picture?'

'It's a way I have'.

'I hate it'. (*B*, 275)

Charles hyper-consciousness of the aesthetic frame is not precisely that of decadence; it is more closely comparable to the condition of postmodernity, where reflexive detachment is called upon to provide relief for cultural overconsumption. Charles has become an ironist in the final section of the novel, epitomized by his barbed observations about the behaviour of his wife Celia and Bridey. But the real implications of his ironic and sceptical consciousness are brought out during Lord Marchmain's decline at Brideshead. The more emphatically that Charles argues against administering the sacrament to Lord Marchmain on his deathbed, the more Julia is angered by what appears in this context to be militant atheism: the habitual deployment of scepticism as a necessary truth. By the time that the priest has been smuggled in to see Lord Marchmain for the last time, Charles has relented, returning to the condition of a sympathetic agnosticism and seeking a sign of confession from Lord Marchmain, 'for the sake of the woman I loved, who knelt in front of me, praying, I knew, for a sign' (*B*, 322). The poignancy of the final movement of the novel lies in what appears to have been the futility of Charles's relent into sympathy. Since Julia has already felt that the 'wall of fire' between them will be unbreachable, their separation has already been decided, even if it only becomes conscious to Julia in a moment on the stairs after Lord Marchmain's death, revealing to Charles a divorce that he, living in the shadow of what he once took to be Julia's 'hysteria' and now knows is the melting of a spiritual iceberg, has suspected for nearly a year.

After this rift between Charles and Julia, Waugh has only seven pages to orchestrate a sacramental moment that will relieve Charles of his eviscerated irony and yearning. That he should stage this moment in the *art nouveau* chapel at Brideshead inevitably provokes a reflection on Aestheticism's legacy. Waugh figures the 'operation of divine grace' within Aestheticism's terms, just as he has figured Christ's crucifixion within a grotesque and intensified version of the syntax of Giorgionesque impressionism. Charles's prayer is staged as a moment of newness and return: 'an ancient, newly learned form of words' (*B*, 330), inspired by the rekindled flame of the *art nouveau* lamp. The transposition of Pater's 'hard gem-like flame' to the flame of religious faith has been easier than we might expect. It is possible for Waugh to perform this translation of Aestheticism into religion because the hardness of Pater's gem-like flame is so at odds with the transient world that it is meant to encounter and absorb; 'while all things melt at our feet', its hardness figures a bulwark against modernity as much as a uniquely transparent receptacle for its changing forms. In order to identify the melancholia of Aestheticism and its consequent potential for conversion narratives, Ellis Hanson has authored the inevitable pun, 'Pater dolorosa'.[20] But the melancholy figure of Pater's Mona Lisa was insistent in her paganism, to the extent that she

was made to predate even the Juno Ludovisi whom Pater recalled. This was one of Pater's tricks of historical reanimation; although ostensibly a performance of aesthetic historicism, his essay on 'Leonardo da Vinci' instated a different kind of millennial time in which the Mona Lisa is both the end of history and the end of beauty, and also its animating force.

In the final movement of *Brideshead Revisited*, Waugh attempts to perform a countermovement against Pater's pagan goddess: in his transubstantiation of the aesthetic into the religious, the Mona Lisa and the Juno Ludovisi become afterlives of the Virgin mother. In this feat of historical reversal Waugh is effectively making the Virgin mother the precursor to the pagan images from which she was an extracted and spectral essence. For Harold Bloom, the strong poet inhabits the time of *apophrades*, 'the dismal or unlucky days upon which the dead return to inhabit their former houses'.[21] In mythic terms this is the moment at which the dead awaken, but it is also the moment when the poet is able to perform a startling reversal of the relationship of tutelage and indebtedness. Through an act of historical cunning, the poet's precursors now appear to be indebted to their descendant; it appears that 'they are being *imitated by their ancestors*'.[22] It might be said that Christianity performed such a reversal with respect to its pagan precursors, but this trick had been unmasked with great wit in Heine's ingenious fable about the unemployment of the pagan gods in Christian modernity.[23] Having fallen on difficult times, the Greek deities had adopted the garments of Christian myth – like tragic actors in an age of conservatism and commercial television, forced to advertise domestic goods in tableaux of domestic sympathy and Victorian family values. In a sense, *Brideshead* is allowing for this process of transference to take place even as its author claimed to have instated the priority of Catholicism.

Waugh may have been read as anti-aesthetic in his novel of Catholic conversion, and his final translation of the gem-like flame into the lamp of God repeats the historical conjuring trick of Christianity in its poetic appropriation of paganism. Yet at the same time Waugh was offering re-employment for the pagan gods; artistic work which they may well have been tempted to take up in such lean times. Hence Sebastian becomes the sickly but saintly form of Apollo, and Charles is rejuvenated by a spiritualized version of the archaic Apollo's feminine equivalent. Carried by this spirit at the end of the novel, we find that he has 'quickened' his pace, in a final moment of rejuvenation that mimics the force of aesthetic renaissance. Waugh's conclusion may as well have been a citation from Pater: 'Only be sure that it is passion – that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness' (*R*, 190). Even if he has diverted from the assertion that 'Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most', the expanded moment with which his novel concludes is ripe with the uncertainty and spectral promise of Pater's carpe diem.[24]

Chapter 7

Sublime Ironies: The Remainders of Romanticism in Samuel Beckett's *Trilogy* and *Krapp's Last Tape*

Literary Modernism was always implicated in Aestheticism and covertly mediated some of its central tropes and ideas; the refusal of habitual and conventional concepts of identity; the image of self-wrought, artificial beings; the development of a literary style that carried a new kind of sensuous consciousness, at the same as it opened up a space of acute epistemological crisis. And yet so often a process of disavowal took place, as if Aestheticism was only the legitimation discourse for a narcissistic relation, Swinburne's white girl before the mirror, without the spectral shudder in which she knows that she is nothing but apparition, framing her image as an outline that fades forever as she thinks. If we read back to Swinburne's and Whistler's late Victorian moment from Samuel Beckett's later works, across a century whose violence is only dimly registered in his haunted texts, Beckett's task appears to be the deliberate defacement of this reflective stasis. The haunted figures of *Rockaby* and *Footfalls*, *Company* and *Ill Seen, Ill Said*, are denied the momentary compensation of Swinburne's white girl finding herself in Whistler's portrait, even though they are in some sense the descendants of this spectral Victorian aesthetic. Far from being seen in relation to nineteenth-century aesthetics, Beckett has consistently been read as the absolute figure of literary modernity. Ihab Hassan attempted to appropriate Beckett's 'literature of silence'[1] as the progenitor of postmodernism, before the word became sullied by its implication in spectacular consumption. Yet Beckett is more properly identified as a form of post-Aestheticism, where Aestheticism needs to be understood as a form of late Romanticism exploring its own anxieties. His work is doubly belated, progressively erasing the traces of cultural and aesthetic affiliation, to the point where his literature might achieve once again the shock of the new, if the category of newness were not the misidentification of a rupture in consciousness that could in no sense be limited to the temporal order of originality and novelty. Yet in his earliest writing, the aesthetic shock was registered as a sublime form of vision and awakening, and this afterlife of Romantic Aestheticism would still leave its traces on his major works.

In his early essay on 'Proust' (1931),[2] published at the waning of the modernist era, Beckett developed an aesthetic manifesto which carried the traces of Romanticism and Aestheticism, clarifying an afterlife that would be ever more dim, yet still present in his mature work. Beckett sought to restore and reveal the sensuous object by removing habitual identities and mechanistic behaviour. He rejected the imposition of conceptual schema on experience and sought a cure for the paralysis of boredom through the aesthetic encounter. What he wished to restore, following Proust, was the 'enchantment' of objects released from habitual categories of perception.[3] Like Schiller in his *Aesthetic Education* and Pater in his 'Conclusion', Beckett sought the emancipation of a faculty of experience that would restore a more vivid sensoria.

In spite of Beckett's devotion to literary form and craft, this promotion of sensuous experience before formal device allies him to the utopian strand of Aestheticism that was both masked and mediated in modernist culture. Yet Beckett's was a Schopenhauerian Aestheticism, borrowing from the post-Kantian metaphysician a gothic epistemology in which the twin polarities of existence were the boredom of habit and the suffering of acute consciousness. In his articulation of this radical dualism, Beckett produced an unusual but convincing hybrid of Schiller and Schopenhauer that recuperated the aesthetic potential of suffering:

> The suffering of being: that is, the free play of every faculty. Because the pernicious devotion of habit paralyses our attention, drugs those handmaidens of perception whose co-operation is not absolutely essential.[4]
>
> The pendulum oscillates between these two terms: Suffering – that opens a window on the real and is the main condition of the artistic experience, and Boredom – with its host of top-hatted and hygienic ministers.[5]

While suffering may have become a necessity, its ultimate aim is to restore aesthetic experience. It maintains the priorities of Schiller and Pater; the emancipation of the free play of the faculties, the release from habitual perception and the subsequent encounter with the sensuous object.

Beckett's revolt against habit is laced with the rhetoric of existential pathos – the daring exposure to reality, the unbearable moment of freedom – and for this reason his later co-option by existentialism was logical and unsurprising. But in spite of this, he still retained the idealist underpinnings of Aestheticism. In the essay on Proust, Beckett consistently values the 'ideal' over the 'concept'. Habit works within the realm of the concept, whereas emancipated (aesthetic) perception is able to uncover the idea:

> Unfortunately habit has laid its veto on this form of perception, its action begins precisely to hide the essence – the Idea – of the object in the haze of conception – preconception. Normally we are in the position of the tourist

> [. . .] whose aesthetic experience consists in a series of identifications and for whom Baedeker is the end rather than the means. Deprived by nature of the faculty of cognition and by upbringing of any acquaintance with the laws of dynamics, a brief inscription immortalizes his emotion. The creature of habit turns aside from the object that cannot be made to correspond with one or other of his intellectual prejudices, that resists the propositions of his team of syntheses, organized by Habit on labour-saving principles.[6]

Young Beckett promotes the form of 'cognition' that the tourist, lost in a series of identifications, has failed to cultivate, but this is an open form of cognition which apprehends the object without imposing a conceptual scheme; he rejects the conceptual 'syntheses' that would hide the object. Just as Pater resisted the dogmatism of system and the wall of habit, Beckett promoted an encounter with the ideal-real that will necessarily have the urgency and immediacy that Pater promoted in the 'Conclusion', although for the young Beckett this encounter was caught within the Proustian thematic of involuntary memory. Like Pater's vanishing instant, this brought with it an acute temporal anxiety, and a pervasive sense of death.

In his later work this model of consciousness as suffering, detachment and resistance would be reconfigured as a form of radical irony, of such reflexive force that it turned on the concept and condition of irony itself as the constitutive form of aesthetic subjectivity. Yet the relation of this ironic subjectivity with death establishes a gothic mode that would pervade Beckett's major fictional works. The reading of Beckett I perform here is in one sense only tenuously connected to the cultural presence of Victorian Aestheticism, but at the same time it replays the same structures of consciousness that I have framed in my readings of Pater, Vernon Lee and Henry James: Romantic irony, straining to a point of absolute refinement, continually undermining itself by the process in which it would be perfected, and in this continual unweaving of itself facing a collapse that will at times appear as a sublime encounter.

In Beckett's work, the force of Romantic irony is twinned with the remainders of the Romantic sublime, but in such a way that the rhetorics of Romanticism and Aestheticism are continually worn down by the force of an absolute irony. In one of the most elliptical and haunted statements of twentieth-century aesthetics, Beckett's example appears as a belated after-image or fragmented remainder of the Romantic encounter with literature and its origins. In *The Infinite Conversation*, Blanchot reads German Romanticism as the moment where 'Literature [. . .] suddenly becomes conscious of itself',[7] but in such a manner that it is condemned to interrogate its own emptiness. Echoing Beckett's 'literature of the unword', he posits the Romantic literary subject as 'pure consciousness without content, a pure speech that can say nothing'.[8] It was the fragmentary reflections of Friedrich von Schlegel that provided a form for Romantic subjectivity to explore such absences. As the primary

theorist of Romantic irony, his critical fragments collected in the *Lyceum* and the *Athenaeum* in the late 1790s promoted a concept of irony as the basis of literary freedom: 'Irony is the clear consciousness of eternal agility, of an infinitely teeming chaos'.[9] The poetry of irony is 'informed by a truly transcendental buffoonery'.[10] For Schlegel the irony performs a sublime detachment greater than any rhetorical ironies. In his essay 'On Incomprehensibility' he catalogues the varieties of literary irony to frame a demand: 'What gods will rescue us from all these ironies? The only solution is to find an irony that might be able to swallow up all those big and little ironies and leave no trace of them at all'.[11] Schlegel searches for a sublime irony, a behemoth of negation that will render even his own irony obsolete, and it is this paradoxical demand that constitutes the affinities between his theory and Beckett's practice.

When the narrator of *The Unnamable* pledges his allegiance against understanding, 'Dear Incomprehension, it's thanks to you I'll be myself, in the end',[12] we might read an echo of Schlegel's credo, which is consolidated in the *Trilogy* by the narrator's resolution to 'overcome . . . the fatal leaning towards expressiveness'. The narrators of Beckett's *Trilogy* clearly exemplify the position of Romantic irony in certain essential respects: reducing the body to a grotesque caricature, refusing identification with expressive appearance and, particularly in Malone's case, assuming a position of manipulative play, the continual pledge to 'Live and Invent' (*T*, 79). While it is worth heeding Jennifer Jeffers's argument that the *Trilogy*, and *The Unnamable* in particular, 'simply refuses to be rendered the exemplar of the reductive paradigm of a traditional concept of irony',[13] this refusal is a complex position which might be regarded as the refinement of Romantic irony itself. The lure of Romantic negation is not easy to escape, and if irony constitutes a manner of negative framing, the *Trilogy* frames such negations in the context of a Romantic condition – a strain towards transcendence which is revealed in Malone's scene at the window, 'on such a night as Caspar David Friedrich loved' (*T*, 182). This is the moment in the *Trilogy* where the remainders of Romanticism are most clearly revealed, where the apparently playful narrator takes on the earnest rhetoric of the Romantic sublime. My contention in this chapter is that the position of ironic detachment assumed by Beckett's fictional narrators is consistently related to a corresponding movement towards the sublime; the ironic negations they perform are the progenitors and the shadow of an original sublime encounter.

Romantic irony and the sublime share the condition of being a default appearance of the infinite within the horizon of representation; they appear as the limits of representation are experienced. The difference is that whereas Romantic irony posits this infinity as a quality of the subject – the subject's capacity for infinite reproducibility and potential – the sublime effects a temporary

breakdown in the subject's capacity for representation. This moment of breakdown is central to Kant's account of the sublime in *The Critique of Judgment*, but the initial moment of trauma and loss leads to a sense of infinite inwardness.[14] For Kant the sublime was induced by the experience of an overwhelming natural force (the dynamic sublime) or by the breakdown of our capacity to represent a vast object (the mathematical sublime), but the result was a move beyond the limits of the sensuous realm; 'the sublime, in the strictest sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form', it resides 'only in our mind, in so far as we become conscious of our superiority over nature within'.[15] Although this superiority induces delight, this is of a purely negative kind, constituted by the sacrifice of any empirical enjoyment.[16] It is this logic of an infinite gain through sacrifice that constitutes the affinity between the sublime and Romantic irony. For Schlegel, irony is 'the freest of all liberties, for it enables us to rise above our own selves',[17] but this elevated aspiration demands that the ironist continually cast off his own empirical substance.

As Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe have pointed out, Schlegel's concept of irony was related to his ideal of sacrifice.[18] They cite fragment 131 of his *Ideas*: 'The hidden meaning of sacrifice is the annihilation of the finite because it is finite'.[19] This sacrificial procedure has a direct result in literary practice, as the Romantic artist strives to transcend the work through a continual negative practice, an aspiration towards what Schlegel defined as the 'sublime urbanity' of a universal poetry.[20] Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe argue that this notion of irony was directly informed by Kant's critical philosophy, which exacerbated the disjunction between the artist as subject and the work, to the extent that the subject of Romanticism was constituted as an evacuated substance. As a result of Kant's critical philosophy:

> All that remains of the subject is the 'I' as an 'empty form' [. . .] that 'accompanies my representations'. [. . .] As is well known, the Kantian 'cogito' is empty. One must set out from this problematic of the subject unrepresentable to itself [. . .] in order to understand what romanticism will receive, not as a bequest but as its 'own' most difficult and perhaps insoluble question.[21]

The 'insoluble question' of the Romantic literary subject is fundamental to Beckett's work. It was approached in three different ways between the late 1930s and the late 1950s: through the sublime rhetoric of his youthful critical writing, through the negative way of the *Trilogy* and, finally, according to the formal innovations of *Krapp's Last Tape*. In all of these works, Beckett stages Romantic subjectivity according to a series of relationships between irony and the sublime. The afterlife of Aestheticism is still present here, although in its most attenuated and spectral form.

Irony as the Way to the Sublime

In the 'German Letter' of 1937,[22] the young Beckett instituted a concept of irony as the motivating force of his post-Joycean 'literature of the unword' – the basis of a negative method: 'On the way to this literature of the unword [. . .] some form of Nominalist irony might be a necessary stage'.[23] It is important to remember that Beckett values irony as a stage on the way rather than the final principle here, echoing Kierkegaard's assertion at the end of *The Concept of Irony*: 'Irony as the negative is the way; it is not the truth but the way'.[24] Beckett's irony is 'a method by which we can represent this mocking attitude towards the word, through words', but the rejection of the work leads the way to a sublime music: 'In the dissonance between the means and their use it will perhaps become possible to feel a whisper of that final music or that silence that underlies All'.[25]

The production of dissonance through irony underpins the most explicitly Romantic gesture in Beckett's critical work, where he traces a path from Beethoven to the abyss:

> Is there any reason why the terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like for example the sound surface, torn by enormous pauses, of Beethoven's seventh Symphony, so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence?[26]

It is perhaps this intoxicated rhetoric that motivated Beckett's later disavowal of his own statement as 'German bilge',[27] but such rhetoric of silence, abyss and sublime music was not unusual in the symbolist and post-Romantic discourses that were still prevalent in Beckett's youth. A surprising parallel can be found in Georg Lukács' extraordinary youthful mediation on German Romanticism, *Soul and Form* (1910):

> This is the most profound meaning of form: to lead to a great moment of silence [. . .] there is only one path leading to the abyss from any place. A question, with life all around it; a silence, a rustling, a noise, a music, a universal singing all round it: that is form.[28]

This appears in a volume where Lukács developed a wide-ranging critique of Romantic irony which targets Schlegel and Novalis as well as two of Beckett's precursors, Kierkegaard and Sterne. In his critical dialogue on Romantic irony, 'Richness, Chaos and Form', Lukács's mouthpiece Joachim rejects Sterne for his 'violent dissonances of material'.[29] What is interesting about Beckett's 'German Letter' in relation to this piece is that Beckett validates precisely the form of dissonant practice that Lukács rejects, while both see

literary form as motivated by a 'final music' or abyss. The total divergence on the means masks a parallel conception of the ends of art. In Beckett's early thought, then, irony is posited as a way to the sublime irony but also as a force that will ultimately be overcome: a contingent structural device which serves a higher duty.

In the *Trilogy* this relationship between irony and the sublime is reconfigured in important ways, and the rhetoric of vertigo and abyss is given a gothic context. The ironic detachment of the narrators and their occasional striving towards sublimity are critically informed by the narrative's deathward trajectory. If death is the continually deferred promise of freedom in the *Trilogy*, irony and the sublime are its emissaries. It is through this encounter with death that the *Trilogy* develops a critical and diagnostic framing of the condition of Romantic irony while exploring its limits. It is here that we can trace a distant affinity between Beckett's work and the reflexive strain of fin-de-siècle gothic Aestheticism, particularly with Pater's essay 'Prosper Mérimée' and Vernon Lee's *Hauntings*. What Beckett's major fiction presents is a version of gothic self-consciousness shorn of all the rhetorical and figural conventions that have gathered around the literature and culture of gothic. In a sense this is the logical destiny of gothic Aestheticism after Modernism, since it takes the empirical reduction of isolated subjectivity that Pater performed in his 'Conclusion' to its limit, while applying Pater's rejection of habit so rigorously as to negate all the metaphorical and rhetorical forms of the aesthetic gothic. What remains is subjectivity oscillating between ecstatic absorption and ironic recoil, constantly measuring itself against its own dissolution.

In *Malone Dies* the dying narrator expresses his own condition of ironic detachment as an ecstatic movement: 'What I sought [. . .] was the rapture of vertigo, the letting go, the fall, the gulf, the relapse to darkness, to nothingness' (*T*, 179).[30] This develops the abyssal discourse of the 'German Letter' and suggests how his irony might pass into a sublime condition of continual dissolve, but it is in the final novel of the *Trilogy* that Beckett's narrator explicitly states his own Romantic irony as a sublime aspiration. The ironic imagination has its own peculiar seduction, that its state of detachment and freedom is a privileged position of knowledge, but the narrator of *The Unnamable* frames his own ironic negations within the conditions of this lure: 'Not to have been a dupe, that will have been my best possession, my best deed, to have been a dupe, wishing I wasn't, thinking I wasn't, knowing I was, not being a dupe of not being a dupe' (*T*, 288).

The principled refusal of the Unnameable develop a peculiar style of negative will, and he fashions himself with an almost Wildean assertion of urbanity. Molloy protests at one point that he is 'far from being an aesthete, or an artist' (*T*, 47), but the Unnamable states his own coda as an artful self-fashioning which resists grotesque expression according to the law of death: 'No cries, above all no cries, be urbane, a credit to the art and code of dying, while

the others cackle' (*T*, 288). The Unnamable is the Aesthete who the more earthly Molloy denies, but this is a mode of aesthetic gothic that is a direct afterlife of German Romanticism. In The Unnamable's statement of sublime urbanity Beckett's narrator mimics the terms of Schlegel's critical fragment 42, which insists that above all else the ironist should maintain an essential urbanity, a performance of independence which raises his detachment above the rhetorical posture of irony and consolidate an ideal or 'sublime' position of freedom:

> Of course, there is also a rhetorical species of irony which, sparingly used, has an excellent effect, especially in polemics; but compared to the *sublime urbanity* of the Socratic muse, it is like the pomp of the most splendid oration set over against the noble style of ancient tragedy.[31] (my italics)

Once again, the sublimity of the ironist is distinguished from the merely rhetorical form of irony. The ironist's urbanity is constituted by a detachment from all performative traces, a denial of the obligation to manifest comparable to the insouciant but portentous refusals of Melville's Bartleby – 'I would prefer not to' in its absolute form.

For Werner Hamacher, Romantic irony is 'a manner of speaking and acting in which all figures and acts come to their limit – to their end – and hence come to themselves as evacuated substance [. . .] subjectivity without substance, only in separating itself from every figure and every essence'.[32] Yet even in this absolute negation there is a 'manner of speaking and acting' – a performative enactment of the negative gesture, and it is for this reason that it makes sense for the narrator of *The Unnamable* to announce his own 'urbanity'. Yet Beckett's use of the term emphasizes the negativity of Schlegel's idea, threatening to undermine his claims for a 'universal poetry': the urbanity of *The Unnamable* reaches a sublime condition because it is performed against the limits of the decaying body.

This points to another central aspect of German Romanticism. When Beckett supplements the Schlegelian ironic coda with an advocacy of the 'art and code of dying', he points to the death-bound subjectivity of Novalis, the shadow figure within the Schlegel brothers' utopian community who suggested untimely truths about Romantic subjectivity. Once again it is Lukács's account that provides a shadow of Beckett's rhetoric of Romanticism: in *Soul and Form* he describes Novalis's project in terms that will be echoed by Beckett's narrator: 'Everything the Romantics wanted to conquer sufficed for no more than a beautiful death. Their life philosophy was one of death: their art of living, and art of dying'.[33] If Beckett continues the work of Schlegel's irony, he does so by situating it within the condition of Novalis's Romantic yearning for death, a condition which David Farrell Krell has described as 'thaumaturgic idealism'.[34] The narrative irony in the *Trilogy* appears to be constituted according to the

law of death, or in a mimetic aspiration announced in *The Unnamable*: 'I'll sham dead now' (*T*, 298), as if the narrator were aspiring to the position of death as the final irony.

Blanchot's account of the *Trilogy* is particularly alert to this constitutive relationship between irony and the imagination of death. Focusing on the artificial inventiveness of Malone's stories, he diagnoses the peculiar condition of the moribund narrator in relation to his own irony:

> 'Their brilliance, their *skilful irony*, everything that gives them form and interest also detaches them from Malone, the dying man, detaches them from the time of his death in order to reinstate the customary narrative time in which we do not believe and which, here, means nothing to us, for we are expecting something much more important'.[35]

So while Malone's narratives are skilfully ironic, his preoccupation with his own impending demise instates a different temporality which renders 'customary narrative time' obsolete, and hence, Blanchot suggests, renders the irony of these narratives all the more superficial.

We might extend Blanchot's point here to say that the presence of death in the narrative has an ironic function itself. Against the skilful irony of the stories, there is a greater irony instated by the immanence of death in the narrative. Following the cliché of 'death the final irony' and the medieval *theatrum mundi* tradition, this would have the effect of being the great leveller, an intimation of sublimity that exposes the vanity of human struggles, but Blanchot's analysis suggests how we can complicate this cliché. The peculiarity of the narrative voice in the *Trilogy* is that the irony instated by the immanence of death is frequently pitched against the ironic detachment of the narrative voice: death ironizes irony itself. According to this hierarchy of ironic levels, we might be tempted to read the narrative voices as the dupes of death, the objects of an authorial irony which is underwritten and ultimately authorized by death. Yet both Molloy and Malone suggest an acute consciousness that their own narrative irony, so frequently turned against the grotesque body and the follies of the living, appears to be constituted precisely by their moribund condition.

It is through its engagement with this condition that the *Trilogy* suggests a critique of Romanticism that is in many ways comparable to that developed by Lukàcs. Beckett's narrative voices continually focus their relationship with a possible death as the basis of their own detachment. Contemplating his graveyard plot, Moran notes, 'Sometimes I smiled, as if I were dead already' (*T*, 124). The narrators of the *Trilogy* rarely take their own ironies lightly; as Malone recognizes, his is a paradoxically earnest position: 'gravely I struggled to be grave no more, to live, to invent' (*T*, 179). If the banal pun suggests how Malone's position of detachment and play might be a response to the proximity of the

grave, this suggests a broader diagnostic. In spite of his professions of rapturous vertigo, Malone is censorious about his own process of self-doubling, expressing the desire for a more stable form of detachment that would halt his endless self-duplication. Reflecting on the multiplicity of his personae, he laments, 'How little one is at one with oneself [. . .] I who prided myself as being a sensible man, cold as crystal and as free from spurious depth' (*T*, 104). Malone condemns his own self-doubling as a spurious claim to profundity, and this is not the only instance where the Beckettian narrator appears to adopt an ethical position against his own ironic detachment. Molloy uses precisely the same terms as he wanders through the 'little side streets' of the town, not as a prince rejoicing in his incognito, but with a troubled sense of the incapacity of the man in the crowd to guess at his position of altitude and detachment:

> Was there one among them to put himself in my place, to feel how removed I was from him I seemed to be, and in that remove what strain, as of hawsers about to snap? It's possible. Yes, I was straining towards those *spurious deeps*, their lying promise of gravity and peace, from all my own poisons I struggled against them, safely bound' (*T*, 21, my italics).

Once again it is precisely the position of ironic detachment which is condemned as an illusory striving towards 'spurious deeps'. In Molloy's case the subsequent articulation of his moribund condition constitutes something like a phenomenology of the ironic unhappy consciousness. In the garden of Lousse, Molloy imagines the borders between himself and the 'deeps and wildernesses' as a death urn, 'that sealed jar to which I owed my being so well preserved' (*T*, 46). Far from being a text which recuperates the force of Romantic irony, *Molloy* appears to offer a diagnostic critique of ironic detachment as a state of entombment.

If Beckett is offering a critique of Romantic irony here, it is in a number of ways comparable to the prototypical critique of Romanticism offered by Hegel in the introduction to his *Aesthetics*, a critique which would later be the basis for much of Lukács's work. When Hegel rejected Schlegel and the Romantic ironists for positing the subject as the source of infinite possibility; this ultimately negative aspiration was 'the source of yearning and a *morbid* beautiful soul'.[36] In maintaining an essentially manipulative ego, the ironist thus reduced all objective phenomenon to the status of lifeless objects:

> The virtuosity of an ironic artistic life apprehends itself as a divine creative genius for which anything and everything is only an unsubstantial creature [*wesenloses Geschöpf*], to which the creator, knowing himself to be disengaged and free from everything, is not bound'.[37]

The ironist treats the other as '*wesenloses Geschöpf*' – an insubstantial being or bodiless shadow. Ernst Behler brings out the gothic possibilities of Hegel's

phrase by freely translating it as 'mere dead creatures'.[38] This helps to bring out a more complex ironic suggestion in Hegel's critique of irony which resonates with the moribund condition of Beckett's narrator's. What Hegel suggests is that in treating the world as a theatre of shadows, the ironist himself lapses into the same shadow realm, becoming a dead creature in a sealed jar, ever more substanceless as irony takes hold.

We can see an equivalent movement from substance to shadow accelerating throughout Beckett's *Trilogy* and reaching its apogee in the later stages of *The Unnamable*, where the association between irony and death is taken to its limit. Having announced his fidelity to the 'art and code of dying', the Unnamable moves towards a profound doubt about his own 'substantiality' (*T*, 315); yet this insubstantiality appears to become the basis of his code – the refusal of all previous instances where he 'took myself for the other' (*T*, 289). When he announces his process of detachment – 'I withdraw my adhesion' – it rapidly escalates into a profound paranoia about the 'others' who provide the language through which he is forced to constitute himself: 'Do they consider me so plastered with their rubbish that I can never extricate myself, never make a gesture but their cast must come to life?' (*T*, 298). The Unnameable's negative process is culminated and symbolized in his thaumaturgic fantasy of the poisoning of his family, where the traces of his own body are scattered amid their corpses; after this, the process of dismembering that the narrator accelerates begins to reach a new phase. In the final movement of *The Unnamable* the 'urbane' performance of the narrator is increasingly threatened by proliferating moments of breakdown: 'everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes, I'm in all these flakes, meeting, mingling, falling asunder, wherever I go I find me, leave me, go towards me' (*T*, 355). Such moments of dissolution suggest a movement towards sublimity in the *Trilogy* which is clearly accelerated in *The Unnamable* – precisely the text where the narrator establishes his own aesthetics of irony most explicitly. This allows us to read the relationship between irony and the sublime in two ways. In one reading, these moments emerge as a compensation for the narrator's detachment, a contrary movement of vertigo, 'the letting go, the fall', when the strain of 'hawsers about to snap' is dissipated. But we might equally read these moments as the ultimate product of Romantic irony in its search for subjective infinity – a sublime irony exploring its limits.

If the acceleration of irony towards the sublime culminates in the final phase of *The Unnamable*, the discourse of dissolution which echoes throughout the *Trilogy* has already been instigated in *Molloy*, in a moment where Molloy finds release from the 'great dismemberings' of night: 'The blood drains from my head, the noise of things bursting, merging, avoiding one another, assails me on all sides' (*T*, 102). The same discourse recurs again in *Malone Dies*, but in this case the experience is framed by a direct engagement with the legacy of Romanticism – Malone's moment at the window, on 'such a night as

Caspar David Friedrich loved, tempestuous and bright' (*T*, 182). In this case the sublime experience is consolidated by an identification with the image of the Romantic artist, and the experience obeys the Kantian model, where the subject strains towards the impossible framing of an immense object.[39] This traditional Romantic encounter is subsequently the source of a radical experience of dissolution in language: 'Words and images run riot in my head, pursuing, flying, clashing, merging, endlessly'. This is the language that will recur in the sublime irony of *The Unnamable*, before Malone's assertion of difference gives way to a compensatory moment: 'beyond this tumult there is a great calm, and a great indifference, never really to be troubled by anything again'. Malone, the most caustically ironic of Beckett's narrators, ultimately retreats to a moment of oral completion with his pillow, but the traces of the Romantic encounter remain, as he concludes his account with a Sturm und Drang rhetoric of transcendence: 'Night, storm and sorrow, and the catalepsies of the soul, this time I shall see that they are good' (*T*, 183). The Romantic aspiration towards transcendence is allowed to stand unchallenged here, but the strained profession of faith in the rhetoric of the sublime authorizes a clearly nostalgic retreat.

The complexity of Malone's sublime moment and the ways in which its discourse is echoed throughout the three novels suggest the ambivalent relationship between irony and the sublime in the trilogy as a whole. If on the one hand the sublime seems to offer a symptomatic relief of the narrator's ironic detachment, Malone's striving for the sublime can also be read as the constitutive basis of his Romantic irony – the striving towards 'spurious deeps' that both Molloy and Malone consider to be their curse. In this sense, Friedrich's Romantic night is the primal scene of the ironic subject – the experience of transcendence that generates the ironist's persistent striving towards detachment. Beckett's narrators have a surprising predecessor in Adam Verver's from James's The Golden Bowl, whose urbane Aestheticism was constituted by an original sublime encounter, an imaginary assumption of the altitude achieved by Keat'z Cortez around which his memories revolve. Romantic irony, then, can be read as a continuous attempt to perform or memorialize this original experience of freedom in the sublime encounter. The radical dissolution of the subject performed in *The Unnamable* – 'everything yields, opens, ebbs, flows, like flakes' – is intimately connected to the rhetorical remainder of Romanticism, just as its ironic performance inevitably suggests the legacy of the Schlegelian ideal of a sublime urbanity. Even if this urbane performance is precisely what the process of the trilogy undermines, Romantic irony is nevertheless the underlying condition of its ongoing project, the basis of the word's turn against itself. And even if the negations of the trilogy appear to sever finally the cultural continuum between Aestheticism and Modernism, its 'art and code of dying' is the gothic afterlife of the nineteenth-century aesthetic project.

Sublime Krapp and 'German Bilge'

Beckett's exploration of the unhappy consciousness of Romantic irony is extended further in *Krapp's Last Tape*, where a new relationship between irony and the sublime emerges. If the 'German Letter' posited irony as the way to the sublime and the *Trilogy* worked to break open the ironic subject through a sublime irony, *Krapp's Last Tape* turns irony directly against Romanticism, ironizing precisely the kind of sublime rhetoric that Beckett had resuscitated in the 'German Letter' and the *Trilogy*. In Beckett's first use of the staged dramatic monologue, the problematics of irony and subjectivity are intrinsic to the use of recorded voice, and the narrative is determined by a trinity of sublime promises: the recollected moment on the lake, the silence of the uninhabited earth announced by the 39-year-old Krapp, and the immanence of old Krapp's possible death in his motionless staring at the end of play. Once again, Beckett's work echoes the late Jamesian representation of the aesthetic subject in middle age, reflecting on a constitutive encounter with the sublime. But Adam Verver's 'realms of gold' have been replaced by poverty and shadow. Beckett's minimalism works directly against Aestheticism's largesse, and the primary conditions of Romantic subjectivity are laid bare. The most emphatic representation of the Romantic sublime in all of Beckett's work is the 39-year-old Krapp's account of 'that memorable night in March, at the end of the jetty, in the howling wind'.[40] This progresses towards a Sturm und Drang rhetoric of terror, illumination and sublimity: 'great granite rocks the foam flying up in the light of the lighthouse and the wind-gauge spinning like a propellor', as the sublime moment induces, in classic Kantian fashion, the recognition of genius: 'my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire' (*DW*, 220). Conceptually the movement here obeys the triadic pattern of the dynamic sublime: from an overwhelming encounter with natural force, to a moment of dissolution, to a recuperation of the powers of reason. The textual content allows this orthodox Kantian reading, but the form of mechanical reproduction parodically frames Krapp-39's voice as the excess of Romantic youth.

What Beckett is staging here is the surpassing or disavowal of Romanticism in advanced age, and to this extent we might draw a parallel with his own gesture of disavowal towards the 'German Letter'. It is tempting to suggest that Krapp is ironizing his own youthful self as 'German bilge', since it appears to be the rhetoric of the sublime which embarrasses or angers the older Krapp more than any of his earlier statements. For Stephen Connor, the effect of Krapp's recollection of his earlier selves on the tape recorder is 'to reveal clearly his ironic noncoincidence with himself'.[41] Yet while Connor is surely right to impute an ironic effect to the technology of reproduction here, the stage image of the 69-year-old Krapp dramatically limits our capacity to ascribe an ironic knowledge to his gestures. While the narrator of *The Unnamable* attempts to retain his urbanity in the face of impending death, Krapp's banana-faced vacuity immediately

belies the idea that he is experiencing a critical self-doubling. Yet this absence of ironic consciousness in the actor on stage has an important function, sharpening the distinction between the older Krapp and the young voice, which is precisely that of irony – the performance of self-knowledge as *Bildung*; the process of a Romantic education which continually casts off its previous selves.

In contrast to old Krapp, the 'rather pompous' voice of 39-year-old Krapp can be seen as the type of the Romantic ironist, driving his own process of aesthetic education by the negation of his youth: 'Hard to believe I was ever that young Whelp' (*DW*, 218). Even the younger Krapp is reported as exhibiting the ironic disavowal: 'Sneers at what he calls his youth and thanks God that it's over. [Pause]. False Ring there'. As Gontarski observes, 'Krapp-69 sneers at Krapp-39, who in turn laughs at young Krapp. At each stage Krapp sees the fool he was, not the fool he is'.[42] But what is particularly interesting about this series of disavowals is that it is precisely the younger Krapp's rejection of the even younger Krapp that Krapp-39 wishes to disavow. As in Schlegel's essay 'On Incomprehensibility', the Romantic ironist seeks a sublime irony which will devour its parents, the more earthly ironies from which it emerged. In this sense the ironic gesture of negation which Krapp-39 compulsively performs can be read as an imitation or memorial of his sublime moment on the jetty, where his past life was framed and surpassed by 'the vision at last', eradicated in the 'dissolution of storm and night'. Just as Malone's Caspar David Friedrich moment is the primal scene of the narrative subject in the *Trilogy*, Krapp-39's inflated discourse of sublimity underpins his performance of *Bildung*.

The process of *Krapp's Last Tape* is to mutually expose Krapp's sublime rhetoric and his ironic negations as twin aspects of a Romantic condition. Yet if this continues the diagnostic representation of Romantic irony and sublimity that Beckett had inaugurated in the *Trilogy*, the critical framing of Krapp-39 has the effect of making the fragile sublimity of the play's ending all the more exposed. As Krapp strains to encounter his lover's eyes on the lake, the egotistical sublime is doubly challenged, by the moment of recollection and by the older Krapp's vacuous gaze. At this point the ironic consciousness of Krapp-39 is replaced by a greater dramatic irony.[43] The old Krapp's 'motionless staring' undermines the 39-year-old's final Romantic statement – 'Not with the fire in me now' (*DW*, 223), recalling and deflating his earlier rhetoric; 'the light of the understanding and the fire'.

If Krapp's 'fire' is a sublime knowledge, the ending of the play ironizes this position. But there is a crucial difference between this dramatic irony and the Romantic irony of Krapp-39, since the play's formal irony has no subject position; the only knowledge it suggests is that of Krapp's impending death. Krapp's gaze suggests an infinite sense of lost possibility, staging the recurrent loss of the sublime moment on the lake. The pathos of this lost sublimity is exacerbated by Krapp-39's hymn to the night: 'Past midnight. Never knew such silence. The earth might be uninhabited'. But the Romantic rhetoric is replaced by the

paradoxically audible silence of the tape's continuous run. We might say that Beckett reinstates a sublime silence here – the silence of the unword – in order to ironize Romantic subjectivity itself; a new form of abject sublimity displaces Krapp-39's egotistical sublime and undermines the rhetoric of Romanticism.

At the end of the play the running of the tape replaces the sublime silence of midnight with a contentless medium of representation – a machinery without manifestation – and the suggestion that the machinery will run down. In this suggestion of impending death the figure of the old Krapp on stage seems to be evacuated of all conscious knowledge and ironic control, yet neither is he the object of dramatic irony. No longer reducible to the successive self-negations that his younger voices perform, his silent listening suggests a different kind of attention. In this respect Krapp's ending suggests a move away from the sublime irony of the *Trilogy*'s narrators, but it also bears out Malone's profession of an unknowing attention to the formless: 'it was not long before I found myself alone, in the dark. That is why I gave up trying to play and took myself for ever shapelessness and speechlessness, incurious wondering, darkness, long stumbling with outstretched arms' (*T*, 166).

Malone's shapeless and speechless condition in the *Trilogy* might be regarded as the degree zero of late Romantic Aestheticism, the breaking point against which the Unnameable constructs his urbanity. The stumbling and incurious wondering is the absence of play, and this is represented as a sacrifice – a final decision to relent of an ironic condition of subjectivity in language. This suggests the trajectory of Beckett's work after Krapp, but it was to be a slow and gradual shuffling off. If Lawrence's work instated a sacrificial mechanism against Aestheticism, irony and instrumental subjectivity, Beckett's post-Aestheticism instigated a different form of sacrifice. In a deliberate movement of artistic decomposition, Beckett's later work increasingly denied the ironic voice, so that the remains of the aesthetic became even more spectral. By the time of *Not I* (1972), Malone's 'outstretched arms' have been manifested in a solitary mute body on stage, which rhythmically exerts a 'gesture of helpless compassion' as the disembodied mouth circles around a terrifying event, narrating the genesis and possibility of its own speech as a traumatic birth. The narrative voice of *The Unnamable* has been shorn of its urbanity; the refined detachment which offered some compensation for its compelling unweaving of identity. In the late prose *Trilogy* the reductive process is exerted against image and figure, so that the narrator of *Ill Seen, Ill Said* frames the question, 'What remains for the eye exposed to such conditions? To such vicissitude of hardly there and wholly gone'.[44] Yet even in this condition, eyeless and hardly there, the lone woman identifies herself with the ideal sensuous object – the black stone of her grave, the final aesthetic remain, the vanishing point which gothic Aestheticism had circled with its ornate hypotaxis, compulsive irony and decadent mythologies: 'Granite of no common variety assuredly. Black as jade the jasper that flecks its whiteness'.[45]

Chapter 8

Inoperative Ironies: Jamesian Aestheticism and Postmodern Culture in Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*

Part One: Performing Ironies

Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* is set in 1980s Britain, but its vision of the aristocracy, consumerism and the emerging culture of postmodernism is continuously informed by a deep involvement in nineteenth-century Aestheticism. Just as his previous novel, *The Folding Star*, established the presence of the symbolist fin de siècle in the life of an aesthetically inclined gay man in the late twentieth century, *The Line of Beauty* revives the discourses of Aestheticism as shadowy contemporary presences. The historical line of beauty is traced by a double curve – from the aristocratic houses of the 1980s Conservatives to the Victorian fin de siècle, where Beardsley's aesthetic of shadowy surfaces moves through the excesses of Wagnerism, curving back to the equally flirtatious surfaces of 1980s design culture and the new hedonism of Thatcher's Britain. Most significantly, all of these contexts are mediated through the continual presence of Henry James, who is both the model for Hollinghurst's narrative method and the sign of a peculiar kind of ironic aesthetic sensibility which is central to the novel. And Hollinghurst facilitates his representation of Aestheticism in the 1980s by a continual focus on the concept of irony as an aesthetic idea, as a mode of performance and as the basis for an emerging relationship between art and politics. It is this political critique which marks Hollinghurst's distinction from the majority of writers who have written in the wake of Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, since one of the questions that could not be fully articulated until the end of the twentieth century was the extent to which the Paterian idea of a 'more liberal mode of life' could be separated from the politics and economics of neoliberalism; a form of conservative individualism that was fostered in the 1980s in support of a radical and often rabid attack on community, collective life and the very ideal of a *sensus communis* that the aesthetic liberalism of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had promoted.

When nineteenth-century Aestheticism made its declaration of artistic independence, the vagaries of the idea 'art for arts sake' disguised a more insistent claim for the sublime detachment of the ironic consciousness. The Aesthete's ironic performance was, to some degree, an aspiration to the ideal independence of the art object itself, and the self-fashioning of the fin de siècle Aesthetes reflected the increasingly rarefied demands made on the object of beauty in post-Kantian aesthetics. Living by irony, maintaining a posture of detachment and indifference, the Aesthete would protect his independence from use value, ethics and social life. At the same time, as Regenia Gagnier's study of Wilde has shown,[1] the Aesthete's fashioning of life as art might be a highly successful mode of marketing in an accelerating consumer economy. The imbrication of the aesthetic gospel of style in irony, spectacle and consumption became even more clear in the culture of postmodernity, which *The Line of Beauty* stages at the onset of the 1980s. This was perhaps the moment when the dimensions of our contemporary cultural politics were defined, in two important senses: first, in the development of an identity politics which would instigate new models of art's capacity for insurgence, frequently more concerned with performance than the literary or artistic object; and second, in the dominance of an ironic consumerism that increasingly overturned cultural hierarchies. When irony begins to authorize the playful manipulation of consumer spectacle, the utopian ideals of Aestheticism easily slide into the style marketing of postmodernism. Yet if the moment Hollinghurst traces is generally defined according to the collapse of definite cultural hierarchies, *The Line of Beauty* is in many ways focused on the desire for cultural distinction and autonomy. Most theoretical treatments of the development of aesthetic autonomy proceed from the Kantian idea of the autonomous art object, but accounts such as Gadamer's in *Truth and Method* and Bourdieu's in *The Rules of Art* trace a line of beauty from the Kantian idea to an increasingly specialized aesthetic subjectivity, which proceeds to imitate art's autonomy by the cultivation of ironic detachment.[2] In Hollinghurst's novel, equally, the idea of irony is fundamentally linked to the drive for the autonomy of art, the desire for both a free space and a space of distinction.

The primary identification of aesthetic autonomy in *The Line of Beauty* is the figure of Henry James. This is a common enough identification, but in the context of James's critique of Aestheticism, it can be regarded as an extraordinary misreading. James was continually concerned to distance himself from Aestheticism and went to some lengths to determine the precise nature of this distinction. The nature of this effort sets the basis for this reading of Hollinghurst's novel, since James asserted his differences with the Aesthetes by developing his own concept of irony. In a prefatory discussion of his stories of artistic life Henry James praised himself for the manner in which 'my postulates, my animating presences, were all, to their intensification of value, ironic'. Having apparently established irony as a value, he is quick to distinguish what

he calls 'operative irony' – an irony which has an application both moral and utopian in so far as it 'implies and projects the possible other case, the case rich and edifying where the actuality is pretentious and vain'.[3] James's theory of irony suggests moral certainty from the rhetorical strategy that promises the highest degree of aesthetic ambiguity, and his operative value begs the question as to what form an inoperative irony would take. The answer is suggested indirectly in the same preface, in the comments he makes about *The Yellow Book* (the likely prototype for *Ogee*, the fictional magazine edited by Hollinghurst's Aesthetes). James recalls the figure of Aubrey Beardsley, who 'somehow invested the whole proposition with a detached, a slightly ironic and melancholy grace'.[4] Beardsley epitomizes a mode of irony which James had frequently documented in his narratives of Aestheticism and the artistic life, but James's most developed critical representations of irony and Aestheticism, *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Tragic Muse*, were also attempts to demarcate a literary space that was not reducible to Aestheticism's claims for an autonomous sphere of sensuous life.

The Line of Beauty is, like *The Tragic Muse*, a broad portrait of the relations between the artistic and political cultures of a particular moment, but on Hollinghurst's canvas the figure of the Aesthete defines and limits the novel's point of view. His reflector consciousness, Nick Guest, is in some senses a version of Nick Dormer from *The Tragic Muse* – both awkwardly seek artistic destinies while trapped within the confines of aristocratic political worlds. Hollinghurst's Nick has recently left Oxford, where he was 'out as an aesthete but unsure of himself', and is staying at the home of aristocratic conservative MP Gerald Feddens. Nick is clearly enthralled by the Feddenses' world, but he attempts to cultivate a position of ironic detachment, partly through an aspiration to a typically fin de siècle position of aesthetic spectatorship and partly to conceal his gay identity. His timidity about his own homosexuality and his elegiac investment in the aristocracy have invited comparisons with Evelyn Waugh's Charles Ryder, but his own identifications are with James. A postgraduate student writing on 'James and Style', he is 'in love with his rhythms, his ironies, and his idiosyncracies' (208), and he is keen to cite the credo from James's 'The Art of the Novel': 'It is art that *makes* life, makes interest, makes importance [. . .] and I know of no substitute whatever for the force and beauty of its process' (139). The primary value in this statement is the formative process, but Nick himself substitutes artistic consumption for production. As a Jamesian reflector consciousness he exerts no discernible force or friction against his surroundings, and at a particularly self-reflexive moment of the novel he meditates on a Holman Hunt painting where the Virgin's face is hidden, 'so that the painting's centre of consciousness, as Henry James might have thought of her, is effectively a blank' (161–2). Nick would turn his own emptiness into a virtue, much in the manner of Pater's ideal of the Aesthete as a 'characterless' or diaphanous site of artistic impressions, but in this novel

the aesthetic consciousness takes the form of a peculiarly inoperative form of irony. While Hollinghurst's narrative mode is ironic in the Jamesian sense, gently but persistently framing the aspirations and misrecognitions of its focalizer, Nick's point of view compulsively highlights ironic gesture and performance, both in the context of London gay life and the aristocracy. The first phase of the novel traces Nick's self-fashioning in an aristocratic Conservative environment, where his primary model is Gerald Feddens's wife, Rachel. While Gerald is full of a bumptious confidence that defines many of the most offensive characters in the novel, Rachel is a model of detached civility to which Nick aspires: 'It was Rachel's style that attracted him more, as a code both aristocratic and distantly foreign' (8), and her aristocratic self-fashioning is secured by a 'characteristic tremor of irony' (24). Whereas Gerald is all protruding matter, defined for Nick by his 'confusingly firm buttocks' (120), Rachel is curiously disembodied. Working so exclusively by irony she is in some senses a woman without content, barely establishing an identity outside the abstract effect of aristocratic authority, but this is precisely her appeal to Nick, to whom Rachel's gentile ambiguities appeal as a tutelary principle: 'Nick loved the upper-class economy of her talk, her way of saying nothing except by hinted shades of agreement and disagreement; he longed to master it himself' (47). The earlier parts of the novel recount Nick's tutelage in this aristocratic civility, irony and Jamesian style – all of which suggest an imaginary form of mastery that Nick cannot comfortably possess.

The Jamesian contexts of the novel are properly established at a party held at Hawkeswood, the manor house of Rachel's brother Lord Kessler. Rachel is clearly in her element here, framed by the house 'like a Sargent portrait of eighty years earlier, of the time when Henry James had come to stay' (76). When Nick first encounters Lord Kessler over dinner he detects in his conversation 'the incalculable ironies of different kinds of rich people about each other' (48) and seems to quickly master the lord's aristocratic tone, 'feeling he had struck a very subtle register, of loyal affirmation hedged with avowable irony' (53). It is through such moments that Hollinghurst suggests the political status of irony, since Nick's 'subtle register' might describe his more general position with regard to the social and political milieu he has adopted; a loyal affirmation of the Feddenses' and the Kesslers' world, hedged with an ironic detachment which he believes grants him carte blanche concerning associations with Thatcherism.

Irony may well have a conservative function, but Nick's remark about the 'aesthetic poverty of conservatism' suggests his capacity to deflect the political dimension into a question of style, and while his vague mutterings about his PhD thesis are focused on 'style', this aesthetic formalism clearly deflects other concerns; 'He'd developed a reluctance that was Jamesian in itself to say exactly what its subject was. There was a lot to do with hidden sexuality, which struck him as better avoided' (213). It is Lord Kessler, more than anyone else, who

manages to bring him out on this topic. When Nick reveals James to be one of his primary subjects Kessler immediately infers that his theme must be 'Style as an obstacle'. Nick delightedly proffers an alternative concept – 'style that hides things and reveals things at the same time' (54) – which provokes Kessler to affirm that he is indeed a 'James man'. The interpellation so pleases Nick that he feels it as 'a kind of coming out', but his enthusiasm in voicing ideas about concealment and revelation suddenly seems to disturb the delicate economy of the conversation. If he has come out as a Jamesian and as an Aesthete he is still anxious about any sexual undercurrents that might exist in his interview with the elusive aristocratic bachelor. One of the functions of James in Nick's life is to deflect any interpellation of his Aestheticism in terms of his homosexuality, 'James' being a latent rather than emphatic sexual signifier.[5]

The thematic of concealment in the scene with Lord Kessler has many Jamesian analogues, but it also suggests some of the ways that the novel describes irony as an aspect of gay life.[6] If Lord Kessler suggests the masking irony of aristocratic manners, the second aspect of Nick's tutelage is provided by his first lover, Leo, a council worker from an urban black working-class background, with a sophisticated knowledge of London and the gay scene. This sophistication involves an ironic performance of which Nick is constantly aware. He is clearly both attracted and disturbed by Leo's 'cynical little smile' (100) and by 'the masking shadow of his face, lazily watchful, easily cynical, clever and obtuse by turns' (178). At an intimate moment, 'Leo hooded his eyes for a second, a signal, secret and ironic'. In Leo's phone voice: 'he sensed a special irony and lack of expectation in it'. The analogy with Rachel strikes Nick in the slightest of gestures: 'even Leo's "Oh" has a 'subtlety of register worthy of Rachel herself' (176).

Nick appears to internalize these ironic effects to the extent that he can no longer trust his most habitual language. Tokens of endearment lose their value through acerbic inflection: 'the darling, longed for by Nick, taking on a dubious ironic twang' (164). When he tells Leo that his family are 'wonderful' the word suddenly loses its ties with immediate context: '"They're wonderful," Nick said, meaning only to be kind – though he heard the word hang, as if in inverted commas, and underlined too: the wonderful of gush, of connoisseurship, of Kensington Park Gardens' (164). In the declaration of his affection his words become a citation, and this reveals the imbrication of the gesture in his own class identifications, most acutely perhaps to Nick himself. This kind of ironic effect has been held as a cosmopolitan value in a variety of contemporary theoretical models; for Richard Rorty it is one of the duties of the liberal ironist to reveal the 'contingency of language' and selfhood.[7] In a quite different context, Judith Butler's earlier work constructed citationality as a critical value in the subversion of gender performatives.8 But in Nick's experience the sense of performative contingency has no power to emancipate the ironic subject or disturb the habitual identity. The experience of citationality is one of

acute embarrassment rather than detached control. When the word 'wonderful' hovers 'in inverted commas' it reveals Nick's most conservative affections and attachments – the privileged environment of his Oxford contemporaries and Gerald Feddens's household, where the 'gush' of the word 'wonderful' is part of the general excess of voluble dinners taken late after aperitifs – a sign of class affinity far from Leo's world and his mother's 5 o clock tea.

Such disturbances in Nick's sense of language and identity reflect a period of his life where he is still trying to establish the correct ironic relationship with his own speech, and his embarrassment around citationality is predicated on a more internal form of irony which he experiences as fragility and detachment. This can be directly contrasted with Leo, whose more calculated and well-rehearsed ironic performances allow him to successfully navigate distinction and embarrassment. When they encounter Nick's friends at Portobello market, Leo maintains an appearance of 'steady ironic contemplation' (114), and this allows him to negotiate what Nick experiences as 'a scene of tortuous intercessions between different departments of his life'. It is only when mentioning his own family that Leo reveals vulnerability, when Nick recognizes 'this first hint of shyness and shame, and the irony that tried to cover it' (35). In this case irony helps Leo to conceal his sexual identity from his mother, and this tactic seems to be shared at the dinner table by his lesbian sister, who 'raised one eyebrow and seemed to cut her food up in a very ironical way' (159). Nick's focalization of the ironic gesture is all the more paranoid and overdetermined at this stage, when he is yet to master irony himself. He feels particularly exposed when meeting Leo's ex-lover Pete, since 'as so often he felt he had the wrong kind of irony, the wrong kind of knowledge, for gay life' (104). Nick's irony is more absolute, his detachment more complete than Leo's, and his discomfort with Pete suggests his distance from 'an era of sexual defiance and fighting alliances' (106) – the commitment and attachments involved in identity politics.

In Nick's still limited experience there are clearly some modes of irony which work within urban gay culture and some which do not. The suggestion at this early stage of the novel is that his irony as a Jamesian Aesthete may in fact be precisely what alienates him from gay life and may be responsible for 'the recurrent vague snobbery and timidity with which he peered into the world of actually existing gayness' (106). Leo uses forms of irony which are defensive and strategic, neither operative in the Jamesian sense nor aspiring to the Aesthete's detachment, but Nick's irony is the most inoperative form – the absolute detachment of an aesthetic consciousness which finds its ideal model in the abstract object of beauty.

Nick finds this ideal object in Wani Ouradi, the son of a Lebanese immigrant multimillionaire who has already inherited the spoils of Thatcherism and performs his wealth with an unconscious dandyism. His beauty and indifference fulfil Nick's aristocratic aesthetic ideal, and his first fleeting perception

of Wani offers 'a moment of selfless but intensely curious immersion in his beauty' (91). From this point the novel increasingly draws an equation between Nick's gospel of beauty and his cultivation of an ironic performance. He becomes explicitly interpolated as 'Antoine's aesthete' (209) and welcomes the image: 'advancing in the high mirror which hung over the fireplace' – one of a succession of moments where Nick catches himself in the mirror fulfilling his own ideal image, yet at the same time becoming increasingly detached. The ironist's relationship to spectacle is the same as that diagnosed by Hegel, but Hollinghurst's emphasis on the continuous mirror phase suggests that the Aesthete's identity is consolidated by mimetic desire for a uniquely detached and transparent object. Having undergone his tutelage with the Kesslers and Leo, Nick perfects his ironic performative through an imitative identification with Wani's 'cool dissociating manner'.

Wani's beauty is equally a motivation for Nick's snobbery.[9] At the Hawkeswood party he 'made everything else in the house seem stale, over-artful, or beside the point' (91). This reproduces the contempt we are told that Henry James had towards the nouveau riche elements of the country house's design, and the sense that beauty's primary force is to reveal vulgarity is reiterated in the echoes of James's *The Spoils of Poynton*, which Wani and Nick later intend to film. Sometime later Nick pitches the *Poynton* project in a house full of 'shiny paintings and Empire torchères', precisely the kind of decorative effects that Fleda Vetch and Adele Gereth revolt against at Waterbath in the opening scene of *The Spoils of Poynton*, and Hollinghurst has Nick 'wincing at the high polish on everything' (210). *The Spoils of Poynton* traces a great divide between art and consumer society, describing both the vulgarity of a modernity based on conspicuous consumption and the mania of the Aesthete's resistance to modernity. Its intertextual position in *The Line of Beauty* makes a central point about the constitution of Nick's Aestheticism. In the same way that Henry James represents Adele Gereth's religious veneration to beautiful 'things' as both origin and symptom of her fervent loathing of the emerging culture of the commodity and celebrity, Nick establishes his ironic detachment when he is increasingly exposed to the 1980s; he defines himself as an Aesthete as the decade reveals itself as the moment of liberal economics and consumption, to the extent that his aesthetic identity appears to be constituted as a symptomatic reaction to the 'vulgarity' of the contemporary.

Aestheticism, Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of the 1980s

The 1890s of *The Spoils of Poynton* saw the reciprocal emergence of a society of mass reproduction, spectacle and consumption and the consolidation of the aesthetic reaction to this culture, particularly in the proto-modernist culture

of symbolism. The 1980s of *The Line of Beauty* appear as a refracted mirror of this Jamesian scene. In the second part of the novel, set in 1986, Hollinghurst develops the logic of Nick's Aestheticism and irony to the point where they are increasingly being realized as postmodernism. As he grows accustomed to Wani's money and cocaine, he appears to accept the new economies of culture operating in the 1980s. At this point his irony changes character and allows for the embrace of pastiche and kitsch; the new attitude is suggested by his response to Wani's new house: 'Of course the house was vulgar, as almost everything postmodern was, but he found himself taking a surprising pleasure in it' (199). Although these are clearly the pleasures of postmodern irony, Nick still manages to preserve the Aesthete's gospel of beautiful impressions. Wani and he are producing the magazine *Ogee*, referring to Hogarth's conception of the double-curved line which characterizes beauty in nature and craft, and in the surfaces of Wani's bedroom the repeated curve suggests the triumph of aesthetics, 'pure expression, decorative not structural'. This is only one example of Hollinghurst's continuous attempt to bring together the discourses of Aestheticism and postmodernism. Hollinghurst recontextualized the nineteenth-century symbolist tradition in *The Folding Star*. In *The Line of Beauty* he bears witness to the ways that the postmodern moment performed a translation of Aestheticism, how the ideals of life as art and the cultivation of aesthetic impressions return farcically as stylized pastiche and overconsumption.[10] Hal Foster has described this cultural process in terms of the ubiquity of design:

> The old project to reconnect Art and Life, endorsed in different ways by Art Nouveau, the Bauhaus, and many other movements, was eventually accomplished, but according to the spectacular dictates of the culture industry, not the liberatory ambitions of the avant-garde. And the primary form of this perverse reconciliation in our time is design.[11]

Foster's diagnosis suggests that the legacy of Aestheticism was more a consolidation of bourgeois hedonism than a utopian transformation of everyday life. This is typical of the Marxist modernist position on Aestheticism,[12] which contains both a powerful ideology critique and a deliberate misreading of the Victorian moment. The notion of life as art was only one aspect of the complex dialectics of nineteenth-century Aestheticism, which was equally motivated to establish a utopian image: the aesthetic dimension was separated from life in order to figure a future reintegration between life and art. Postmodernism shares many of the tendencies of Aestheticism – the embrace of lifestyle and decorative form, the celebration of irony as a mode of freedom. The central difference is that while Victorian Aestheticism held the artistic sphere at a distance with the hope of dragging life into its orbit, postmodern culture tends to embrace the present as an already constituted total art work, its flaws or

vulgarities negotiated and ameliorated by irony. One of the consequences of this is that it becomes increasingly difficult to separate the aesthetic realm from the political and the economic.

The Line of Beauty presents a symptomatic representation of the cultural sphere in the age of liberal economics which in many ways reflects the Marxist modernist critique of Aestheticism. As the novel progresses the great divide between the aesthetic dimension and commodity capitalism is increasingly breached. The imbrication of art and money is signalled by a pastiche of Martin Amis's *Money* (1984),[13] as Nick and Wani discuss their Henry James movie with its spectacularly dumb producers, Brad Craft and Treat Rush, who happen to mention their friend Julius Money. Nick's Jamesian performance becomes more mannered in reaction to this grotesque Amis backdrop, and he believes that the aesthetic performance renders him beyond the economic. 'I'm the aesthete, remember! I don't know about the money side of things', (223) he says to Lord Ouradi at one point, but he has in fact been investing in city funds with the help of his Oxford contemporaries. The city increasingly becomes central to Nick, and his relationship with postmodernism is staged in a visit to Lord Kessler's new corporate headquarters. This is clearly a version of the Lloyd's building, which had been opened in 1986, and through Nick's focalization we are introduced to its external design – its famously externalized innards, the spectacular central trading room with its numerous escalators and its historically preserved boardroom, a reconstructed dining room from Bowood House in Wiltshire.[14] All these elements of the building are interpreted as significant aspects of the claims of postmodern aesthetics, and Hollinghurst is attentive to the kind of aesthetic and political discourse that the building generated.

Before the visit to Lloyd's Nick has been discussing Wagner with his financial adviser, Sam Zeman, and the focus on Wagnerism is not incidental. His enthusiasm is, of course, typical of the fin de siècle Aesthete, but was equally a facet of his cultural moment. Andreas Huyssen wrote in 1986 that 'the current Wagner cult may indeed be a happy collusion between the megalomania of the postmodern and that of the pre-modern on the edge of modernism',[15] suggesting that there is a hidden cultural logic in Nick Guest's synthesis of the Decadent fin de siècle and the 1980s. Huyssen has also described the emergence of mixed-media performance culture according to the Wagnerian analogy, as 'the revival of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* as postmodern spectacle'.[16] Hollinghurst suggests, in a similar way, that the postmodern financial building has become a contemporary form of the total art work. In *The Line of Beauty* the Lloyd's trading room becomes a symbolic space where economic life is translated into public theatre, as Nick watches the costumed workers in the vast interior:

> On the exposed escalators the employees are carried up and down, looking both slavish and intensely important. Nick watches the motorbike

> messengers in their sweaty waterproofs and leathers and heavy boots. He feels abashed and agitated by the closeness of so many people at work, in costume, in character, in the know. (203)

Nick's agitation is a typical reaction of the Aesthete confronted with work and workers, but his broader anxiety is generated by the public dimension of the building and the kind of performances it generates. One of the effects of his engagement with the Lloyd's building is to emphasize the distinction between the private aesthetic consciousness and public space, yet the way Nick focalizes the public performances of the Lloyd's workers also allows Hollinghurst to engage in the claims made by architects in the 1980s for a postmodern urbanism.

In a 1985 monograph Richard Rogers and Partners had voiced a clear social agenda based on the regeneration of public space,[17] and their manifesto for the Lloyd's building was based on a democratic and performative conception of architecture: 'Buildings are not idiosyncratic private institutions: they give public performances both to the user and passerby. Thus the architect's responsibility must go beyond the client's program and into the broader public realm'.[18] Hollinghurst's version of Lloyd's undermines this notion of aesthetic democracy: if Rogers claims to resist the private status of the corporate institution, Nick's perception is haunted by the suggestion that the workers possess private knowledge, that the corporate sphere performs knowledge as power. This is consolidated in the figure of Lord Kessler, who is transposed at this point of the novel from his aristocratic country house to his corporate headquarters. Peering into the corporate cathedral's heights Nick imagines Lord Kessler presiding: 'Nick craned upward for a glimpse of the regions where Lord Kessler himself might be conducting business, at that level surely a matter of mere blinks and ironies, a matter of telepathy' (204). While its architects represented Lloyd's as the public space for diverse performative practices, Hollinghurst frames the building as a metaphor for the reinscription of aristocratic power relations within the free market economy, and once again irony is the sign of power in detachment. Economic authority is maintained as an aesthetic position, a point which is underscored rather heavily by Nick's description of Lord Kessler's privileged domain: 'He knew that the old panelled boardroom had been retained and that Lionel had hung some remarkable pictures there. In fact he said that Nick should call in one day and see the Kandinsky' (204–5). This embodies the contradictory imperatives of postmodern aesthetics neatly: in spite of the fact that Lloyd's expresses an emphatic contemporaneity, the postmodern historicist method also allows for the preservation of essential elements from the past – in this case the boardroom, the centre of power. The Kandinsky in the boardroom is one of the novel's most overstated symbols: the aristocratic distance of high Modernism presides within the postmodern semblance of public art and in this case symbolizes the pact between an aristocratic conservatism and the new money.

It is within this political condition that Hollinghurst questions the space of art and aesthetic consciousness. The moment of the novel coincides precisely with the Conservative government's attempt to debilitate the public status of the arts, which began with the 1983 cuts to the Arts Council's budget increases. This exacerbated the political antagonism to Thatcherism within the arts and led to increasing politicization of the National Theatre, the RSC and other central cultural institutions.[19] Hollinghurst is peculiarly reticent in detailing the particular cultural conflicts that emerged in the wake of Thatcherism and the art's-budget cuts, and to this extent his own Jamesian strategy threatens to disable the novel's critical potential. Part of the reason for this reluctance to portray resistance may be explained by his fidelity to Nick as a centre of consciousness, since Nick has clearly sheltered himself from any radicalization of art and, to a large extent, from the public dimension of culture. His appearance at the Lloyd's building is the exception to his largely private cultivation of artistic sensations. In spite of his interest in architecture and contemporary design culture, the primary medium of Nick's artistic experience throughout the novel is music, and this attention to music allows Hollinghurst to give a more general representation of the problematic status of art and Aestheticism in the culture of Thatcherism and postmodernism.

Musical Altitudes and Aesthetic Independence

Nick Guest's experiences are constantly informed by his musical passions. Much as Proust reiterates the 'little phrase' from the Vinteuil sonata as the leitmotif of Swann's love for Odette, Nick's love for Leo is carried on a 'love chord' whose grandiose swell threatens to overcome his ironic distance. There is clearly a tension between what music reveals to Nick – the important part it plays in his sexual awakening – and the demands he places on music as a Jamesian Aesthete, rigorous in his sense of formal detachment and stylistic finish. The novel in fact stages an argument about the relative status of music: apparently the most abstract and independent of artistic media, yet equally the most insidiously physical, tied more than any other art to the development of our affections.

The first and most explicit musical theme in the novel is the recurrent argument that Nick has with Gerald on the merits of Richard Strauss, who Gerald adores and Nick regards as vulgar excess, or what Catherine Feddens calls 'goddamery'. During one of Nick and Gerald's spats a Radio 4 commentary on the various recordings of a Strauss piece effectively mimics Nick's aesthetic stance: '"But its possible isn't it," the clever young man went on, "to wonder if the sheer opulence of the sound and those very broad tempi don't push this reading over the edge, losing that essential drop of self-irony without which the piece can all too easily become an orgy of vulgarity"' (95). Just as Nick believes

his irony will save him from identification with the postmodern bombast of Wani's world, the 'clever young man' on the radio seeks an ironic exculpation from Strauss's fin de siècle excess. This pastiche of the cultural commentator's demand for reflexive detachment prefaces a more searching examination of Nick's critical discourses, as Hollinghurst subsequently presents Nick's own assessment of Strauss in quoted monologue:

> What the problem was was this colossal redundancy, the squandering of brilliant technique on cheap material. [. . .] And then there was the sheer bad taste of applying the high metaphysical language of Wagner to the banalities of bourgeois life, an absurdity Strauss seemed only intermittently aware of! But he couldn't say that, he would sound priggish, he would seem to care too much. Gerald would say it was only music. (96)

Nick's critical voice here echoes Adorno's assertion that 'philosophy [. . .] is for sale in Strauss's music. [. . .] Everything becomes a cultural good to be looked at, to be bought, to be enjoyed as a stimulus for the nerves of the big but tired businessman'.[20] Yet Nick's critique of bourgeois music is shorn of any political content, and as he himself recognizes, it all too easily allows for Gerald's assertion that 'it's only music'. In this case it is the Conservative politician, rather than the Aesthete, who asserts the autonomy of art. Music, like irony, is rendered inoperative by Nick's inability to protect it from his Conservative patrons.

This is a consistent feature of Hollinghurst's representation of the Conservative Party's attitude to art in the 1980s, and if Gerald asserts musical independence in the Strauss debate in order to protect his own indulgence, there are yet more serious ways in which the belief in artistic autonomy may actually be quite consistent with his Thatcherism. At the centre of the novel Hollinghurst represents a musical recital, which Gerald Feddens hosts exclusively for the pianist Nina Glaserova. Nina is an Eastern bloc émigré, and it is clear that 'Gerald's claims for her were political as much as artistic' (237), the broader purpose of the concert being to represent the triumph of Western neoliberalism over Eastern bloc communism. The artist is presented by Gerald as an objective embodiment of democratic freedoms, but it is clear that Nina's sense of artistic mission and the affective power of her playing are less palatable to the Conservative audience. The disparity between Nick's passionate response and that of the rest of the audience is glaring, as Nina's performance of Beethoven's *Farewell* Sonata conveys to him a powerful sense of art's necessity which appears to compromise his carefully cultivated ironic distance. During the performance he gazes at Wani and the idealized reflection of his muse, which operates as the door to a limitless aesthetic dimension:

> Nick focused on him, so that everything else swam and Wani alone, or the bit of him he could see, throbbed minutely against the glossy double curve

> of the piano lid. He felt he floated forwards into another place, beautiful, speculative, even dangerous, a place created and held open by the music, but separate from it. It had the mood of a troubling dream, where nothing could be known for certain or offer a solid foothold to memory after one had woken. (240)

Hollinghurst describes Nick's musical experience in primarily spatial terms, but in the central public performance of the novel the 'place created and held open by the music' is exclusively private. Music creates an autonomous imaginary interior, and this is the polar opposite of Nick's experience of the Lloyd's building with its demonstrative public spectacle. While Nick's ironic consumerism and dandyish performance suggested a direct translation of Aestheticism into postmodernism by way of irony, his musical experience suggests a retreat from postmodernism to an Aestheticism of total synaesthetic immersion, and this proceeds directly from his Wagnerian enthusiasms.

Hollinghurst's description of musical reception is closely inflected with the discourse of the symbolist tradition that he traced in *The Folding Star*; the aesthetic state is described by analogy with the drug experience and the 'troubling dream', and both of these experiences are imagined in terms of the production of a new imaginary space.[21] One of the most influential nineteenth-century expressions of this equation between music, drugs and dream experience was Baudelaire's description of his reception of Wagner in the essay 'Richard Wagner and *Tannhäuser* in Paris' (1861).[22] For Baudelaire, music revealed an independent space and closely approximated the troubling dream experience of the opium trance; it opened up '*an immensity with no other décor but itself*',[23] and this virtual space allowed for 'a profound reverie, in an absolute solitude, a solitude with an *immense horizon*'. In the series of descriptions of Wagner's music that Baudelaire cites and augments, all categories of experience – dream, pleasure and solitude – are subsumed under the spatial analogue of the immense room or horizon.

Nick Guest's musical epiphany follows this symbolist tendency to experience art as both a transcendental imaginary experience and a refracted image of worldly luxury. The young Aesthete enters an abstract universe, but he does so through the image of his lover reflected in a piano lid – the shallow reflection is both a limitless gateway and a momentary narcissistic glimmer. This is clearly a radically different model of aesthetic experience to that of the cocaine-fuelled postmodern ironist since, according to the symbolist model of opiates, music creates a virtual and autonomous world of total synaesthetic immersion, whereas according to Nick and Wani's cocaine model, ironic consumerism works by an accelerated immediacy in which the consumer nevertheless remains detached. What is yet common to both attitudes is that they maintain the aesthetic consciousness as an experience of altitude and distance, what Baudelaire celebrates as 'that extraordinary *thrill of pleasure*

which dwells in *high places*'.[24] Paul de Man has read this desire for altitude as one of the fundamental drives of Baudelaire's self-fashioning as an ironist: the function of irony is to lift him to an exalted dimension even as he floats through the urban crowd; a disembodied spectator.[25] Nick achieves precisely this kind of detachment in the 'beautiful, speculative' space of the music, and this recalls the altitudes which Lord Kessler inhabits in the Wagnerian Lloyd's building – floating in the Kandinsky of his boardroom. In *The Line of Beauty* the acquisition of altitude is one of the most powerful lures of art, and the privileged environment in which Nick has been guest effectively materializes this musical transcendence: the Feddenses' end of Ladbrooke Grove taking 'palpable advantages of the hill as a social metaphor' (165) and the 'love chord' which resounded through the first part of the novel floating Nick towards illusory heights.

The Line of Beauty takes a complex view of this drive for aesthetic altitude which is both critical and sympathetic.[26] Nick cultivates a snobbery which reflects aristocratic privilege, yet in the context of the particular trials of gay life in the Thatcherite 1980s the aesthetic dimension could be said to offer a necessary space of autonomy. Adorno suggested in his essay on Hofmannsthal[27] that the snobbery of the fin de siècle Aesthetes had an ambivalent cultural politics – snobbery was both a reactionary aristocratic posture and, at the same time, a bid for independence which held its own promise of happiness. In the same way, Nick Guest's drive for aesthetic altitude forms a dialectical image. His drive for free space reflects that of Jamesian women like Fleda Vetch or Isabel Archer, who explicitly define aesthetic and aristocratic principles as the grounds of their bid for autonomy, but Hollinghurst equally suggests that Nick's striving for an aristocratic altitude holds no capacity for genuine freedom.

In the last section of the novel, 'The End of the Street', the narrative follows a traditional and melodramatic structure, and according to the moral demands of melodrama, Nick's delusory heights demand a fall. Colm Tóibín has criticized such mechanisms from a Jamesian perspective as enforcing closure on the impressionistic openness of the novel,[28] but *The Line of Beauty* in fact follows typically Jamesian melodramatic patterns. While Hollinghurst has constructed his Aesthete as a Jamesian, he is most Jamesian as a narrator when he forces a series of unmaskings. Nick's divorce from the Feddenses' world is brought about by scandal: as Gerald is caught in insider dealing, the tabloids discover Nick's relationship with Wani, who is now dying from AIDS. When Nick returns to Kensington Park Gardens stalked by photographers, his first encounter with Rachel and Lord Kessler signals the Jamesian peripeteia. At this point, rather than seeing himself as the master of ironic style, Nick experiences himself directly as the subject of James's dramatic irony: 'Rachel was sitting by the mantelpiece, Lionel sitting in an armchair, and for a second Nick thought of the scene in *The Portrait of a Lady* when Isabel discovers her

husband sitting while Mme Merle is standing and sees at once that they are more intimate than she had realized' (446). The intimacy of the siblings is conspiratorial, and Nick is clearly soon to be excluded from the Feddenses' world. This is the first parallel between Nick and Isabel Archer but encapsulates his peculiar position of an anxious and enforced distance, what L. C. Knights has described as the archetypically Jamesian experience of the 'trapped spectator'.[29] Hollinghurst has transposed the position of Isabel Archer from the gender politics of the 1880s into the sexual politics of the 1980s, but he has also given a contemporary context to James's exploration of Aestheticism, aspiration and cultural conservatism. We could follow the comparisons with *The Portrait of a Lady* beyond Hollinghurst's cues to say that, as Isabel Archer realizes in her famous act of fireside meditation, Nick Guest has been 'ground in the very mill of the conventional' (*PL*, 622) – aesthetic irony is not only inoperative as a critique of Political Conservatism, but uniquely vulnerable to its violent powers of containment and exclusion.

According to Hollinghurst's representation of the 1980s, then, there are two problems with irony and Aestheticism. The first is in relation to the aristocracy – the Aesthete attempts to reclaim a posture of independence and detachment from the aristocracy but remains bound to the object it mimics; where it aspires to autonomy it remains in a position of patronage – an obliging guest. The second problem is in the arena of postmodernism, where the Aesthete manages an ironically detached appreciation of contemporary culture but fails to assert any independence from capital and commodity consumption. In the first sense Aestheticism is compromised by its specious claim to autonomy, while in the second sense it is not autonomous enough. Hollinghurst maps the aesthetic and political condition of the 1980s according to these torn halves – an aristocratic retreat and a consumerist dispersal of artistic energies. According to this symptomatic representation of postmodernity, there appears to be no independent space for the aesthetic.

This deterministic cultural critique is tentatively redressed in the conclusion to *The Line of Beauty*, which invokes a powerful sense of the residual potential of aesthetic experience. As in Pater's famous aesthetic 'Conclusion', the quickened sense of beauty's presence is invoked by the recognition of mortality, as Nick leaves the Feddenses' house and contemplates the possibility of his own diagnosis as HIV positive. This is perhaps the first moment in the novel that Nick stands in free space, no longer a guest in a Tory household, and in this sense it is arguably the first moment in the novel where the aesthetic dimension is experienced as a democratic freedom. The consequent emotion, made up of 'terror', nostalgia and unconditional affirmation, is constituted at the end of the street where it is 'the fact of a street corner at all that seemed so beautiful' (501). Yet the ambivalence of this affirmation offers the novel's final question to Aestheticism. Since Nick's gaze appears to finally rest on an architecture of opulence, 'number 24, the final house with

its stucco swags and bows', his Aestheticism may equally be said to depend on the aristocratic space from which he has just been brutally expelled. It is this moment which questions most forcefully the capacity for aesthetic democracy which had been co-opted by Conservative neoliberalism and postmodernism. In the conclusion to Nick Guest's Jamesian life, beauty is a rare thing, and if his aesthetic affirmation is 'shockingly unconditional', his artistic life is violently limited by a cultural and political condition which the 1980s enforced and revealed.

Chapter 9

The Aesthetic Afterlives of Mr W. P.: Reanimating Pater in Twenty-first-Century Fiction

The vampire narrative, perhaps the most prevalent of all neo-Victorian modes in contemporary culture, presents an uncanny image of historical reanimation and rebirth. As an immortal figure who refuses the determinacy of local context and chooses to escape the nineteenth century, the vampire transgresses the orthodoxies of historical criticism,[1] reanimating himself in other centuries, transporting a spirit across history and nation in a bizarre mimicry of the Enlightenment humanist ideal of culture. In *Aesthetic Afterlives* I have traced a current of Aesthetic vampirism inherited from Baudelaire, Kierkegaard and primarily Walter Pater. Pater's representation of the Mona Lisa – Aestheticism's most influential and gracious vampire – figured an aesthetic life or autonomous art work which appears to exist outside of history, while herself underwriting the project of aesthetic historicism. But it was Pater's essay on Prosper Mérimée that suggested the trajectory in which Hegel's critique of irony was carried into Modernism. When Pater identified the French writer as the glacial spirit of modern irony and Kantian negation, violently addicted to excess of style, he set the terms not only of Aestheticism's self-critique but of Modernism's turn against the Victorian fin de siècle. It would be precisely this compulsive irony that Lawrence targeted in his sacrificial treatment of Aestheticism as demonic detachment, but equally it would be an ironic method which Katherine Mansfield used to turn against the culture of the fin de siècle. Pater's final image for the condition of aesthetic detachment was to determine Mérimée as of 'a vampire tribe' – a rare moment of biodeterminism in his work that appears to ascribe a racial difference to the extreme personification of aesthetic independence. But there were also personal reasons for this metaphor. These have remained in shadow for over a century, but I can reveal them now, in the hope that I might assist a spectral revival.

In the 1920s, Marc-André Raffalovich reiterated an image of Pater as 'a large grey Vampire' (Michaelson, 465). This had apparently been current in 1870s Oxford, where the diaphanous don was perceived as a 'black/white ingratiating

vampire' (469). Raffalovich resuscitated what he took to be an insult in order to mount a defence of Pater's legacy, but the gothic image may have been neither a misrepresentation nor a slur. The private conclusion I attained on my research on Aesthetic vampirism was that Pater's vampire motifs were clearly identifying a mode of life he had either already chosen or was secretly preparing for. In short, I was convinced that Pater must still be alive, albeit undead, in the form of a vampire.

After a good deal of fruitless research on contemporary Paters, I finally found a reference to a 'Mr W. P.', who had been living in a small medieval hill town in northern Tuscany. I immediately left and scoured the area, with no success, until one night, sitting in a dark and empty vegetarian café in one of the town's satellite villages, I came upon an intimation of my prey. I was reading *Imaginary Portraits* abstractedly when I glimpsed a pale but ingratiating figure, whose upper lip exposed a strange scar or ellipsis – as if his face was haunted by the absence of a huge moustache. This was a man of shadows bereft of his customary mask. Terrified by such close exposure and afraid to confront my hero in this faceless condition, I fled back to England.

I was worried that the matter might be closed here, but at the same time, my friend Marcus Dowson was suffering from an academic crisis. Historicism, he angrily insisted, had destroyed literary studies and all of its capacity for surprising reanimations and translations.[2] 'Literature, it's all dead to me', he would say, 'and especially those damned Victorians'. Thinking of ways I could recuperate Marcus's aesthetic life, I felt that Mr W. P. could be the answer and I hoped that Marcus in his present state would benefit rather than recoil from the shock of vampiric reanimation. If Marcus were to find Mr W. P., then Victorian literature would live for him again, though in undead form, and at the same time I might use Marcus as a medium – a passage between my scholarship and the chthonic terror of my hero's vampire state. I sent him to Tuscany, with my spare copy of Nietzsche's essay 'On the Advantage and Disadvantages of History for Life' for the journey.[3]

I waited for several months with no communication of any kind, until finally I received Marcus's terrifying statement: 'I have passed into the diaphanous state. Henceforth our communication will be in the realm of shadows'.[4]

After I overcame the shock of my friend's incipient vampirism, I became increasingly excited by the possibility that he might be able to mediate a textual relationship between myself and Mr W. P. There were so many questions I had stored for Pater over the years. Could the idealist project of Victorian Aestheticism be translated or transfigured in the twenty-first century? Or had Pater's construction of the 'aesthetic critic' – subjective, impressionistic and eccentric – effectively compromised the utopian ideals of artistic labour that had determined Ruskin's gothic and Morris's Aesthetic socialism? Was it possible to reconcile the organicist and environmental politics that were now being increasingly co-opted and corrupted by modern conservatism, with the cosmopolitan ideals of urban

aesthetic modernity – irony, difference and the 'relative spirit'? Or was the model of Aestheticism as radical irony redundant, now that we were so clearly aware of the complicity of postmodern irony with the consumer economy?

I refrained from a direct approach to these questions and decided to engage Mr W. P. in a neo-Victorian experiment. I would ingratiate myself with a series of presents, cultural products which I believed had in some sense framed, reanimated or translated the discourses of Victorian Aestheticism in contemporary culture. The majority of these would be fictional works by the writers known as 'the New Beauticians' – Alan Hollinghurst's *The Line of Beauty*, Zadie Smith's *On Beauty* and Alan Ball's *American Beauty*.[5] All of these works seemed to reanimate an idea or experience of beauty that was related to Pater's 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance*, where the transience and impressionability that Baudelaire celebrated as the condition of modernity are read as fundamental aspects of aesthetic subjectivity. The New Beauticians had their own aesthetic conclusions; postmillennial, their aesthetic sense of an ending might bring with it a kind of relief,[6] as of a crisis postponed or of an imaginary crisis tentatively welcomed. But whether their works sought to exploit the impressionability and transience of aesthetic subjectivity or to reconcile it with an idea of community, they were all in some sense the children of Mr W. P.

Having already undertaken a close reading of *The Line of Beauty*, it seemed inevitable that my first present to Mr W. P. should be this complex piece of aesthetic historicism. Hollinghurst's novel is a work of understated neo-Victorianism in which actual allusions to Pater or Wilde are absent, and I felt that this would in some sense ease the embarrassment of celebrity that Pater no doubt felt, in spite of his relative obscurity in the world of literature and aesthetics. Considering Hollinghurst's provocative representation of nineteenth-century Aestheticism, I hoped to arouse a passionate attitude in Mr W. P., but his response was typically opaque:

> Dear Dr E.,
>
> I am grateful for your continued interest in a body of work which seems, in the light of your contemporary, to have been, as it were, set in relief, in all its ripeness. In the prose of your age we find Style in all its varieties, reserved or opulent, terse, abundant, musical, stimulant, academic, but I must hasten to my conclusion feeling, as you might expect, an indefinable taint of death in these fond returning ghosts, the remains of my literary architecture.

My first impression here was that Mr W. P. was flagrantly recycling himself, though we might expect this of a writer who had been undead since 1894. Furthermore his somewhat overwrought hypotaxis seemed to have entirely deflected my specific questions of influence and legacy. On further reflection, though, I wondered if the allusion to his own essay 'Style' was perhaps a tacit response to Hollinghurst's

Nick Guest, engaged in a thesis on 'Henry James and Style', and a subtle way of reinstating Pater's priority over James's critical theory. But the most resonant reanimation here was of the 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance*, where Pater says of Rousseau: 'An undefinable taint of death had clung always about him, and now in early manhood he believed himself smitten by mortal disease' (*R*, 190).

I quickly realized that Mr W. P.'s allusion was pointing to the final page of *The Line of Beauty*, when Nick Guest contemplates the possibility of his own diagnosis as HIV positive and subsequent death of AIDS. At this moment his gaze returns to the beautiful house of the Feddenses, and the narrative of Aestheticism and Thatcherite economics is overshadowed by the imagination of death:

> The tall white house-fronts had a muted gleam. It came over him that the test result would be positive. The words that were said every day to others would be said to him. [. . .] He tried to rationalize the fear, but its pull was too strong and original. It was inside himself, but the world around him, the parked cars, the cruising taxi, the church spire among the trees, had also been changed. They had been revealed. It was like a drug sensation, but without the awareness of play [. . .] it was the morning's vision of the empty street, but projected far forward, into afternoons like this one decades hence, in the absent hum of their own business. The emotion was startling. It was a sort of terror, made up of emotions from every stage of his short life. [. . .] It was a love of the world that was shockingly unconditional. He stared back at the house, and then turned and drifted on. He looked in bewilderment at number 24, the final house with its regalia of stucco swags and bows. It wasn't just this street corner but the fact of a street corner at all that seemed, in the light of the moment, so beautiful.[7]

Hollinghurst's aesthetic conclusion obeys the most familiar aspect of Pater's, where a recognition of mortality induces an embrace of the beautiful moment, but Nick Guest's aesthetic experience is more complex, both in its temporality and its political unconscious. Nick's 'vision of the empty street', like T. S. Eliot's in 'Preludes', attains a disturbing autonomy from the actual street; in this case it is 'projected far forward' to a point beyond Nick's death. This suggests a more gothic variation on Pater's aesthetic carpe diem: it is not so much that the aesthetic sense is inaugurated by the recognition of finitude, but that the aesthetic framing of the present demands an imaginary assumption of one's own death.

This is the same relationship between irony and death that I had found in Lee's *Hauntings* and Beckett's *Trilogy*. In a radicalized version of the cliché 'death: the final irony', only extinction ensures an impersonal and detached point of view. Nick experiences this being unto death as a moment of vertigo, which affords him with a double emotion: both the unconditional affirmation of beauty and 'a sort of terror'. In the passage I have quoted it appears that Nick Guest's experience

of the beautiful cannot be disentangled from its privileged conditions – the Feddenses' house, with its 'regalia of stucco swags and bows'. Yet the apprehension of terror radically disturbs the ideal of beauty, and Nick appears to stand in free space for the first time. This suggests an important distinction from Pater's 'Conclusion', since it effectively reanimates a discourse of the sublime that had remained largely repressed in the culture of Paterian Aestheticism. Hollinghurst's conclusion reconfigures the sublime as a psychic tremor akin to Rilke's terrifying angel,[8] but there is perhaps also a political possibility in this moment. If we were to radicalize Lyotard's notion of the postmodern sublime,[9] we might say that in Nick Guest's life the sublime is an event which ruptures the line of beauty and questions the cultural polity and neoliberal economics of the 1980s.

The complexities of Hollinghurst's conclusion here raise a number of more general questions regarding the fate of Aestheticism in Victorian and contemporary culture. Has a neo-Victorian Aestheticism based on the ideal of beauty become redundant when, as Lyotard has suggested, aesthetic avant-gardism has been dominated by a logic of the sublime as the undoing of representation? Furthermore, if the Victorian ideal of beauty has become politically compromised or ideologically tainted, is it possible to reconstruct a politics of Aestheticism based on an ideal of sensuous life, on what Jacques Rancière has called a 'politics of the distribution of the sensible'? Hollinghurst narrates a radical split between aesthetic subjectivity in its freedom – a freedom which is finally afforded by the sublime – and the distribution of sensible artistic pleasures – which is designated as the realm of beauty. Since Nick identifies himself as a late Victorian Aesthete, this divide might be taken as symptomatic of the poverty of the Victorian ideas of beauty and aesthetic democracy, but we might read the return to the sublime as the guarantor of freedom as much as a retreat from beauty's radical promise – a retreat which is itself symptomatic of the condition of aesthetics after Thatcherism.

In order to pursue these questions further, I packaged up a series of recent beauty products in contemporary literature and film and sent them to Tuscany in an attempt to elicit Mr W. P.'s response. The first work was Alan Ball's hymn to the suburbanization of counterculture, *American Beauty*, which I accompanied with Zadie Smith's attempt to construct a neo-Forsterian aesthetic in *On Beauty*. These works seemed to me to embody a significant dichotomy. Ball's film constructs the ideal of beauty according to a subjective appreciation of mortality and finitude, which is clearly comparable to Pater's 'Conclusion'. But it does so within the context of the suburbanization and reincorporation of countercultural ideas of freedom; as Lester Burnham decides to revive the spirit of his youth, spent flipping burgers and smoking grass, by purchasing high grade THC from the teenage video artist next door. In spite of the film's flaws I had a sentimental attachment to its own conclusion – where the spectacular death of Lester Burnham induces an epiphanic orchestration of his beautiful memories.[10]

Perhaps in conscious opposition to this anarcho-libertarian thematic, Zadie Smith's novel re-socializes the idea of beauty as the basis of a *sensus communis*, which is enshrined, though never entirely realized, in the social space of the university. In this return to the idea of beauty in education Smith appears to be promoting a nineteenth-century liberal ideal of *Bildung* which, as Linda Dowling has suggested, was always threatened in the culture of Victorian Aestheticism by a countermovement towards an aristocratic subjectivism.[11] Yet Smith undermines the defence of aesthetic *Bildung* with a more familiar twentieth-century diagnostic of cultural commodification and global capital. This is allegorized in the one explicit reference to Victorian Aestheticism: Levi Belsey works in a megastore which is housed in an 1880s gothic building, and 'in this building Oscar Wilde once gave a lecture concerning the superiority of the lily over all other flowers'.[12] In equating Ruskin's gothic idealism with the excessive gestures of Wilde's American lecture tour, then reducing both to a unilateral process of commodification, Smith makes a typical post-Adornian gesture against the Victorian. In this sense we might level the critique that her novel is not neo-Victorian enough, since it refuses to seriously examine the legacy of Victorian Aestheticism within the conditions of the contemporary. Smith's strategy is primarily critical rather than utopian and focuses on two significant ways in which the ethical possibility of beauty has been threatened or compromised. First, because the claims of identity politics and class cannot be reconciled with the ethical aesthetic of the university: this is the narrative of Levi, the young black son of the mixed race Belsey family, and Carl, the young rapper whose attendance at creative-writing classes focuses a split in the university community. Second, because the liberal-bourgeois project of *Bildung* is being undermined by the post-structuralist critical relativism of Howard Belsey.

Smith's critique of Belsey recalls Elaine Scarry's treatise *On Beauty and Being Just* as a means of negotiating the anti-aesthetic trend of contemporary criticism, and her conclusion effects an ethical and aesthetic recognition that works within Scarry's terms. In her essay 'On Beauty and Being Wrong', which is directly echoed in the concluding section of Smith's novel, Scarry distinguishes between two 'errors in beauty': one is the generous mistake of over-ascribing the quality to a person or object, and the other is 'the sudden recognition that something from which the attribution of beauty had been withheld deserved all along to be so denominated'.[13] Within the context of such specific mistakes, she suggests a broader cultural neglect, where the sense of beauty has been compromised by a spuriously anti-aesthetic politics. Scarry's work has suggested either a return *of* beauty or a return *to* beauty, and in a sense the choice of preposition here determines the fate of art. In a return *of* beauty the force of the process is the reanimation of an abstraction, the ghost or angel having waited in purgatory until the event of its return. If we return *to* beauty then we give it a fixed habitation and a name, whether Greece, Renaissance Florence or 'here and in England'. The intrinsic conservatism

of this notion has inspired, at least in part, a series of twentieth-century anti-aesthetic reactions – Adorno's gothic Modernism, the artistic reclamation of obscenity and violence in the name of 'transgression' and the post-structural and Marxist critiques of aesthetic ideology.

If Scarry's invocation of an ethical sense of beauty attempts to formulate an incomplete and tenuously hopeful corrective to these intellectual habits, Pater has a significant role in this mission. At the beginning of her essay, Scarry invokes Pater's essay on Leonardo da Vinci to stage her idea that 'beauty prompts a copy of itself'. This procreative impulse is exemplified by Pater's Leonardo, following glimpses of strangeness and beauty through the streets of Florence, which are subsequently translated into the spectral presences of Leonardo's painting and Pater's prose: 'an angel, a Medusa, a woman and child, a Madonna, John the Baptist, St Anne, La Gioconda' – where the latter existed, she might have added, as a vampire, outside the conditions of procreation, an autonomous image of the aesthetic life. Scarry's beautiful reanimation of Pater is comparable to the gothic apotheosis that Juliet imagines for Romeo in the event of her death, scattered in fragments across the night sky,[14] and the fragmentation of Pater's prose body serves his spectral rebirth, 'so that traces of Pater's paragraphs and Leonardo's drawings inhabit all the pockets of the world (as pieces of them float in the paragraph now before you)'.[15] Scarry moves from such moments of poetic replication towards a general theory that beauty inspires an 'impulse toward a distribution across perceivers',[16] and there is the implied sense here that this mental distribution mimics or prefigures the democratic distribution of the sensible. What is important about Scarry's account, and what prevents her alternative to anti-aesthetic criticism from being a naive humanism, is that this aesthetic image of democracy remains a spectral presence.

The suggestive power of Scarry's essay does not so much support Zadie Smith's novel as reveal its fundamental weakness as a diagnostic of contemporary Aestheticism. Smith's conclusion invokes the materiality of the aesthetic as a promise of happiness: 'the underlying blue of her veins and the ever present human hint of yellow, intimation of what is to come' (442). In this mute aesthetic moment, Smith attempts to stage a return to the materiality of beauty, where the sensuous experience of paint works as a 'promise of happiness', but she does so without having previously invoked the spectral presence or estranged possibility of beauty. Her conclusion forces a moment of aesthetic reconciliation to prefigure an emotional reconciliation between Howard Belsey and his wife, Kiki, and presumably promises a rethinking of Belsey's anti-aesthetic criticism, yet the moment fails to capture either radical sublimity or exquisite sensuousness. What it lacks is the quality of evanescence which Ball attempted to evoke in the conclusion to *American Beauty*, the aesthetics of the transient firework which pervades and unites the otherwise divergent critical projects of Pater, Scarry, and Adorno.

It was perhaps this sense of the limits of *On Beauty* as a diagnostic of contemporary Aestheticism that made me all the more anxious to elicit Mr W. P.'s

guiding spirit. I marvelled at the idea that Mr W. P. might face his own fragmented spectre in Scarry's prose, like Rilke receiving his angel with a strange admixture of narcissism and terror. But I was even more interested to know how 'Pater' would react to the ways that Smith's and Ball's beauty products translated the cultural dialectics of Aestheticism into such plural arenas as identity politics, and the reabsorption of counterculture into American liberalism, the role of the university in the return of beauty. I anticipated his response with some excitement.

This was to be my greatest disappointment. I was met with a blank silence and a complete refusal of any communication from Marcus, my mediator, which continued for several weeks. Regretting my decision to send these flawed experiments to such a master of style, I wondered what had so incensed Mr W. P. Was it the facile neo-Edwardianism of Smith's attempt to invoke Forster's model of reconciliation? How emaciated a synthesis must 'only connect' have appeared to one of the most subtle dialectical thinkers of the late nineteenth century. Or had he reacted to the starkly deterministic representation of repressed homosexuality in *American Beauty*? (In spite of Chris Cooper's performance, the character of the proto-fascist neighbour, Colonel Frank Fits, presented a reductive symptomatic portrait of thwarted desire.) Or did Mr W. P. regard the consummate moment of *American Beauty* – Lester Burnham's aesthetic conclusion – as a melodramatic and sentimental tableau which compromised his literary aesthetics of musical form?

In a final attempt to regain the master's approval I sent him one more fiction: John McGregor's *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*. This was less clearly associated with the New Beauticians, but in many ways I saw it as the inheritor of Pater's vision, mediated by the formal innovations of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*.[17] The novel is set in a single Nottingham Street, and it orchestrates a series of perspectives against the backdrop of the street's abstract and subliminal music. My theory was that McGregor's novel might suggest a third way, which surpassed the epiphanic individualism of *American Beauty* and the liberal organicism of *On Beauty*. It begins from the epistemological scepticism of Pater's 'Conclusion' to the *The Renaissance*, but its multiplicity of voices captures the passionate attitudes of urban life. This is a tempered form of modernist Aestheticism, or a neo-modernist experiment which is equally informed by a Paterian embrace of transient impressions. *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* orchestrates a series of fragmented perspectives against the backdrop of the city's abstract and subliminal music. 'The city, it sings' (1), and in the panoramic nocturnal opening to the novel, 'the sound cuts more sharply across the surface of things'. McGregor's narrative method reflects the kind of diaphanous sensibility that Pater promoted in his early essay on Coleridge; 'a natural susceptibility to moments of strange excitement, in which the colours freshen upon our threadbare world, and the routine of things about us is broken by a novel and happier synthesis'.[18] The final movement of the novel appears to mimic the Paterian embrace of transience and mortality: when a young boy is

hit by a car, the colours of the street seem to freshen with the crisis, but the process of McGregor's narrative effectively reverses the movement of Pater's 'Conclusion' to *The Renaissance*.

The famous second paragraph of Pater's 'Conclusion' begins with 'the inward world of thought and feeling', before empirically reducing the objective world to 'impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them' (*R*, 187). This culminates, at the end of a long paragraph, in the inconsistency of the diaphanous mind itself, 'such a tremulous wisp constantly re-forming itself on the stream' (188), and it is by refining aesthetic subjectivity down to this 'evanescent shade' that Pater prepares for a final movement, where a 'passionate attitude' emerging from the flux releases the aesthetic observer from the 'solitary prison' of empirical reduction.

Where Pater begins with epistemological scepticism and moves towards an embrace of the passionate attitude via the recognition of mortality, McGregor moves backwards from the perception of the beautiful moment to a possible death, finally concluding with a moment of fragmented community and uncertainty. As streams of traffic wait at the entrance to the hospital, the final moment of the novel seems to question the possibility of shared experience:

> dozens of pairs of eyes hanging on the lights.
> All waiting for the amber.
> All waiting for the green. (275)

This etiolated projection of an aesthetic *sensus communis* contrasts sharply with Alan Ball's aesthetic carpe diem or Zadie Smith's return to the sensuous material. McGregor effectively pauses at the second paragraph of Pater's 'Conclusion'; in spite of the novel's debt to the legacy of aesthetic impressionism, it resists the culminating epiphanic gesture. I felt some nostalgia for the passionate attitudes of Victorian Aestheticism when I decided on this final gift for the undead 'Pater', but I felt that McGregor's sceptical impressionism was perhaps closer to the spirit in which Mr W. P. had decided to continue into the twenty-first century as a vampire.

Mr W. P.'s response was brief but suggestive. There was to be no more text, but Marcus delivered me a gold Italian florin, dated 1477. Did this suggest perhaps the imbrication of aesthetics and economics common to both the Victorian fin de siècle and the end of the twentieth century, as theorized in Regenia Gagnier's work?[19] Or did the date refer to the birth of Giorgione, the spirit of music? After a series of speculative enquiries into the meaning of this vampiric token, I sat at my desk, muttering the word the word *florin* over to myself and turning the coin in my hand. Then suddenly, in a synaesthetic reverie, the burnished gold began to filter a hidden music, and from the light of this florin I heard a name: Florian Deleal – Pater's aesthetic persona in his autobiographical imaginary portrait, 'The Child in the House'.

Perhaps another of Pater's vampire self-portraits, Florian is described as 'connected with the *pale people* of the towns'. But more significantly, Pater emphasizes his 'peculiarly strong sense of home' (178). In tracing the origins of his aesthetic sense, Pater notes that his susceptibility to beauty 'belonged to this or the other material place in the material habitation – that little white room with the window across which the heavy blossoms could beat so peevishly in the wind' (177). In 'The Child in the House' the aesthetic sense is both constituted and limited by the architecture of home – the walled garden of Florian's childhood. I realized what Pater was saying to me with this florin, the tangible ghost of Florian – that all the neo-Victorian narratives I had posted him determined aesthetics in relation to space and property. In *The Line of Beauty*, Nick Guest's life is framed as an aesthetic country house novel, according to the model of James's *The Spoils of Poynton*, and on the final page, his gaze finally returns to rest on the house of the Feddenses. The suggestion here is that far from being, in a Kantian sense, the free production of aesthetic subjectivity, beauty can only be experienced by the Aesthete as the transient guest of privileged houses. In *American Beauty*, Lester Burnham's suburban Aestheticism is a clearly compromised attempt to establish his independence from his property-obsessed wife, an ambitious estate agent. In Smith's *On Beauty*, the Belsey family have inherited a house with exquisite mottled green windows, dated 1856. The novel begins in England with Jerome Belsey, who is, like Nick Guest, in awe of a Victorian terrace house, its bucolic setting and its conservative family. The model here is Forster's *Howards End*, where the inheritance of property provides the necessary grounding for the otherwise itinerant and rootless project of aesthetic *Bildung* – the Bloomsbury-liberal Schlegels. But although Smith is explicit about this Forsterian example, she does in some sense fail to see her project through, since her narrative of aesthetic inheritance shifts the focus from property to an object of precious Haitian art – a detached object on the wall rather than the dwelling place.

This elision of the property narrative where it seems most urgent is perhaps a sign of what is at stake for a contemporary project of Aestheticism and Aesthetic democracy. Pater looked back to the childhood domicile to seek the grounds of this aesthetic sensibility and found a protected and spiritualized version of the home.[20] In this sense there was an admission that in spite of the democratic and distributive demands of Aestheticism, the aesthetic dimension was constituted by an architecture of privacy. But Pater's spectral image offers an alternative to this reification of the domicile. His aesthetic prose projects for us both a spiritualized house and the ghost of the literary object; his genius for ekphrasis is such that the aesthetic experience, as he imagines it, is never reducible to the object. In one sense, this performs the ideal gesture of Aestheticism, since it protects the aesthetic from any reduction to the commodity. In his early review of William Morris's poetry Pater prescribed an 'Aesthetic poetry' which 'projects, above the realities of its time, a world

in which the forms of things are transfigured [. . .] and sublimates beyond it another still fainter or more spectral'. The spectral image was produced by 'that inversion of home-sickness [. . .] which no actual form of life satisfies' (Ap., 213–4). There is a doubly orientated demand voiced here: for an Aestheticism of absolute autonomy, where the spectre is the symbol of an integral freedom, and for a return of beauty in the forms of life – a reanimation of sensuous experience and a redistribution of the furniture of the world which is postponed, yet still held as a ghostly possibility.

I remembered that the one treasured fragment I had received from Mr W. P. referred to 'these fond returning ghosts, the remains of my literary architecture'. If he conceived his own prose as a house that we might inhabit, we would only enter the literary space as transient guests. As these prose edifices became the objects of literary history, they were themselves becoming spectral, ghosts to which we return fondly yet with an acute sense of the brevity in which we are protected or enshrined in the house of language. Pater regarded architecture as the most obdurately social of the arts, but in a sense each of the versions of contemporary Aestheticism I have documented is attempting to negotiate a fundamental rift between the social claims of beauty – the Romantic and environmental project of Aestheticism – and the marginal condition of subjectivity – ironic, vampiric or sublime.

The vampire Mr W. P.'s continuing but hidden presence has been intimately connected with the claims of literature, irony and criticism. Irony, indifference, autonomy and negation have been the means by which a false aestheticization of the lifeworld has been forestalled or refused, but at the same time it has been irony that has allowed for what was initially granted aesthetic legitimacy as 'post-modernism' to become a banal mimicry of total-art, a farcical afterlife of the nineteenth-century aesthetic project where ironic play has authorized the flattening of the cultural sphere into a realm of total consumption. This has made it all the more necessary to reconstruct Aestheticism as an affirmation of a sensuous life, both in the Dionysian sense, as a liberation of ecstatic energies, and according to Ruskin and Morris's call for the overcoming of a reified division of labour and play. But such an affirmation has been forestalled. Reading backwards to the sacrificial politics of Lawrence's critique of irony clarifies the continuing necessity of this postponement and suspicion. The values of negation, irony and cosmopolitan detachment have been enshrined, necessarily, as the defensive and critical forms of aesthetic subjectivity, at the same time as they mimic the forms of instrumental reason. In *Aesthetic Afterlives* I have recovered a series of powerful imaginative critiques of this aesthetics of detachment which either directly or suggestively identify Pater's Aestheticism as the basis of a vampiric condition. Such identifications were equally fundamental to Aestheticism's own critical self-reflection, and at best articulate a partial truth about the late Victorian aesthetic moment. Aestheticism seized on a position of radical detachment in a symptomatic response to political anxieties about

organic belonging, but what it left behind was a vision of a musical life, a wave-instilled space which civilized the energies of the Dionysian cult.

Protecting the afterlife of Mr W. P. is a way of maintaining a dialectical promise; spectral and utopian, both the absolute autonomy of La Giaconda/Juno Ludovisi, and the immanence of Dionysus. Given that at the end of his mortal life, Pater came to reflect on the philosophical necessity of a 'radical dualism', we can begin to translate this dialectical calling as a double affirmation – of both irony and its other, of an autonomous art that defends its impossible space, and an affirmation of art as a public value. It becomes all the more necessary to do so at the very moment when artistic practice, education, and radical politics are being undermined in what appears to be a permanent revival of the 1980s, a revival whose spectacular and popular forms have perhaps masked the depth of political cynicism that continues to undermine both the public and private spheres, and what we should claim, in the spirit of Mr W. P., as those *other* Victorian values – aesthetic education, the fragile and diaphanous condition of artistic experience, and the aspiration towards a democratic distribution of beauty. If what Pater imagined as the musical ideal had to be replaced by an insistent ironic detachment, it becomes all the more necessary to assert the space of art as both radical detachment and sensuous promise; to rescue irony from aristocratic reaction and instrumental reason, to separate art and education from the marketplace, to affirm Aesthetic Renaissance against heritage and consumption, and to recover the space in which the dead walks again and haunts.

Notes

Introduction

[1] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*: *Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 106. Hereinafter abbreviated as *R*.

[2] Pater's relativism and epistemological scepticism are the basis of F. C. McGrath's reading of his influence on Modernism. See *The Sensible Spirit: Walter Pater and the Modernist Paradigm* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1986).

[3] Angela Leighton, 'Aesthetic Conditions', in *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire*, Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins and Carolyn Williams (eds), (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press), pp. 12–23. (p. 19). Leighton has since incorporated this analysis of Pater in her book *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of the Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). This is perhaps the most sustained account of Aestheticism's literary afterlife in twentieth-century and contemporary literature. Whereas in *Aesthetic Afterlives* I am almost exclusively concerned with fiction, Leighton is largely focused on poetry, and this in part explains her extraordinary capacity to incorporate Pater's style into her critical perception. Other writers to attempt this kind of fidelity to Aestheticism's legacy are Isobel Armstrong, in *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), whose final chapter revives the Platonic dialogue style as it was practiced by Vernon Lee and Oscar Wilde, and Elaine Scarry, more briefly, in *On Beauty and Being Just* (London: Duckworth, 2006), which reanimates Pater's ekphrastic afterlife of the Mona Lisa.

[4] Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 81.

[5] Habermas identifies Schiller as the most prominent attempt to formulate an 'aesthetic critique of modernity' while defending the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), p. 45. For a detailed analysis of Schiller's idea of aesthetic autonomy that elucidates the important distinction between different ideas of appearance (*Erscheinung*) and semblance (*Schein*), see the exemplary commentary in Wilkinson and Willoughby's edition: Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

[6] This is how Peter Burger defines the 'avant-garde' relationship between art and life, which he distinguishes from 'Aestheticism', ignoring the dialectical complexity of much of the literature of Victorian Aesthetic Hellenism. See *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1984).

[7] Pater, 'Diaphaneitè', in *Miscellaneous Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 247–54. Hereafter abbreviated as *MS*.

[8] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Hegel Reader*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 28–9.

[9] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

[10] 'The fact that this "System-Programme," within the strange framework of Romanticism it proposes, comes to us in a fragmentary state is perhaps a symbol. A symbol of the incompletion that still constrains us, to which the will to completion, moreover, was deliberately dedicated' (Ibid., p. 28).

[11] G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). See the section 'Irony' in the introduction to the *Aesthetics*, I, pp. 64–9.

[12] Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony: with Continual Reference to Socrates,* ed. and trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

[13] For the original development of the idea of Romantic irony see Friedrich Schlegel's '*Lucinde*' *and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), particularly 'Critical Fragments', 42 (p. 148). The association between Romantic irony, Fichtean subjectivism and the Kantian idea of beauty is made explicit in 'Athenaeum Fragments', 198 (p. 252).

[14] Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London: Penguin, 1992), chapter 9, 'Amazons, Mothers, Ghosts: Goethe to Gothic'.

[15] See *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Derrida and Adorno* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992). Bernstein argues that the rent between beauty and truth originally motivated Kant's recourse to the sublime as a guarantee of transcendence and that this was later incorporated into a 'Deconstructive sublime' which was 'in itself modernist, interruptive' (140). Clearly this is a Modernism which is rooted in the legacy of German Romanticism, but where Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe stress the concepts of Romantic irony and the fragment in their reading of the Jena Romantics' legacy for aesthetic modernity, Bernstein emphasizes discontinuity and the return of the sublime. In my narrative, the agonistic condition of Romantic irony will increasingly generate a recourse to the sublime, a relationship which is dramatized most clearly in Henry James's late fiction and Samuel Beckett's major novels.

[16] Oscar Wilde, *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol.4, 'Criticism', ed. Josephine Guy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 166.

[17] Ibid., p. 143.

[18] Arthur Symons, 'The Decadent Movement in Literature', Originally published in *Harpers New Monthly Magazine,* 87 (November 1893), 858–67. Reprinted in Arthur Symons, *Dramatis Personae* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1923), pp. 96–117. See, for example, his comments on the artistic vision of the brothers Goncourt; 'What the Goncourts have done is to specialize vision . . . and to subtilize language' (p. 110), and his claim that literature 'reflects all the moods, all

the manners, of a sophisticated society. Its very artificiality is a way of being true to nature' (p. 98).

[19] This relationship of mutually productive hostility between consumer culture and the aesthetic personality is illuminated in Pierre Bourdieu's account of the formation of the autonomous literary sphere in France. See *The Rules of Art*: *Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[20] This 'new' cultural formation was announced in a recent lower-case volume, *The new aestheticism* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), ed. John J. Joughin and Simon Malpas. While it has many interesting reflections on the conditions of art in modernity, the volume appears curiously ignorant or negligent of Victorian Aestheticism and its legacy.

[21] Theodor Adorno, Letter to Benjamin (10 November 1938), in Ernst Bloch, Georg Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. Ronald Taylor (London: New Left Books, 1977), p. 123.

[22] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2004) and 'The Aesthetic Revolution and Its Outcomes', *New Left Review*, 14 (2002), 133–51.

[23] It should be noted here that Rancière is rare among Continental aestheticians in recognizing the tradition of British Aestheticism and offers a forceful corrective to Adorno's anti-Victorian gestures.

[24] Rancière (2002), p. 136.

[25] Girard's work on the novel is primarily concerned with the psychology and cultural anthropology of mimetic desire: see René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965).

[26] Walter Pater, 'The Aesthetic Life' (?1893), (Harvard University bMS Eng 1150 [7], Houghton Library, Cambridge, MA), p. 34.

[27] Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, 2nd edn (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 175.

[28] Ibid., p. 176.

[29] Jonathan Freedman, *Professions of Taste: Henry James, British Aestheticism and Commodity Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. xxviii–xxix.

[30] *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks,* ed. Margaret Scott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[31] For a reading of the presence of Aestheticism in Woolf's work, see Perry Meisel, *The Absent Father: Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980).

[32] See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Trying to Understand Endgame', in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), pp. 241–75.

Chapter 1

[1] Harvard University bMS Eng 1150 (7), pp. 9–10.

[2] Ibid., p. 34.

[3] Pater attributed both the *Concert* and the *Fête Champêtre* to Giorgione, although we now know the paintings to be by Titian. The misattribution of the *Fête Champêtre* might be regarded as a deliberate poetic gesture, since Titian was clearly imitating Giorgione's style of landscape and figure painting: what is most important in Pater's account is the 'Giorgionesque' – a quality which is connected to the Dionysian impulse of his Greek essays and not reducible to a single painter's signature.

[4] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *La Musique et l'ineffable* (Paris: Seuil, 1983).

[5] For a musicological argument for the relevance of acoustic space in composition, see, for example, Trevor Wishart, *On Sonic Art,* ed. Simon Emerson (London: Routledge, 1996).

[6] Cardiff's work has been displayed in a number of traditional white-cube gallery spaces, but was also situated in the Rideau Chapel at the National Gallery of Canada. Such transitions from aesthetic to sacred space are central to Pater's story 'The Prince of Court Painters' (*Imaginary Portraits*), in which he uses musical motifs for Watteau's design work, clearly with Whistler's works, such as the *Peacock Room* (1876–1877), in mind. The story is in many ways a melancholy admission of the limits of the Giorgionesque ideal.

[7] Walter Pater, *Appreciations* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 39–64.

[8] David Toop has criticized the conservatism of this aspect of the soundscape project in *Haunted Weather: Music, Silence and Memory* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2004).

[9] John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[10] Octavia Hill, *Our Common Land (and Other Short Essays),* (London: Macmillan, 1877), p. 106.

[11] G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). See vol. I, part 2, section 2, chapter 2, for the delineation of the classical ideal.

[12] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, II, p. 795.

[13] Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche*, 2nd edn (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 229.

[14] See Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute.*

[15] For Kant's famously narrow category of 'free beauty', see *The Critique of Judgment*, trans, James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), §16, p. 72

[16] Carolyn Williams, 'Walter Pater: Early Film Theorist', in *Victorian Aesthetic Conditions*, Clements, Elicia, and Lesley J. Higgins (eds) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 135–51.

[17] In this light, I would like this chapter to commemorate a listening to Stockhausen's *Goldstaub* in London, 1999, with Sascha Wolters and Sigrid Stoffels; my thanks to Sigrid for recalling the 'huks and haks'.

[18] See Anthony Ward, *Walter Pater: The Idea in Nature* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1966). Ward notes that it was typical of the Oxford Hegelians to suggest an affinity between Wordsworth and Hegel, citing William Wallace and Edward Caird in relation to Pater's essay on Wordsworth.

[19] Originally published in 1874, collected in *Miscellaneous Studies.*

[20] See Hill (ed.), *The Renaissance*, p. 388–9 (notes).

[21] Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, ed. Friedrich Bassenge (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1965), p. 498.

[22] Ibid., p. 260

[23] This negative concept of *aufheben* is consistent in Hegel's account of music, but there is a particularly interesting moment in his account of poetic drama which uses a positive sense of sublation as synthesis: Hegel sees pantomime, the 'plastic music of bodily posture and movement', effectively synthesizing the classical art of sculpture with the Romantic art of music. See *Aesthetics*, II, p. 1039.

[24] Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[25] For a more detailed account of Pater's approach to theatricality, see my piece 'Haunted Stages: Walter Pater and the "Theatrical Mode of Life"', in Elicia Clements and Lesley J. Higgins (eds), *Victorian Aesthetic Conditions* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 196–216.

[26] An interesting comparison with Titian's method would be Bernardo Strozzi's *The Village Musicians* (Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto), a later work by a baroque painter who assimilated the dramatic qualities of Caravaggio and Velázquez. Strozzi's painting focuses on the musical performance at the expense of the sense of acoustic space; this is achieved by darkening the interior and directing the gaze of the performers to a confrontational encounter with the beholder, in direct contrast to the absorption of Titian's monk.

[27] Billie Andrew Inman, 'The Intellectual Contexts of Pater's "Conclusion"', in *Walter Pater: An Imaginative Sense of Fact*, ed. Philip Dodd (London: Frank Cass, 1981), p. 25. For Hegel painting had a special capacity to 'give permanence to what is most fleeting' (*Aesthetics,* II, 836) while preserving the 'momentary life that is concentrated in specific situations'. For a good analysis of Pater's theory of painting and its sources, see Lee Mckay Johnson, *The Metaphor of Painting: Essays on Baudelaire, Ruskin, Proust and Pater* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980).

[28] Jonathan Freedman has made Rossetti's sonnet the basis of his argument about Aestheticism's 'rhetoric of atemporality' (see *Professions of Taste*, pp. 14–22), but I would argue that Pater manages to evoke both a dynamic sense of temporality and a sensuous experience of space in 'The School of Giorgione'.

[29] See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). Fried initiated this distinction in his earlier dogmatic criticism, which famously dismissed 'theatricality' under the auspices of a Greenbergian modernist manifesto.

[30] Dee Reynolds, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art: Sites of Imaginary Space* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 195.

[31] Billie Inman gives some quite convincing evidence that this same paragraph in 'The School of Giorgione' contains a subtle echo of a recent view of Whistler's Nocturnes series. See Billie Andrew Inman, *Walter Pater and His Reading 1874–1877, with a Bibliography of His Library Borrowings, 1878–1894* (New York: Garland, 1990), p. 91.

[32] The essay was collected in the posthumously published *Greek Studies* (1895). References are to the library edition of 1910.

[33] Pater's reiterates Hegel's critique of the symbolic mode of art directly, along with the details of his evolutionary scheme (*The Renaissance*, pp. 167–9): see, in particular, the remarks about architecture (p. 167) and 'the art of Egypt' (p. 168).

[34] For a reading of Pater's musical aesthetics in terms of the sublime, see Ellen Keck Staunder, 'Aspiring Towards the Condition of Music: Pater's Revisionary Reading of Hegel in "The School of Giorgione"' (*Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 1995, vol. 19, pp. 1–17). My reading of Giorgionesque musicality is clearly contrary to this.

[35] This is clearly a complex spatio-temporal image, and we might choose to emphasize the 'unfamiliar room', privileging space or the temporal activity of passing. In her article 'Pater's Music' (*Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*, 14 [Fall 2005]), Angela Leighton has promoted the temporal aspects of music by foregrounding 'time as it flies' in the subsequent paragraph of 'The School of Giorgione', while I have strategically emphasized space. So while Leighton's article begins from an angle opposite to mine, I find little grounds for disagreement, expect for the one-dimensional statement that 'to talk about music in Pater is, then, to talk mainly about time' (72).

[36] Pater associates Dionysian frenzy with *schwarmerei*, or Romantic enthusiasm, in 'The Bacchanals of Euripides' (*Greek Studies*, pp. 53–80), p. 56.

[37] The associations between Freud's concept of sublimation and Hegel's concept of sublation are particularly relevant here, considering Pater's double focus on erotic transference and the processes of elevation and refinement integral to idealist aesthetics, but it should be clear that, outside the Olympian temple, Pater's Dionysus is neither sublimated nor sublated.

[38] Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 198.

[39] See Stefano Evangelista, *British Aestheticism and Ancient Greece: Hellenism, Reception, Gods in Exile* (Houndmills,UK: Palgrave, 2009).

[40] Emma Sutton describes how, from the 1860s to the 1890s, 'Wagner's work was explicitly associated with German military expansion' in *Aubrey Beardsley and British Wagnerism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 162. She argues that apparently apolitical fin de siècle Wagnerites were often more aware of this political current than we might imagine: her analysis of Beardsley's *Under the Hill* uncovers a subtle critique of Wagnerian nationalism, and we can assume that these political dangers would be a common anxiety in Aesthetic culture.

[41] Edward A. Lippman, *Musical Thought in Ancient Greece.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 2.

[42] Andy Hamilton, *The Aesthetics of Music*, p. 95.

[43] See Christopher Janaway, 'Plato and the Arts', in *A Companion to Plato*, Hugh Benson (ed.), (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 388–400.

[44] See Jacques Derrida, 'Plato's Pharmacy', in *Dissemination*, pp. 63–172.

[45] For a compelling account of this intellectual moment, see Jeanne Morefield, *Covenants Without Swords: Idealist Liberalism and the Spirit of Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[46] See, for example, T. H. Green, *Works of Thomas Hill Green*, 5 vols, ed. R. L. Nettleship, (London: Longmans, 1886), vol. 2, p. 312.

[47] Andrew Seth, *Hegelianism and Personality*, p. 217.

[48] Walter Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1910), pp. 172–96.

Chapter 2

[1] José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanisation of Art and Notes on the Novel*, trans. Helene Weyl (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 46.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Walter Pater, 'Winckelmann', *Westminster Review*, 31 (January 1867), 80–110 (p. 94).
[4] Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 262.
[5] Ibid., p. 49.
[6] As Kierkegaard would later admit, much of his critique here is dogmatically Hegelian. See *The Concept of Irony*, 'Supplement: A Passage in My Dissertation'; 'What a Hegelian Fool I Was!' (p. 453).
[7] Ibid., p. 135.
[8] Sylviane Agacinski, *Aparté: Conceptions and Deaths of Søren Kierkegaard*, trans. Kevin Newmark (Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1988), p. 44.
[9] Charles Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 153.
[10] Ibid., p. 155–7.
[11] 'Ne suis-je pas un faux accord / Dans la divine symphonie, / Grâce à la vorace Ironie / Qui me secoue et qui me mord?' (Ibid., p. 156). The English versions I have provided are taken or adapted from McGowan's translation.
[12] 'Je suis de mon coeur le vampire' (Ibid., p. 156).
[13] Ibid., pp. 159–60.
[14] 'Un phare ironique, infernal' (Ibid., p. 160).
[15] In *Appreciations*, pp. 213–27. Hereinafter abbreviated as *Ap.*
[16] First published in the *Fortnightly Review* (November 1869), then reprinted in *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873).
[17] Daniel T. O'Hara, *The Romance of Interpretation: Visionary Criticism from Pater to de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), p. 23
[18] See 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 187–228 (p. 218)
[19] Carolyn Williams, *Transfigured World: Walter Pater's Aesthetic Historicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 121.
[20] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Literary Essays, a Selection in English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 267.
[21] In *The Concept of Irony*, Kierkegaard celebrates Aristophanes' use of the clouds as a metaphor for the amorphous and limitless subjectivity of Socrates the ironist: 'the clouds are nothing but fog or the dim, self-affecting, infinite possibility of becoming anything . . . the possibility that has infinite dimensions and seems to encompass the whole world but still has no content' (p. 134).
[22] Jeffrey Wallen, 'Alive in the Grave: Walter Pater's Renaissance', *ELH*, 66.4 (Winter 1999), 1033–51 (1042–3).
[23] Ibid., 1045.
[24] Laurel Brake, 'The Entangling Dance: Pater After *Marius*, 1885–1891', in Brake, Williams, et al., *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire* (Greensboro, NC: ELT Press, 2002), pp. 24–36.

[25] First delivered as a lecture in November 1890, then published in the *Fortnightly Review,* December 1890. Reprinted in *Miscellaneous Studies* (1895); hereinafter abbreviated as *MS*.

[26] Pater's identification of Mérimée's irony with vampirism can be illuminated by Matthew Gibson's reading of Mérimée's own vampire texts, particularly *La Guzla*. Gibson describes how this vampire text uses a series of distancing devices to frame a grotesque subject: the result is a 'tension between alienation and sublimity', and we might take this formula as a broader definition of the rhetorical and aesthetic functions of vampirism. (See Matthew Gibson, *Dracula and the Eastern Question: British and French Vampire Narratives of the Nineteenth-Century Near East* [Houndmills: Palgrave, 2006], p. 138).

[27] These anxieties about the equation between irony, Aestheticism and vampirism appear to have informed the wider cultural image of Pater, as is suggested by Marc André Raffalovitch's recollection that Pater was frequently perceived in the image of a 'black, white, ingratiatory vampire' or 'a large grey Vampire'. See Alexander Michaelson, 'Walter Pater: In Memoriam', *New Blackfriars,* 1928. 9 (101), pp. 463–72 (citations above p. 469, p. 465).

[28] *Intentions*, pp. 126–7.

[29] Ibid., p. 54.

[30] Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 518–9.

[31] Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, trans. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs and David Miller (London: Verso, 2005), p. 93.

[32] See Charles Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964).

[33] Originally published as 'A Novel by Mr. Oscar Wilde', in the *Bookman* (November 1891), i, 59–60; collected in Karl Beckson, *Oscar Wilde: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 83–6.

[34] Ibid., p. 84.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 258.

[37] 'Faustus and Helena: Notes on the Supernatural in Art', reprinted in *Belcaro: Being Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions* (London: W. Satchell, 1881), pp. 70–105, and in *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, ed. Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Calgary: Broadview Press, 2010), pp. 291–319. Hereinafter abbreviated as *H*.

[38] Sondeep Kandola, *Vernon Lee* (Tavistock, UK: Northcote House, 2010).

[39] Pater argues that Hegel's legacy has been an acute impression of duality; 'the impression . . . of a very imperfect reciprocity between the exacting reasonableness of the ideal he supposes and the confused, imperfect, hap-hazard character of man's actual experience in nature and history – a radical dualism in his system, as to the extent of which he was perhaps not always quite candid, even with himself'. ('The History of Philosophy') (Harvard University bMS Eng 1150 [3], p. 6).

[40] *Transfigured World*, p. 63.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 83.

[43] Patricia Pulham, *Art and the Transitional Object in Vernon Lee's Supernatural Tales* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), p. 130.
[44] G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), section IV, A: 'Independence and dependence of self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage', pp. 111–19.
[45] Ibid., p. 113.
[46] *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 114.
[47] Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1969).
[48] 'Through his work, therefore, the Slave comes to the same result to which the Master comes by risking his life in the Fight: he no longer depends on the given, natural conditions of existence; he *modifies* them' (Ibid., p. 49).
[49] Jaques Lacan, *Ecrits* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 109.
[50] Ibid., p. 110
[51] In *Against Nature*, Des Esseintes aspires for his room to be like the deepest cabins of a ship, with only the ocean visible from the closet windows.

Chapter 3

[1] Vernon Lee, 'Lady Tal', in *Daughters of Decadence*, Elaine Showalter (ed.), (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 192–261, esp. p. 194.
[2] Ibid., p. 221.
[3] The issue of cosmopolitanism has recently become an important concern in Victorian studies (see Anderson), but was established in James criticism much earlier in Christof Wegelin's *The Image of Europe in Henry James* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1958). Wegelin begins his study with Emerson's idea that Americans are split between their debt to intellectual culture (in Britain and Europe) and their duties to home (pp. 3–4). For a more recent account of James's cosmopolitanism, see Adeline R. Tintner, *The Cosmopolitan World of Henry James: An Intellectual Study* (Baton Rouge: Lousiana State University Press, 1991).
[4] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*, ed. Geoffrey Moore (London: Penguin, 1984).
[5] Ibid., p. 394.
[6] Henry James, *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Roger Gard (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 394.
[7] Philip Horne notes the importance of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* as a subtext in *The Tragic Muse*. See his introduction to the novel (*TM*, pp. xvi–xvii).
[8] The most familiar of these narratives are Poe's 'The Oval Portrait' and Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Henry James's most sophisticated representation of specular identification through an art object is Milly Theale's encounter with the Bronzino portrait in *The Wings of the Dove*. Jonathan Freedman reads this moment of ekphrastic self-identification as fundamental to Victorian Aestheticism in his seminal reading of the novel (Freedman, 1990).
[9] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 103.

[10] Henry James, *Letters,* 4 vols, Leon Edel (ed.) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974–1984). 3, p. 492, cited Freedman, p. 135.

[11] I am following Paul de Man's conception of irony in 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' here (de Man, 1983, pp. 187–228). This is largely deduced from Baudelaire's essay 'On the Essence of Laughter' (Baudelaire, 1964, pp. 147–65) and Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony.*

[12] *The American* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 26.

[13] Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael B. Naas (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 9.

[14] Ibid., p. 10.

[15] For such an ethical reading of deconstruction see, for example, Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

[16] See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[17] Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 153.

[18] Linda Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art: The Victorians and Aesthetic Democracy* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

[19] The major critics to make this link are Rorty himself and Ross Posnock, in *The Trial of Curiosity : Henry James, William James and the Challenge of Modernity* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). This important work on William James and the late Henry James's cultural criticism and fiction attempts to articulate a 'politics of nonidentity' which assimilates an anti-foundationalist mode of irony to a form of 'mimetic selfhood'. My analysis of *The Portrait of a Lady* suggests a quite different model of the relationship between irony and mimetic subjectivity, where irony consolidates an instrumental subjectivity that cannot escape mimetic desire.

[20] George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 671. F. R. Leavis recognized *Daniel Deronda* as the main precursor for *The Portrait of a Lady,* and cites the full passage about Grandcourt's 'refined negations' as a blueprint for Osmond. See *The Great Tradition* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1962), pp. 134–5.

[21] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 114.

[22] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 136.

[23] There is a theoretical irony in this application of Butler's theory of performativity to James's representation of dandyism, since Butler's *Gender Trouble* was motivated by a typically constructivist critique of the idea of the subject as origin and agency; yet the tactics of critical performance she suggested may well effect an ironic agency which intensifies the illusion of subjective mastery. Butler addressed this problematic in her remarks on the 'construction model' of gender identity in the introduction to *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 4–12.

[24] Barbey d'Aurevilly, *Of Dandyism and of George Brummell*, trans. Douglas Ainslie. (London: J. M. Dent, 1897), p. 74.

[25] William Hazlitt, 'Brummelliana', in *Selected Writings*, Ronald Blythe (ed.), (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 430–3 (p. 431). Hazlitt notes the dandy's manner

of exaggerating the importance of 'the merest trifles' while 'treating everything else with the utmost *nonchalance* and indifference'.

[26] Baudelaire's comments might be read alongside Maurizio Ascari's suggestive description of Gilbert Osmond as the 'Aesthete of immobility' ('Three Aesthetes in Profile: Gilbert Osmond, Mark Ambient and Gabriel Nash', in *Henry James and the Aesthetic Movement: Essays on the Middle and Late Fiction*, David Garret Izzo and Daniel T. O'Hara (eds), [Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2006], pp. 35–54, esp. p. 38].

[27] Ibid., p. 28.

[28] Ellen Moers has stressed the dandy's identification with the aristocrat and the ambivalent political implications of this relationship: See *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: Viking, 1960), p. 13. See also Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), chapter 2, 'Dandies and Gentleman: or, *Dorian Gray* and the Press'.

[29] See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965).

[30] Derrida, *The Other Heading*, p. 9.

[31] In *The Other Heading*, Derrida plays with the various identifications of Europe as heading or end-point of the continent. In this spirit we might bring Hegel and Huysmans together to suggest that the Aesthete is figured as both the Hegelian end of history – the end of the evolution of self-consciousness in the spirit of irony – and as the end or waste-product of natural selection, in the sense that Huysmans represents Des Esseintes as the final remnant of a decaying aristocracy.

[32] Marc Shell situates these kinds of economic-aesthetic figures in the context of nineteenth-century American culture, where the development of inscribed coins and, eventually, paper money 'precipitated awareness of quandaries about the relationship between face value (intellectual currency) and substantial value (material currency)'. Marc Shell, *Money, Language and Thought*: *Literary and Philosophical Economies from the Medieval to the Modern Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 1.

[33] *The Concept of Irony*, p. 52.

[34] Jacques Derrida, 'Economimesis', in *The Derrida Reader: Writing Performances*, Julian Wolfreys (ed.) (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 263–93.

[35] Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe situate the emergence of the German Romantic concept of irony as the basis of 'free' literary production according to the same problematic in Kant's work. See *The Literary Absolute*, p. 104.

[36] Derrida, 'Economimesis', p. 7.

[37] Ibid., p. 5.

[38] Henry James, *The Figure in the Carpet and Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 76.

[39] Henry James, *The Tragic Muse*, ed. Philip Horne (London: Penguin, 1995).

[40] Freedman, *Professions of Taste*, p. 5.

[41] Richard Salmon, 'Aestheticism in Translation: Henry James, Walter Pater and Theodor Adorno', in *Translating Life: Studies in Transpositional Aesthetics*, Shirley

Chew and Alistair Stead (eds), (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), pp. 277–96 (p. 290).

[42] Ibid., p. 287.

[43] Gadamer sees this process of 'subjectivization' as a direct result of the Kantian critique: see *Truth and Method*, 2nd edn, trans. and rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), part 1, section 2. This sets the basis for a number of accounts of aesthetic subjectivity and the autonomy of art. Of these, Bourdieu's account of the emerging autonomy of the literary sphere has the most detailed social and cultural basis: see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992) This account is particularly close to James's criticism in so far as Bourdieu ascribes a pivotal role to Flaubert in the constitution of literary independence.

[44] The cultural processes associated with this conceptual shift are illuminated in different ways by two accounts of Victorian culture: Ian Small's *Conditions of Criticism*, which describes the ambiguous position of Pater and Wilde in terms of the professionalization of criticism, and Regenia Gagnier's *The Insatiablility of Human Wants*, which describes the mutual shift from production to consumption models in economic and aesthetic thought at the fin de siècle.

[45] For a summary of the various identifications of Nash and an extended reading of Aestheticism in *The Tragic Muse*, see Robert S. Baker, 'Gabriel Nash's "House of Strange Idols": Aestheticism in *The Tragic Muse*', *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 15.1 (Spring 1973). Jonathan Freedman also identifies Nash with Wilde (see Freedman, p. 183).

[46] William R. Goetz, 'The Allegory of Representation in *The Tragic Muse*', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 8.3 (Fall 1978), 157.

[47] D. J. Gordon and John Stokes have suggested that the relationships in the novel are consistently the site of uncertainty about identity. See D. J. Gordon and John Stokes, 'The Reference of *The Tragic Muse*', in *The Air of Reality: New Essays on Henry James*, John Goode (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 81–167 (p. 82).

[48] James's association of irony, Aestheticism, and the cigarette might be clarified by Rachel Bowlby's reading of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* in terms of the idea of smoking, consumption and advertising. See *Shopping with Freud* (London: Routledge, 1993), chapter 2, 'Promoting Dorian Gray'. See also Richard Klein's theoretical romance *Cigarettes Are Sublime* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), where the cigarette emerges as *the* representative form of the Kantian idea of aesthetic autonomy.

[49] For a more detailed discussion of the ways that James conceived of theatre in terms of an ethic of relations, see my article 'Conventional Signs and Consecrations: Henry James's Theatrical Forms from "The Théâtre Français" to *The Portrait of a Lady*', *Henry James Review*, 28.3 (Fall 2007).

[50] Henry James, *The Awkward Age*, ed. Ronald Blythe (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 179.

[51] Ibid., p. 218

[52] Théophile Gautier, *Souvenirs de Théatre: D'Art et de Critique*, (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1883), pp. 197–204. Originally published in *L'Événement*, 8 August 1848.

[53] John Addington Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London: Smith, Elder, 1873).

[54] Delivered in New York on 9 January 1882, collected in Oscar Wilde, *Collected Edition: Miscellanies*, ed. Robert Ross (London: Methuen, 1908), pp. 243–77.

[55] Lee recycles Hegel's critique of the symbol immediately after she has rejected the Hegelian premise on the anthropomorphism of Hellenic art and the decay of paganism. Using the example of a terra-cotta owl, she proceeds to reject those decorative objects which 'served merely as a symbol, as the recaller of an idea; the mind did not pause in contemplation of the bird, but wandered off in search of the god; the goggle eyes of the owl . . . were soon forgotten in the contemplation of the vague, ever transmuted visions of . . . the supernatural' (*Hauntings*, p. 300)

[56] Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 126. Hereafter referred to in the text as *WD*.

[57] Henry James, *The Golden Bowl*, ed. Virginia Llewellyn Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 174–5. Hereafter abbreviated as *GB*.

[58] John Keats, *The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin, 1988), p. 72.

[59] See chapter 16, 'Second Thoughts', in Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1910), p. 21.

Chapter 4

[1] Letter of April/May 1908, Vincent O'Sullivan and Margaret Scott (eds), *The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, vol. 1, 1903–1917 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 44.

[2] J. Middleton Murry, 'Art and Philosophy': 'A fantastic and reactionary aestheticism is art's greatest enemy'. *Rhythm*, 1.1 (Summer 1911), 9–12 (12).

[3] As Ann Ardis has pointed out, John Lane included advertisements for reissues of the *Yellow Book* in the endpapers of *Blast*. However, this should not distract us from the emphatic declaration of independence from Aestheticism that Lewis and Pound made in their introductory statements. (See Ardis, 'Staging the Public Sphere: Magazine Dialogism and the Prosthetics of Authorship at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', in *Transatlantic Print Culture, 1880–1940: Emerging Media, Emerging Modernisms*, Ann Ardis and Patrick Collier (eds), (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 32.

[4] Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', in *Criticism*, p. 102. Dismorr actually misquotes the aphorism as 'Nature imitates Art, not Art Nature'.

[5] *Blast* 2, p. 70.

[6] Ibid., p. 71.

[7] J. Middleton Murry (ed.), *Journal of Katherine Mansfield* (London: Constable, 1954), p. vii. For a consideration of Murry's editorial decisions in his editions of the journal, see Anna Jackson, *Diary Poetics: Form and Style in Writers' Diaries, 1915–1962* (London: Routledge, 2010).

[8] Murry, *Journal*, p. ix.

[9] Notebook 39, *The Katherine Mansfield Notebooks,* ed. Margaret Scott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 94–99. Begun on 14 July 1906, this

series of Wildean epigrams continued until 30 March 1907, with 'Selections from Dorian Gray'.

[10] See Oscar Wilde, *Salomé*, in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1999), pp. 583–605, esp. 589.

[11] See Sydney Janet Kaplan, *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), chapter 2, 'The Problem of Oscar Wilde'.

[12] Algernon Charles Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads and Atalanta in Calydon* (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 103–5.

[13] From 'Unbound Papers', *Notebooks*, p. 200–1, written on 2 December 1908.

[14] *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, p. 90.

[15] See Claire Tomalin, *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life* (London: Penguin, 1988). Tomalin's account makes it clear how Mansield's future possibilities were essentially determined by a series of fateful accidents, specifically the contraction of gonorrhea. Although this biographical context is subsidiary to my account of Mansfield's literary relationship with Aestheticism, my subject here is life-writing as much as the autonomous literary text, and these events go some way to explaining the contraction of that sense of freedom that Mansfield had imagined in her earlier notebooks.

[16] *Rhythm*, 1.1 (Summer 1911), 36.

[17] See, in particular, A. J. Plenty, 'The Restoration of Beauty to Life', ed. A. R. Orage, *New Age*, 2.1, p. 5; 2.2, p. 21; 2.3, p. 37.

[18] L. Haden Guest, 'The Last of Wilde', *New Age*, 1.5 (30 May 1907), 75.

[19] The first of these, 'Germans at Meat', was published in *New Age*, p. 6.18 (3 March 1910), p. 419–20, followed by 'Frau Brenchemacher Attends a Wedding', 7.12, .273. She subsequently introduced the subtitle 'Pension Sketches' for 'The Sister of the Baronness', 8.14 (4 August 1910), p. 323–4.

[20] 'Unedited Opinions – Concerning "The New Age"', *New Age*, 4.14 (28 January 1909), p. 280.

[21] For a thorough investigation of Materlinck's influence on the modern stage at this point, see Patrick McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[22] See Arthur Symons, *Eleanora Duse* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1926).

[23] Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight*, p. 225: 'irony appears as an instantaneous process that takes place rapidly, suddenly, in a single moment'.

[24] Mansfield's representation of the writer Raoul Duquette frames a particular kind of anxious self-doubling, which might be read in terms of de Man's version of Romantic irony, except that he is himself the subject of narrative irony. For a reading that is attentive to this self-doubling, see Pamela Dunbar, *Radical Mansfield: Double Discourse in Katherine Mansfield's Short Stories* (London: Macmillan, 1997). Dunbar also has an interesting perspective on the remainders of Romanticism implicit in Duquette's literary self-fashioning.

[25] Bernard Bosanquet, *History of Aesthetic* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1892).

[26] The exact date for this entry is supplied by Murry in *Journal*, 1954, p. 93.

[27] Henry James, *What Maisie Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 85.

[28] Ibid.
[29] Pater, *Miscellaneous Studies*, p. 196.
[30] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life,* trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1997), p. 112.
[31] Sydney Janet Kaplan has argued, conversely, that '"Prelude" breaks the form of the Bildungsroman but is a narrative of *Bildung* nonetheless'. See *Katherine Mansfield and the Origins of Modernist Fiction*, p. 117. Kaplan's point is that while the narrative appears to have a 'spatial organization', the several female characters 'represent the central consciousness at the various stages of her life', suggesting inevitable continuation and privileging the unformed consciousness of Kezia. I will argue that the subjective intensity of the aloe for Linda breaks this continuity, since the aloe's place in an intersubjective condition of female experience is broken when the narrative enforces a series of breaks between Linda's experience, her mother's, and her sister's.
[32] Collected in Elaine Showalter (ed.), *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle* (London: Virago, 1993), pp. 98–117.
[33] Angela Smith, *Katherine Mansfield and Virginia Woolf: A Public of Two* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), p. 88–9.
[34] For a broad analysis of these conditions in literary representation, see Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Beauty's Body: Feminity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford,CA: Stanford University Press, 1997).
[35] Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads and Atalanta in Calydon*, p. 104.
[36] Mansfield's relationship with Woolf was by turns close and tormented, and she was to have as much power in her afterlife: as Hermione Lee records, Woolf was caustic about the early appearance of Mansfield's ghost, but continued to be haunted by her former friend's spirit. See Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 398.
[37] Kaplan, p. 34.
[38] Ibid., p. 35.
[39] Cited in *Dear Lady Ginger: An Exchange of Letters Between Lady Ottoline Morrell and D'Arcy Cresswell, Together with Ottoline Morrell's Essay on Katherine Mansfield*, ed. Helen Shaw (London: Century, 1984), p. 125.

Chapter 5

[1] Cited in John Worthen, *D. H. Lawrence: The Life of an Outsider* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 224.
[2] D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 418. Hereinafter cited as *WL*.
[3] Anne Fernihough, *D. H. Lawrence: Aesthetics and Ideology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
[4] For a discussion of the prevalence of the break in theories of modernity, see Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2002).
[5] Adorno and Horkheimer declare the importance of Hegel's 'Lordship and Bondage' in their chapter 'The Concept of Enlightenment', in the following

quotation: 'But the master, who has interposed the servant between it and himself, in this way relates himself only to the dependence of the thing and enjoys it pure; however, he leaves the aspect of [its] independence to the servant, who works upon it' (cited in Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 35.).

[6] For a critical account of this ontological critique of modernity, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, trans. Peter Collier (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991).

[7] 'In so far as the world-views have disintegrated and their traditional problems have been separated off under the perspectives of truth, normative rightness and authenticity or beauty, and can now be treated in each case as questions of knowledge, justice or taste respectively, there arises in the modern period a differentiation of the value spheres of science and knowledge, of morality and of art. Thus scientific discourse, moral and legal enquiry, artistic production and critical practices are now institutionalized within the corresponding cultural systems as the concern of experts'. Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity: An Unfinished Project', in *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on the Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, Maurizio Passerin d'Entrèves and Seyal Benhabib (eds), (London: Polity Press, 1996), pp. 38–58 (p. 45).

[8] Frederic Jameson, *A Singular Modernity* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 12.

[9] See Gyorg Lukacs, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1963), pp. 17–46.

[10] Ibid., p. 25.

[11] D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, ed. Mark Kinkead-Weekes (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 12. All references hereinafter are included in the text with the abbreviation *R*.

[12] The full extent of the Hegelian underpinnings of George Eliot's work is not generally acknowledged, and an account of her relationship to Hegelianism is long overdue. For some general illumination of her absorption in a German intellectual tradition see Avrom Fleishman, *George Eliot's Intellectual Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), which briefly considers Hegel's relevance to Eliot's construction of *Bildung* (pp. 77–9), and Rosemary Ashton, *The German Idea: Four English Writers and the Reception of German Thought: 1800–1860* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

[13] Arthur Symons, 'At the Alhambra: Impressions and Sensations', in *Savoy*, No. 5 (September 1896), 75–83 (80).

[14] For the original source of these poems, see Albert Giraud's *Pierrot Lunaire: Rondels Bergamasques* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1884). My use of the poems is comparative here, and I offer no evidence that Lawrence had a direct encounter, but the text of *The Rainbow* is resonant of such a reading. Since the German translation was closer to Lawrence's cultural milieu, I am citing the names of Hartleben's translation: these are provided, along with English translations by Andrew Porter, in Jonathan Dunsby, *Schoenberg: Pierrot Lunaire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and my citations are from this source.

[15] Jonathan Dunsby, *Schoenberg: Pierrot Lunaire*, p. 65–6.
[16] Ibid., p. 55–6.
[17] Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 22.
[18] Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr: The 1918 Version*, ed. Paul O'Keeffe (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1990).
[19] Ibid., p. 52
[20] Ibid., p. 58.
[21] Ibid., p. 57
[22] Rachel Potter, *Modernism and Democracy: Literary Culture 1900–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 70–71.
[23] Santanu Das has written suggestively of the way that the war's presence in Lawrence's writing is revealed in an acute sense of male physical intimacy, inherited from the experience of the trenches – an intimacy which is rehearsed in the wrestling scene in *Women in Love*. See *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 233–5. In a sense, then, we might see the deracinated bohemia of 'Crème du Menthe' and 'Breadalby' as in mourning for the intimacy and physical urgency of war.
[24] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott.
[25] Ibid., p. 1.
[26] Ibid., p. 18.
[27] See Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art*.
[28] Fernihough, p. 1.
[29] Fernihough follows Pierre Bourdieu's work on Heidegger to argue that *Völkisch* ideology was based on a political ontology.
[30] Fernihough, p. 23.
[31] Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1989), p. 39
[32] I was alerted to Sartre's formulation in an article by Leena Kore Shroeder which is particularly concerned with the position of anti-semitism in modernist literature and cultural politics: 'Tales of Abjection and Miscegenation: Virginia Woolf's and Leonard Woolf's "Jewish" Stories', *Twentieth Century Literature* (Fall 2003).
[33] Barry Bullen, 'Loerke's Statuette', in *D. H. Lawrence's 'Women in Love': A Casebook*, David Ellis (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 298–327.
[34] Jill Lloyd, *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 24.
[35] *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence: Volume II: June 1913–October 1916*, George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (eds) (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1981), p. 660.
[36] See his letter of 9 October 1916, in *Letters*, ii, George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton (eds), (1981), p. 660.
[37] Ibid., and see Fernihough, pp. 86–7.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, p. 239.
[40] Wyndham Lewis, *Blast* 1 (London: Bodley Head, 1914), p. 144.
[41] Lloyd, *German Expressionism*, p. 50.

[42] See Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970); 'to such an extent were Beauty and Death looked upon as sisters by the Romantics that they became fused into a sort of two-faced herm, filled with corruption and melancholy and fatal in its beauty' (p. 31).

Chapter 6

[1] Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London: Penguin, 1962), pp. 39–40. Further references are included in the text after the abbreviation *B*.
[2] Bernstein, *The Fate of Art*, p. 17.
[3] H.D., *The Walls Do Not Fall*, XIV (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 21–2.
[4] Ibid., p. 22.
[5] Evelyn Waugh, 'Let Us Return to the Nineties, but Not to Oscar Wilde', in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, Donat Gallagher (ed.), (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 122–5, esp. p. 123.
[6] 'Was Oxford Worthwhile', *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, pp. 82–4.
[7] Giorgio Agamben, *The Man Without Content* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).
[8] See Walter Pater, 'Style', in *Appreciations* (London: Macmillan, 1910), p. 31.
[9] Joseph O'Leary, 'Walter Pater's Construction of the Renaissance', *English Literature and Language*, 46, 15–42.
[10] Stanley Fish, *How to Write a Sentence, and How to Read One* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), p. 59.
[11] Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature*, Volume 2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Trans Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 132.
[12] Evelyn Waugh, 'Ronald Firbank', in *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh*, pp. 56–58, esp. p. 57.
[13] I am using the term 'grotesque' here in relation to the evaluative terms that Pater sets up in 'Winckelmann', where the grotesque is the opposite of Hellenic serenity and breadth, and where the 'characterless' condition of the *adorante* suggests a release from all the excesses of grotesque embodiment.
[14] Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 170.
[15] See *Dorian Gray*, p. 6.
[16] *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, vol. 5, 'Men and Women', ed. Ian Jack and Robert Inglesfield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 263–74.
[17] Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects,* trans. Mrs Jonathan Forster, 5 vols (1850–1852), iii, pp. 231–2.
[18] *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, p. 264.
[19] Ibid., p. 265.
[20] See Ellis Hanson, *Decadence and Catholicism*, chapter 3, 'Pater Dolorosa', in which the puns already pile up in the first section, 'Pater Noster' (p. 169).
[21] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd edn (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 141.

[22] Ibid.

[23] See Heinrich Heine, 'Gods in Exile', in *The Prose Writings of Heinrich Heine*, Havelock Ellis (ed.), (London: Walter Scott, 1887), pp. 268–89. For Pater's citation, see *The Renaissance*, pp. 24–5.

[24] My attempt to evoke the relationship between Aestheticism and religion as Waugh conceives it is influenced by Sara Lyons's readings of the relationship between Aestheticism, paganism and unbelief. Her focus on the 'carpe-diem' religion practiced by Swinburne in his shorted lyrics is particularly suggestive and has been at least a subliminal influence on my readings here. This is outlined in her hitherto unpublished paper, 'The Carpe Diem Religion: Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Algernon Charles Swinburne's *Decadent Poetics*.'

Chapter 7

[1] Ihab Hassan, *The Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* (New York: Knopf, 1968).

[2] Samuel Beckett, *Proust, and Three Dialogues with George Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1965).

[3] 'when the object is perceived as particular and unique and not merely the member of a family, when it appears independent of any general notion and detached from the sanity of a cause, isolated and inexplicable in the light of ignorance, then and then only may it be a source of enchantment. Unfortunately Habit has laid its veto on this form of perception . . .' (Ibid., pp. 22–3).

[4] Ibid., p. 20.

[5] Ibid., p. 28.

[6] *Proust*, p. 23.

[7] Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, trans. Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 354.

[8] Ibid., p. 356.

[9] Friedrich von Schlegel, *'Lucinde' and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 247.

[10] Ibid., p. 148.

[11] Ibid., p. 267.

[12] Samuel Beckett, *The Beckett Trilogy* (London: Picador, 1979), p. 298. Hereafter abbreviated as *T*.

[13] Jennifer Jeffers, 'Beyond Irony: *The Unnameable*'s Appropriation of Its Critics in a Humorous Reading of the Text', *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 25.1 (Winter 1995), pp. 47–66 (p. 48).

[14] Following Adorno and Lyotard, Nicoletta Piredu has made a distinction between this recuperative movement in the Romantic sublime and the Beckettian sublime, focusing on the 'radical negativity' of Beckett's late prose. See 'Sublime Supplements: Beckett and the "Fizzling Out" of Meaning', *Studies in Short Fiction*, 29.3 (Summer 1992), pp. 303–14. For another interesting approach to the sublime according to the experience of time in Beckett's work, see Russell Smith, 'Beckett's Endlessness: Rewriting Modernity and the Postmodern Sublime',

SBT/A, '*After Beckett/D'après Beckett*', Anthony Uhlmann, Sjef Houppermans and Bruno Clément (eds), 14 (2004), 405–20. Bjørn K. Myskja's book-length study *The Sublime in Kant and Beckett* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002) focuses on Molloy and its critical reception (Myskja, 2002).

15 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 114.

16 Ibid., p. 120.

17 Schlegel, p. 108.

18 Nancy, p. 78.

19 Schlegel, p. 253.

20 Ibid., p. 148.

21 Nancy, p. 30.

22 'German Letter of 1937', in *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, Ruby Cohn (ed.), (London: John Calder, 1983), pp. 51–4, translated in notes, pp. 170–3.

23 Ibid., p. 173.

24 Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, p. 327.

25 *Disjecta*, p. 172.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., p. 170.

28 Georg Lukács, *Soul and Form*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1974.), p. 114.

29 Ibid., p. 145. In *The Theory of The Novel*, written in 1914–1915, soon after *Soul and Form*, Lukács asserted that this principle of dissonance was basic to the form of the novel, at the same time as he looks to the novel as a means of overcoming the 'dissolution' of Romantic irony. See Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), chapter 4, 'The Inner Form of the Novel'.

30 Malone appears to co-opt the terms of Baudelaire's theory of the 'absolute comic' here, the dizziness of a consciousness beyond caricature. In 'On the Essence of Laughter', Baudelaire experiences this vertigo through the Italian commedia. Contemplating the figures of Pierrot, Léandre and Cassandre: 'a dizzy intoxication is abroad' (Baudelaire, p. 162), an irony constituted by the 'dizzy height of hyperbole'. For a reading of Baudelaire's theory of irony in relation to Schlegel, see Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' (in de Man, 1983).

31 Schlegel, p. 148.

32 Werner Hamacher, 'The End of Art with the Mask', in *Hegel After Derrida*, Stuart Barnett (ed.) (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 105–30 (p. 106).

33 Lukács, *Soul in Form*, p. 54.

34 David Farrell Krell, *Contagion: Sexuality, Disease, and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

35 Samuel E. Gontarski, *The Intent of Undoing in Samuel Beckett's Dramatic Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 143.

36 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 67. For a sustained reflection on Hegel's critique of the 'beautiful soul' in relation to Beckett, see Drew Milne, 'The Beautiful Soul: From Hegel to Beckett', *Diacritics*, 32.1 (Spring 2002), pp. 63–82.

37 Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. I, p. 66.

[38] Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[39] The staging of Malone's experience from the perspective of the window demonstrates the strain between an immeasurable object and the frame, which Derrida has suggested is integral to Kant's account of the sublime. See Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[40] Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 220. Hereafter abbreviated as *DW*.

[41] Stephen Connor, *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 128.

[42] Gontarski, p. 59.

[43] In his important early essay 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism' (1920), Walter Benjamin makes a distinction between Schlegel's concept of irony as 'the expression of a pure subjectivism' and the 'ironization of form', which is most successfully achieved in drama. See Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2000), pp. 162, 163. In this sense we can read Beckett's use of the recorded monologue within a dramatic form as a technical innovation which allows him to ironize the form of the ironic narrator.

[44] Samuel Beckett, *Ill Seen, Ill Said* (London: John Calder, 1982), pp. 37–8.

[45] Ibid., pp. 43–4.

Chapter 8

[1] Regenia Gagnier, *Idylls of the Marketplace: Oscar Wilde and the Victorian Public*.

[2] Hans George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edn, trans. and rev. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*: *Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*.

[3] Henry James, *The Figure in the Carpet, and Other Stories*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 38.

[4] Ibid., p. 34.

[5] It is surely significant that the names of Pater and Wilde remain concealed in the novel and in the catalogue of Nick's tastes – Aestheticism is mediated through James before his sexuality became such a central critical concern.

[6] This is also an important subject of *The Swimming Pool Library* (London: Penguin, 1989), where the narrator William Beckwith cultivates a 'careless, almost cynical detachment' (p. 84). This is partly to negotiate multiple sexual opportunities but Beckwith's reflections on his grandfather's life suggests that the ironic detachment is borne of the necessity for concealment (p. 120).

[7] See Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, chapter 1.

[8] The idea of a radical performative was suggested to many by the conclusion to *Gender Trouble*, but Butler herself recognized the problematics of this kind of critical knowledge: see, for example, her remarks on 'the conceit of autonomy' in *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 228. For a compelling

account of this critical problem and its relevance to nineteenth-century cosmopolitan values, see Amanda Anderson, *The Powers of Distance*.

[9] René Girard's theory of imitative desire also contains a theory of snobbery, particularly in his readings of Stendhal and Proust, where he asserts that 'the snob is also an imitator'. See *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero, p. 24.

[10] Clearly Aestheticism can to some degree be read as a discourse of an emerging consumer society. One of the strongest cases for this reading is Regenia Gagnier's argument that a shift from production to consumption models occurred simultaneously in late-nineteenth-century economics and aesthetics. See *The Insatiability of Human Wants* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[11] Hal Foster, *Design and Crime* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 19.

[12] The Marxist Modernist critique of Aestheticism is encapsulated in Adorno's scattered remarks on '*l'art pour l'art*' and 'Jugendstil', which he criticizes for 'the beautification of life without its transformation; beauty itself thereby became vacuous and, like all abstract negation, allowed itself to be integrated into what it negated'. See *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 258–9).

[13] Martin Amis, *Money* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984).

[14] See Kenneth Powell, *Lloyd's Building: Richard Roger's Partnership* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994), p. 25.

[15] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 182.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Barbie Campbell Cole and Ruth Elias Rogers (eds), *Richard Rogers + Partners* (London: Architectural Monographs, Academy Editions, 1985). The ideal of public space was later consolidated in the diagnostic manifesto developed by Richard Rogers and Mark Fischer in *A New London* (London: Penguin, 1992).

[18] *Richard Rogers + Partners*, p. 19.

[19] For an account of the relationship between Thatcher's government and the arts focused on theatre, see D. Keith Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).

[20] 'What National Socialism Has Done to the Arts', in Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, selected by Richard Leppert (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 373–87, esp. p. 379.

[21] For an account of this tendency in symbolism, see Dee Reynolds, *Symbolist Aesthetics and Early Abstract Art*.

[22] In Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, pp. 111–46.

[23] Ibid., p. 117.

[24] Ibid., pp. 116–17.

[25] Paul de Man, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism: The Gauss Seminar and Other Papers*, ed. E. S. Burt, Kevin Newmark and Andrej Warminski (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[26] Alistair Stead has made a similar point about the lure of altitude in Hollinghurst's *The Folding Star*, suggesting that Edward Manners's encounter with symbolist art concentrates his 'pilgrim's aspiration' towards the sublime, which is constituted through a 'dreamy rhetoric of verticality'. See 'Self-Translation and the Arts of

Transposition in Allan Hollinghurst's *The Folding Star*', in *Translating Life: Studies in Transpositional Aesthetics*, Shirley Chew and Alistair Stead (eds), (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), pp. 361–86, esp. p. 370.

[27] 'The George-Hofmannsthal Correspondence, 1891–1906', in Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel Weber and Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

[28] Colm Tóibín, Review of *The Line of Beauty, New York Review of Books*, 52.1 (13 January 2005).

[29] L. C. Knights, 'Henry James and the Trapped Spectator', in *Explorations* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1946), pp. 162–75.

Chapter 9

[1] It should be noted from the outset that, in spite of the transgressive relationship between vampirism and historicism I am suggesting, one of the primal scenes of 'New Historicist' criticism was clearly a moment of vampirism; Stephen Greenblatt's 'I began with the desire to speak with the dead' (1990). The critical narrative which focuses this vampire-historicism most clearly is, of course, Oscar Wilde's 'The Portrait of Mr W.H.', which recasts the history of the Enlightenment and Hellenist idealism according to the narrative of a vampiric Shakespearean actor.

[2] In the times I had seen him recently, Marcus subjected me to increasingly paranoid and profane diatribes about the status of contemporary criticism. His key themes were the demise of theoretical literary studies and the silencing of the 'critic as artist'. Marcus had an unerring faith in Derrida's 'Signature/Event/Context', once a staple of literary theory courses for second-year undergraduates. His central belief was that once *Jane Eyre* was in the classroom, there was no legitimate reason why we should discuss the context of its production – 'the 18****ing40's', as he called them – rather than grafting it onto alternative contexts such as, for example, the collusion between neo-imperialism and Protestantism in twenty-first century politics, or the ideology of gothic subculture in relation to Thatcherite individualism. It was from a misreading or forgetting of Foucault, he insisted, that so much recent criticism insisted on verifiable historical genealogies and contexts. I put it to him that surely a truly Foucauldian historicism had a necessary strategic role in recovering secret or repressed 'micro-narratives', particularly in the context of feminism and sexual-identity politics, and that historicist Victorian studies were surely all the more urgent for their questioning of empire. I felt worthy after this riposte, with a curious sense of expiation, but Marcus was unrepentant.

[3] I was careful to suggest that Marcus should not read this text in Italy and recommended that he dispense with it immediately on the completion of his railway passage. Considering the proximity of Pater's and Nietzsche's aesthetic concerns and Nietzsche's dominance of twentieth-century intellectual fashion, I felt it was wise not to show any allegiance to the legacy of a competing Dionysian Hellenist.

[4] Marcus had often talked of writing as the art of shadows. Since his disappearance I have remembered a particularly animated dialogue with Marcus in the late 1980s. It was conducted drunkenly, in his bedsit above an antique shop in north Leeds, over innumerable cigarettes, with *Aladdin Sane* playing in the background. After Marcus had read Derrida for the first time, he was briefly possessed with the idea of a 'New Vampirology' – he lectured me extensively about textuality as shadowplay: a site of contagious reanimations, haunted 'traces' and spectres. In his new order we were to be the harbingers of a 'gothic modernity' and a 'new critical impressionism'. Considering the emergence of spectrality as a major theme in later Derrida and the appropriation of these ideas by Victorianists, such as Julian Wolfreys (*Victorian Hauntings*), Marcus's ideas seem prescient now, but even more so considering his own recent fate.

[5] We might also add Michael Bracewell's *Divine Concepts of Physical Beauty* as a precursor to the work of the 'New Beauticians'. Bracewell's novel begins with a brilliant pastiche of nineteenth-century aesthetic prose: '"I hate Art students"', says Lucinda Fortune, '(while watching a wreath of cigarette smoke slowly strangle a demure spray of edelweiss)' (3), then constructs a symptomatic and parodic narrative of the aesthetic personality in the context of 1980s Britain.

[6] The idea of 'relief' is a recurring motif in Pater's work, which contains multiple registers. See McGrath (1986) and Williams (1989).

[7] *The Line of Beauty*, p. 501.

[8] The comparison with Rilke's second Duino elegy might be extended here: while the poem opens with the terrifying angel, and the third stanza articulates a Paterian sense of evanescence, the elegy concludes with a longing for '*einen unseren Streifen Fruchtlands*' ('a pure, contained, human place', [Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Selected Poetry*, Stephen Mitchell (ed. and trans.) (London: Picador, 1987), p. 161]). This sense of spatial belonging is suggested by the 'self-mastered figures' of Attic gravestones. In the final lines, Rilke articulates a condition of aesthetic modernity which involves our habitual projection of this sense of repose and belonging into ideal self-sufficient bodies, a condition which bears close comparison with Pater's articulation of Hellenism in 'Winckelmann'.

[9] In 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde' (in *The Inhuman*), Lyotard stresses both the Kantian sense of the sublime as the undoing of representation and what he sees as a Burkean emphasis on the instantaneous event, the 'here and now'. Two aspects of this analysis are particularly relevant for this reading: first, Lyotard stresses that this instantaneous rupture stalls any capacity for the artwork to take part in a *sensus communis*, or 'community of addressees' (p. 104). Secondly, and more elliptically, Lyotard suggests that 'there is something of the sublime in capitalist economy' (p. 105).

[10] At the 2006 conference, 'Walter Pater: New Questions, Latent Questionings' (Rutgers), Vincent Lankewish described his attempts to teach Pater's 'Conclusion' to high school and performing arts students in New York, using Ball's *American Beauty* to help articulate Pater's sense of transience and mortality, offering a powerful narrative of aesthetic education ('Walter Pater: Now Playing at Your Local High School').

[11] See Dowling, *The Vulgarization of Art*.
[12] Zadie Smith, *On Beauty* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 179.
[13] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (London: Duckworth, 2006), p. 14.
[14] See *Romeo and Juliet*, III, 2, 20–5, where Juliet announces her vampiric intentions.
[15] Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*, p. 4.
[16] Ibid. p. 6.
[17] McGregor's novel has in fact been associated with Woolf in a remarkably philistine review that determines the great modernist Impressionist as the vampire of modernity: speaking of the novel's lack of Victorian virtues, it suggests that 'it would be hard to imagine a paler one, its lifeblood sucked out by a Virginia Woolfish adherence to the fey, the pretend, the fortuitously elegant' (Julie Myerson, *Guardian*, 24 August 2002). It is perhaps unsurprising that this vampire-hunting disavowal of the 'fey' and the 'fortuitously elegant' should come from the heart of Islington's culturati.
[18] Walter Pater, 'Coleridge's Writing', *Westminster Review*, January 1867, p. 123.
[19] See *The Insatiablility of Human Wants*, which takes its sweeping theoretical narrative of the shift in nineteenth-century economic and aesthetic discourses into the 1980s, suggesting a model for a neo-Victorian aesthetic criticism which is trans-historical, like the vampire Mr W. P., rather than dogmatically historicist.
[20] In *The Afterlife of Property,* Jeff Nunokawa described how the Victorian novel tends to translate property into an idealized image of the private sphere; in response to the circulation of capital and the exhibition of property, novels such as *Little Dorritt, Dombey and Son* and *Daniel Deronda* project an 'afterlife of ownership' – generally under the sign of the abstract feminine or 'angel of the house' – which compensates for the transience and instability of the marketplace. This analysis of the spiritualizing of property might be extended through Hazel Hutchison's perception that Victorian poetry frequently mimicked Swedenborg's discourse of the spiritualized house (Hutchison, Hazel, 'Ideal Homes: James, Rossetti and Swedenborg's House of Life', *Symbiosis* 8.1 (2004), pp. 49–62.). I am grateful for her suggestion of Swedenborg's relevance to Pater's 'Child in the House'.

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