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Crossing the Line: Affinities Before and After 1900



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Crossing the Line:

Affinities Before and After 1900

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CROSSING THE LINE: AFFINITIES BEFORE AND AFTER 1900

Regenia Gagnier

(University of Exeter; President, British Association for Victorian Studies)

It is with great pleasure that I write the Preface to this special issue of the AHRC-funded *Victorian Network* journal, as the President of the British Association for Victorian Studies, with its over 700+ international membership, and as the keynote speaker at the conference from which the papers were selected, "Crossing the Line" of 28-29th January 2010 at the University of Liverpool. My keynote lecture, "Individualism, Decadence, and Globalization: on the Relationship of Part to Whole: 1880-1920," was in part subsequently published as an Appendix on J. K. Huysmans to my book *Individualism, Decadence, and Globalization: on the Relationship of Part to Whole 1859-1920* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), and I owe the conference organizers and Professor Mark Llewellyn a debt for their comments and criticisms after the lecture. With Llewellyn, I also gave a plenary round-up talk after the conference, reflecting on both the content and the mission of the AHRC-funded conference intended to professionalize research students in the cross-disciplinary fields between Victorian and Modernist Studies.

The conference had two objectives: to explore the natural and cultural affinities and repulsions between the two periods, simultaneously exploring how our perspective on them both is affected by the passage of time; and to professionalize graduate students in this key event of our field, the academic conference, and its core activities, such as publication and grant-writing. So "Crossing the Line" had at least two main meanings, one having to do with the continuities and disruptions between the Victorian and Modern periods and within Victorian/Modernist Studies, and the other with the rites of passage of students crossing into the profession as conference presenters. In our support of both these aims, Llewellyn and I were aided by the wonderfully informed and intellectual Commissioning Editor for the Humanities of Manchester University Press, Matthew Frost, who gave an exceptionally helpful publisher's lecture on scholarly publishing and a welcome invitation for consideration of advanced projects by MUP. Both conference aims now culminate with the publication of selected papers in *Victorian Network*, which is dedicated and funded to publish the best work by postgraduates in Victorian Studies. The journal is therefore warmly commended by BAVS, whose founding mission includes post-graduate professionalization and support, especially during economic hard times when there are more noteworthy Ph.D.s than academic posts.

The conference did indeed showcase some of the best international postgraduate and post-doctoral research in Victorian and Modernist studies. I attended half the sessions—Llewellyn and I dividing them between us as far as was

practical—and heard some stunning papers on domesticity or heteronormativity, as well as Queer Theory and homoeroticism, and feminine and feminist voices; Science, Medicine, and Literature, one of the fastest growing areas in the discipline and one familiar to *Victorian Network*; changing idioms in the visual arts and architecture, from sculpture to painting and illustration to cinema and cityscape; the representation of nature and re-association of sensibility in forms of ecological and pastoral thought; the modern metropolis from the industrial revolution to modern media; poetic traditions from Victorian verse to *vers libre*; and there was one whole panel devoted to the modern Victorian Walter Pater. In these topics, as in the papers selected here, we were able to see more crossings, between genders and gender roles; the two cultures of science and arts; between the sister arts and their respective geographies, indoors and outdoors, urban and rural; between nature, culture, and technology; between literary forms of epic, lyric, novel, short story, and drama; and between psyches such as Pater's, moving between Victorian and modern convention and disruption. I discuss such trends in more detail and in professional context in "Whither Victorian Studies" in the inaugural issue of the journal *Victoriographies* (University of Edinburgh, 2011), but it should be noted here in *Victorian Network* how, with their presentations, submissions and blogs, the graduate students are themselves driving the field in new directions, with work equally strong in theory and the archive.

I personally never publish anything without presenting it publicly for comment and criticism at least once and usually more than once. We should acknowledge the University of Liverpool, the AHRC, and *Victorian Network* for giving research students this opportunity to present their research for comment and criticism before it goes into the books that will establish their reputations for posterity.

FAITHFUL INFIDELITY: CHARLES RICKETTS' ILLUSTRATIONS FOR TWO OF OSCAR WILDE'S POEMS IN PROSE

Jeremiah Romano Mercurio
(University of St Andrews)

Abstract

The artist, collector, and critic Charles Ricketts (1866–1931) has often been characterised as a reactionary voice in early-twentieth-century debates about modern art. Although he responded conservatively to modern-art developments such as those embodied by the term 'Post-Impressionism', his work in book design and illustration exemplifies progressive strategies of decoration that reconfigure the relationship between author and illustrator as one of collaborative authorship. Ricketts' illustrations are autonomous narratives that not only reproduce the meanings of the texts they represent, but also parody and elaborate on them. Moreover, Ricketts' book designs and illustrations represent a complex resistance to and working out of Oscar Wilde's views on art, language, and orality. Wilde regarded visual art as inferior to language because the latter can embody the graphic and is free from the former's fixity in time and materiality. Ricketts' illustrational strategies are designed, not only to reinforce his own autonomy, but also to disprove Wilde's description of visual art as limited compared with language. Ricketts' progressive strategies of design are epitomized by his unpublished illustrations for Wilde's *Poems in Prose* (1894), a text which dramatises the centrality of voice to Wilde's poetic endeavour and allows Ricketts directly to challenge Wilde's denigration of the visual arts.

By focusing on two representative examples, Ricketts' drawings for 'The Disciple' and 'The House of Judgment', and by providing close readings of both image and text, this piece traces Ricketts' illustrational methods and reveals their debts to Wilde's own theories of orality, language, and visual arts, charting Ricketts' divergences from Wilde's texts and highlighting the critical dialogue implicit in the illustrations. Ricketts' drawings for the *Poems in Prose*, currently held at the Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery in Carlisle, have never been published together as a set, and the juxtaposition of the two drawings here is a preliminary attempt to set these illustrations in conversation with each other.

As an illustrator, stage-designer, painter, art critic, and collector, Charles Ricketts (1866–1931) played a central role in the debates over modernism and sought to determine the direction of art in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Great Britain. His influence over these debates, however, was not straightforward, but rather simultaneously reactionary and progressive. On the one hand, as his biographer J. G. P. Delaney describes, Ricketts had a 'backward- rather than forward-looking mentality'.¹ Ricketts deplored modern art's devotion to novelty for novelty's sake, the impulse, he felt, of Cézanne, Matisse, Gauguin, and other 'Post-Impressionist' painters: 'Novelty in itself is valueless. The spirit of beauty and power, of which art is

¹ J. G. P. Delaney, *Charles Ricketts: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 15.

the expression, has centuries behind it; it is as old as thought'.² On the other hand, while seemingly at odds with key modernist developments in form and colour engendered by 'Post-Impressionism', Ricketts supported and identified with new artistic styles and forms suited to coping with the conditions of modernity without 'sweeping clean [. . .] the slate of tradition'.³ In line with this approach, Ricketts' own graphic art, especially the designs and illustrations produced for Oscar Wilde's work, embodies an *avant-garde* style and employs progressive strategies of design that bridge Victorian and modernist aesthetics. This essay will investigate Ricketts' use of these strategies in a series of unpublished drawings designed for Wilde's *Poems in Prose* (1894). These illustrations are progressive in both their autonomous relationship to the text and their deft translation of the oral tale into a graphic medium, explicitly challenging Wilde's assertion that language is superior to other artistic forms.

Recent analyses of Ricketts' work by Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, Nicholas Frankel, and David Peters Corbett, underscore that Ricketts' book designs and illustrations, especially those commissioned for Oscar Wilde's work, represent innovative reconfigurations of the relationship between text and image. For example, Kooistra identifies Ricketts' illustrational strategy in Wilde's *The Sphinx* (1894) as a form of *impression*, her term for an approach in which 'pictorial representation of the text is less important than critical interpretation and decorative embellishment'.⁴ Although Ricketts' designs for *The Sphinx*, on some levels, reflect the content of Wilde's poem, Kooistra denies the illustrations' subservience to the text:

Ricketts's choice of scenes to be illustrated, his introduction of highly personal symbols, above all his decorative style, combine to make the images equal and independent partners in the image/text dialogue.⁵

Frankel also traces Ricketts' deployment of autonomous designs within a number of Wilde's books, including *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), *Poems* (1892), and *The Sphinx*. In an essay on the 1892 edition of Wilde's *Poems*, Frankel compares this later version with the 1881 edition in order to highlight the ways in which Ricketts' design alters textual meaning and to establish 'the book's design as a sign-system in its own right'.⁶ Regarding *The Sphinx*, Frankel similarly argues that 'the relation between book and poem is not in fact one of simple parity or reflection', emphasising that the

² Charles Ricketts, *Pages on Art* (London: Chapman and Company, 1913), p. 150.

³ David Peters Corbett, *The World in Paint: Modern Art and Visuality in England, 1848–1914* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), p. 254.

⁴ Lorraine Janzen Kooistra, *The Artist as Critic: Bitextuality in Fin-de-Siècle Illustrated Books* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995), p. 17.

⁵ Kooistra, p. 98.

⁶ [Nicholas] Frankel, 'Book Decoration and the Poetic Text: Charles Ricketts's Designs for Wilde's *Poems* (1892)', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 30 (1997), 67–87 (p. 69).

'decorated book poses in real terms what the poem rehearses at the level of the imagination'.⁷ That is, the sphinx's semantic opacity within the text is dramatized by a typographical and illustrational design that obscures the text itself. Lastly, Corbett also argues that in Ricketts' relationship with Wilde the former had 'to assert himself and his own creative autonomy against the subordinate position of illustrator and designer'.⁸ Like Kooistra and Frankel, Corbett notes that Ricketts' designs for *The Sphinx* 'depart from the text in a multitude of minor ways'.⁹ However, Corbett stresses that 'the 'full-page illustration still depends [. . .] on fidelity to the subject set by the text'.¹⁰ According to Corbett, though, even this act of fidelity indicates Ricketts' resistance to Wilde, whose own calls for autonomous illustration are undermined by Ricketts' faithful rendering of the written text. As all three critics argue, Ricketts' designs for Wilde's books are innovative in their independence from the verbal text and in their re-defining of illustration itself.

More than an additional example of Ricketts' resistance to Wilde, the series of illustrations for *Poems in Prose* suggests that Ricketts' strategies of design respond to and are at least partially grounded in Wilde's own theories of orality, language, and visual art. Wilde's privileging of voice in his own work emerges in response to what he saw as Walter Pater's increasingly cumbersome and inert prose. In Wilde's view, the intricacy of this prose reveals a compositional method designed solely for the printed page; that is, Pater's prose seemed to Wilde 'far more like a piece of mosaic than a passage in music' and, therefore, 'lack[ing] the true rhythmical life of words and the fine freedom and richness of effect that such rhythmical life produces'.¹¹ As Linda Dowling argues, this kind of prose 'satisfied [Wilde's] desire for variation and "visual" arabesque', but its static quality 'alienated the ear'.¹² To counter the limitations of such materially oriented prose, Wilde called for a return to voice: 'Yes: writing has done much harm to writers. We must return to the voice'.¹³ Wilde's focus on the voice led to his adopting an improvisational and synthetic style in his own writing and oral story-telling. Deirdre Toomey describes this type of compositional style in oral cultures, noting that 'originality in an oral culture consists not in inventing an absolutely new story but in stitching together the familiar in a manner suitable to a particular audience, or by introducing new elements into an old story'.¹⁴

⁷ Nicholas Frankel, *Oscar Wilde's Decorated Books* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 171.

⁸ Corbett, p. 136.

⁹ Corbett, p. 165.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Oscar Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', in *Intentions* (London: James R. Osgood McIlvaine, 1891), pp. 93–213 (p. 113).

¹² Linda Dowling, *Language and Decadence in the Victorian Fin de Siècle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 185.

¹³ Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', p. 114.

¹⁴ Deirdre Toomey, 'The Story-Teller at Fault: Oscar Wilde and Irish Orality', in *Wilde the*

Orality, thus, engenders a fluid style in which the dexterity of the teller is paramount.

Not only did Wilde call for a return to voice as a way to reinvigorate written texts, but he also privileged language in general as a medium superior to other modes of artistic expression. For example, in 'The Critic as Artist', Wilde demotes the visual arts by arguing that language has a greater expressive power:

[T]he material that painter or sculptor uses is meagre in comparison with that of words. Words have not merely music as sweet as that of viol and lute, colour as rich and vivid as any that makes lovely for us the canvas of the Venetian or the Spaniard, and plastic form no less sure and certain than that which reveals itself in marble or in bronze, but thought and passion and spirituality are theirs also, are theirs indeed alone.¹⁵

Wilde implicated visual art along with Pater's overly material prose as fixed and rigid forms, bound by time and physical existence. Being itself frozen in time, visual art is unable to represent time adequately: '[t]he image stained upon the canvas possesses no spiritual element of growth or change'.¹⁶ Wilde's belief in visual art's inferiority led to his conception of illustration 'as an underlining and reinforcing of the autonomy and power of the text'.¹⁷ In other words, Wilde conceived of textual illustration as evidence of language's generative power. As Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, collectively known as 'Michael Field', recount in their journal, Wilde most approved of illustrations that did not reflect the content of a book because 'he holds that literature is more graphic than art, and should therefore never be illustrated in itself, only by what it evokes'.¹⁸ In Wilde's opinion, there is no need for an illustration to reproduce the written text because language can engender an image better than visual art. Paradoxically, Ricketts must, in order to distance himself from Wilde's preference for autonomous illustration, faithfully represent at least some of Wilde's text. This position partly explains why Ricketts' illustrations and design for *The Sphinx* 'shuttle between fidelity and independence'.¹⁹ In *The Sphinx*, Ricketts shifts between explicit independence and covert resistance masked as fidelity to the written text, and he takes up a similar position with respect to *Poems in Prose*. In the latter text, however, Ricketts is also eager to establish illustration's equality with the oral tale, specifically by creating dynamic, fluid, generative images that symbolically, if not literally, extend beyond the limits of time and space. In short, Ricketts had to

Irishman, ed. by Jerusha McCormack (London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 24–35 (p. 28).

¹⁵ Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', p. 119.

¹⁶ Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', p. 134.

¹⁷ Corbett, p. 162.

¹⁸ Michael Field, *Works and Days*, ed. by T. and D. C. Sturge Moore (London: John Murray, 1933), p. 139.

¹⁹ Corbett, p. 166.

demonstrate his independence from Wilde by performing a number of tasks; he needed directly to counter Wilde's claims about the inferiority of visual art, to demonstrate that graphic art could be as dynamic and vital as language—particularly the spoken word—and to perform his autonomy, both by diverging stylistically and substantively from Wilde's texts, and by reinforcing those same texts.

Although Wilde interprets orality as a sign of language's superiority to other art forms, there is a strong affinity between oral tales and impressionistic strategies of illustration. By dint of their improvisational quality, oral tales threaten to destabilise the textual product, altering the written text through multiple performances and revisions. Autonomous illustrations similarly re-imagine a written text and alter its meaning. All six of Wilde's published prose poems began as oral tales, and are consequently ideal vehicles for Ricketts' method of illustration, providing the opportunity to establish his illustrations as equal to Wilde's prose. The six prose poems collectively titled *Poems in Prose* were first published together in the July 1894 edition of *The Fortnightly Review* and include the following: 'The House of Judgment', 'The Disciple', 'The Artist', 'The Doer of Good', 'The Master', and 'The Teacher of Wisdom'. Shortly after their publication, Ricketts began sketches—which he later described as 'amorphous' and 'particularly cursive'—to illustrate the prose poems.²⁰ A 1924 letter from Gordon Bottomley to Ricketts reveals that Ricketts had originally intended to produce an independent volume of his drawings paired with Wilde's text: Motivated by Ricketts' resumption of work on his illustrations around 1924, Bottomley implores Ricketts 'to publish the whole set with the text [of the prose poems] in the way you planned thirty years ago'.²¹ Ricketts never completed the edition of his illustrations with Wilde's prose poems, but he did produce nine pen-and-ink illustrations²²—one for each of the six prose poems Wilde published, with two designs and three drawings for 'The Doer of Good' and an additional sketch of three dancing figures, which might have been intended to serve as a frontispiece.²³

²⁰ Ricketts to Gordon Bottomley, 27 July 1918 (London, British Library, Add MS 61718). Ricketts wrote to Gordon Bottomley earlier in the month, asking: '[D]id I tell you I found a batch of old Vale scraps, tracings and drawings, published and unpublished, for the *Dial* of 1889 [for] *Daphis and Chloe*, *The Sphinx*, and for Wilde's *Poems in Prose*—the latter were found before Egypt, put away, and then forgotten[?]' (Ricketts to Bottomley, July 1918 [BL Add MS 61718]). It is difficult to know to what extent these 'scrawls' formed the basis for the later drawings completed around 1924. After completing the latter, he wrote to Gordon Bottomley, saying: 'Recently I executed eight drawings in my old manner illustrating Wilde's *Poems in Prose*' (Ricketts to Bottomley, 13 June 1924 [BL Add MS 61719]).

²¹ Ricketts' precise intentions for publishing these illustrations are unclear, although Gordon Bottomley reveals in a letter to Ricketts that the latter had planned to publish the text and images together: 'The only thing I need to be perfectly content is to hear that you mean to publish the whole set with the text [. . .] in the way you planned thirty years ago' (Bottomley to Ricketts, 29 July 1924 [BL Add MS 58091]).

²² Eight more or less finished illustrations and one sketch.

²³ The sequence of the illustrations' composition and Ricketts' intended order for them in any book

These drawings are currently held at the Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery in Carlisle and form part of an album of Ricketts' late work, which also includes a second series of illustrations for *The Sphinx*.

Before printing his prose poems in *The Fortnightly Review*, Wilde recited these six tales—and many others—in conversation to his approving peers, many of whom, including William Butler Yeats and André Gide, singled out his speech as his best work. Ricketts, too, valued Wilde's speech more than his writing, remarking to Anthony Pye that 'nothing written by Wilde hints at the richness of his conversation'.²⁴ As musings on the prose poems, Ricketts' improvisations on Wilde's themes are in keeping with the spirit of orality and the prose poems themselves. Not only are Wilde's prose poems improvisational, but they also draw from a store of pre-existing literary material, and in this respect the story-teller performs the role of the critic as defined by Wilde in 'The Critic as Artist':

For just as the great artists, from Homer and Æschylus, down to Shakespeare and Keats, did not go directly to life for their subject-matter, but sought for it in myth, and legend and ancient tale, so the critic deals with materials that others have, as it were, purified for him, and to which imaginative form and colour have been already added.²⁵

Ricketts' illustrations again parallel Wilde's prose poems, this time in their appropriation of literary tradition. The drawings use Wilde's tales as raw material for Ricketts' purposes, while also overlaying a critical discourse of art and weaving a dense fabric of allusions to literary and art history.

There is not enough space in this article for a discussion of Ricketts' entire series of illustrations for Wilde's prose poems, but two examples, those drawings for 'The Disciple' and 'The House of Judgment', are representative of the set, all of which share a similar approach to illustrating Wilde's texts. Moreover, it is easy to extract

he may have planned to publish is difficult to determine. Also, one page from the album is torn out, and on the stub T. Sturge Moore (signed 'T.S.M.') has written: 'taken out *The Thinker in Bronze* [*The Artist*] 10/13/32'; it is unclear whether or not this drawing has been returned. *The Artist* is affixed by tape to a stub from which it appears detached, suggesting that this might be the removed illustration reinserted and attached to a different stub. It could also be the illustration that Ricketts presented to Gordon Bottomley, which Bottomley had framed and which is also held at Tullie House along with the album (Ricketts to Bottomley, 13 June 1924 [BL Add MS 61719]). Otherwise, there is another illustration for 'The Artist', but this seems unlikely given that Ricketts records completing only eight illustrations (Ricketts to Bottomley, 13 June 1924 [BL Add MS 61719]).

²⁴ Charles Ricketts, *Self-Portrait: Taken from the Letters & Journals of Charles Ricketts, R.A.*, collected and compiled by T. Sturge Moore, ed. by Cecil Lewis (London: Peter Davies, 1939), p. 178.

²⁵ Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', p. 137.

these two prose poems from the series of six published in *The Fortnightly Review* because they are the only two to have appeared in print—both in *The Spirit Lamp* (1893)—prior to their publication as a set.²⁶ Both 'The Disciple' and 'The House of Judgment' embody Ricketts' subjective interpretation of Wilde's prose poems; they are designed to translate Wilde's texts into the language of graphic art and into Ricketts' personal style and symbolic world. Additionally, the illustrations directly challenge Wilde's claims for language's superiority to other art forms by mimicking the traits of the oral tale—instability, trans-temporality, improvisation; furthermore, they critique Wilde himself and creating a space for Ricketts' own position as author.

'The Disciple'

In many ways, Wilde's 'The Disciple' is an ideal text for Ricketts' progressive method of illustration. Having appeared in two different versions published by Wilde (as mentioned above), this prose poem has a publication history that captures the quality of reinvention inherent in the oral tale. Not only did Wilde recite and publish 'The Disciple' multiple times, but other writers recorded the tale in their own publications; Gide, for example, reprints the prose poem in his recollections of Wilde.²⁷ 'The Disciple' is itself a reinterpretation and parody of Ovid's retelling of the Narcissus and Echo myth in *Metamorphoses*, also a highly parodic text, which diverges from, undermines, reorders, and re-contextualizes the Greek myths from which it draws. Ricketts' embellishments and commentary on Wilde's prose poem, in turn, recreate Wilde's improvisations on the text in speech and in print. Although Ricketts' illustration for Wilde's text is progressive in its reconfiguration of the relationship between image and text, its illustrational strategy adopts the same approach to storytelling embodied by Ovid and Wilde; Ricketts becomes a third bard, making his strategy of design germane to the spirit of Wilde's prose poem. Although Ricketts' illustration is sympathetic to Wilde's tale, Ricketts' positioning of himself as a third story-teller undermines Wilde's assertion that visual art lacks the same range and flexibility of the poet.

Ricketts' illustration for 'The Disciple' (figure 1) cites from the text, inserts material of Ricketts' own invention, incorporates aspects of the prose poem from unrecorded recitations, draws in material from other prose poems by Wilde, and critiques the character of Wilde himself. A brief summary of Wilde's tale compared with Ricketts' corresponding illustration will highlight the way the latter diverges from the text. The prose poem retells the story of Narcissus from the perspective of the pool in which Narcissus would admire his reflection. The narrative begins at the

²⁶ 'The House of Judgment', *The Spirit Lamp*, 17 February 1893, pp. 52–53. 'The Disciple', *The Spirit Lamp*, 6 June 1893, pp. 49–50.

²⁷ See André Gide, *Oscar Wilde: In Memoriam (souvenirs); Le 'De Profundis'* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1910)



Figure 1 Charles Ricketts, *Illustration for Oscar Wilde's 'The Disciple'*, n.d., Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle. Pen, ink and Chinese white, 23.2 x 15.2cm. 1971.85.35A.15 (Image courtesy of Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery; reproduced by kind permission of the copyright holders, Leonie Sturges-Moore and Charmian O'Neil).

point of Narcissus' death and captures the reaction of the Oreads and the pool. Seeing that the pool has turned into a 'cup of salt tears', and assuming that the pool, most of all, admires Narcissus because it had continually witnessed the latter's beauty, the Oreads attempt to sympathise with the pool: 'We do not wonder that you should mourn in this manner for Narcissus, so beautiful was he'.²⁸ However, the pool is actually unaware of Narcissus' beauty, explaining that 'I loved Narcissus because [. . .] in the mirror of his eyes I saw ever my own beauty mirrored' (pp. 23–24). Wilde contravenes readers' expectations by disrupting the tale's anticipated narrative trajectory, emphasising the subjective nature of artistic reception (in this case, the appreciation of Narcissus' beauty) and demonstrating that even long-established myths remain subject to reinterpretation.

Ricketts continues this process of inversion and critique by embellishing further on the tale. Upon seeing the illustration, the viewer is immediately struck by a key difference between the image and text: the presence of the centaur, which appears to the left of Narcissus. This centaur makes no appearance in any version of 'The Disciple', nor does it appear in Ovid's tale of Narcissus. Ricketts imports the centaur from another of Wilde's prose poems, 'The Poet', unpublished by Wilde but retold by Ricketts in his *Oscar Wilde: Recollections* (1932).²⁹ In that prose poem, a man recounts invented stories about his encountering mermaids, fauns, centaurs and various other mythological creatures. One day he actually sees these creatures and is thereafter unable to tell any more stories. Claiming to quote Wilde, Ricketts describes the man's experience of the centaur: '[it] peeped at him behind a hollow rock'.³⁰ The centaur in his illustration for 'The Disciple' is performing this precise action, which suggests (in the absence of other antecedents) that it is the same centaur from 'The Poet'. While Deirdre Toomey describes how 'this tale, and in particular the motif of the centaur slowly turning his head, obsessed Ricketts', the inclusion of the centaur in this illustration is more than a product of his obsession.³¹ Firstly, its presence in an illustration for 'The Disciple' creates an inter-tale dialogue. The oral tradition itself carries on this dialogue with other tales, borrowing frames and devices

²⁸ Wilde, 'The Disciple', *The Fortnightly Review*, 56 (July 1894), 23–24 (p. 23). Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent references to the *Poems in Prose* will be given after the quotations in the text and will be from the following edition: *Poems in Prose* (*The Fortnightly Review* [July 1894], 22–29).

²⁹ Although no known version of 'The Poet' was published by Wilde, he did claim to be bringing it out 'in a Paris magazine above my signature' (*The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, ed. by Rupert Hart-Davis [London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1962], p. 809). A partial manuscript exists: see *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Volume 1: Poems and Poems in Prose*, ed. by Bobby Fong and Karl Beckson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 217–218. Wilde also explains that the cave where 'The Teacher of Wisdom' resides in the eponymous prose poem is 'a cavern in which a Centaur had once dwelt' ('The Teacher of Wisdom', p. 27).

³⁰ Charles Ricketts, *Oscar Wilde: Recollections* (Bloomsbury: Nonesuch, 1932), p. 18.

³¹ Toomey, p. 32.

and employing them in unexpected contexts. The centaur's inclusion does precisely this, expanding the narratological reference of the illustration in the same way that prose poems do. Furthermore, the centaur had a special meaning for Ricketts. Lamenting Gide's omission of the centaur in his retelling of the tale, Ricketts explains:

Strangely enough Gide omits the episode of the centaur, yet this detail has remained vivid in my memory, for Wilde, by an almost imperceptible turn of the head, when speaking, conjured up the movement of the receding creature.³²

That the centaur's movement reminds Ricketts of Wilde's own movement 'when speaking' implies that the centaur is itself an emblem of orality, an embodiment of Wilde's story-telling. Ricketts might have read Wilde's tale as an admonition against pictorial representation—the tale's protagonist can no longer invent after seeing his mythological creatures—and therefore included this symbol of Wilde in his illustration in wilful disregard for Wilde's low opinion of the visual arts. However Ricketts reads the tale, he has invoked the oral within a purely pictorial form by personifying the act of speaking and alluding to the story-teller—Wilde himself. In doing so, Ricketts challenges the notion that Wilde's tale is stunted by his drawing, demonstrating that the tale remains dynamic in spite of its being illustrated.

The centaur's inclusion stands in for orality, myth, and inter-narrativity, but it also marks the illustration as parody, a pastiche of Wilde's story-telling in the language of illustration. This parody extends to a personal critique of Wilde and his reputation for lasciviousness, which he acquired notably after his trials. Although sympathetic to Wilde's homosexuality, Ricketts disapproved of his friend's more flamboyant behaviour. His association of Wilde with the centaur underscores this judgment. By representing Wilde as a centaur, Ricketts also locates the former within a specific tradition of visual art from which the latter had a number of models for his own centaur. J. G. P. Delaney argues that 'the general inspiration [for Ricketts to employ centaurs in his work] was the numerous classical and Renaissance depictions he must have seen in the Louvre and the British Museum' (p. 147). In particular, Ricketts must have had in mind Botticelli's *Pallas and the Centaur* (c. 1482), in which Pallas Athena tames a centaur, who signifies man's baser nature, and Gustave Moreau's *Dead Poet Borne by a Centaur* (c. 1890), in which the image of poet and centaur are directly linked.³³ The symbol of the centaur, then, is polysemous to a large degree, allowing Ricketts to represent Wilde—and by extension story-telling—within the content of the illustration itself, to parody Wilde and his more extreme

³² Ricketts, *Oscar Wilde: Recollections*, p. 17.

³³ Botticelli's *Pallas and the Centaur* was reproduced, along with T. Sturge Moore's ekphrasis on the painting, in the art journal co-edited by Charles Shannon, *The Pageant* (1896), I, p. 227.

behaviour (subverting Wilde's moral authority), to subsume a metaphor of orality within the context of graphic art (challenging the supremacy of the written—or spoken—text in word/image relationships), and to practise a form of literary criticism that juxtaposes multiple prose poems (specifically 'The Poet' and several versions of 'The Disciple') within the context of a single illustration.

Another, less ostensible, aspect of Ricketts' illustration that redefines the relationship between image and text is his figuring of Narcissus and the reflection pool. Narcissus' presence in the illustration is itself a divergence from the text, since both printed versions of the prose poem (from *The Spirit Lamp* and *The Fortnightly Review*) begin 'when Narcissus died'.³⁴ A sceptical viewer might argue that Narcissus is already dead in the illustration, his left arm hanging lifelessly over a stone. His right arm, though, is positioned in a way difficult to maintain without effort. The same is true for the position of his body. A more likely reading, then, is that Ricketts intended an anachronistic, trans-temporal reading of the illustration—one that refutes Wilde's earlier-quoted claim that visual art cannot adequately represent time. A similar trans-temporality pervades the history of the oral tale, transforming tales across multiple recitations and story-tellers. Positioning himself as a story-teller, Ricketts' inserts an analepsis absent from the text, which begins only after Narcissus' death. This analepsis allows Ricketts to comment on Wilde's story by reincarnating Narcissus while omitting the reflection of his face from the pool—a central aspect of the myth. While part of Narcissus' arm and, perhaps, part of his lower body are discernible in the pool, his face, including the eyes with which he gazed at his reflection, are rendered invisible by the illustration's perspective. The effect of this removal of Narcissus' face from the illustration is that—at least in the context of Ricketts' drawing—the pool is unaware, or at least indirectly aware, of Narcissus' presence. For the viewer to witness Narcissus' visage in the pool would be to imply that the pool *sees* him, but Wilde's inversion of the myth is to turn the pool into another Narcissus, valuing Narcissus because his eyes cast back the pool's own reflection. Ricketts radically departs from Wilde's story only to reinforce it in ways unimagined by the text.

'The House of Judgment'

The other prose poem that Wilde published in *The Spirit Lamp* is 'The House of Judgment', and Ricketts' accompanying illustration (figure 2) is the *tour de force* amongst his eight designs for *Poems in Prose*. It employs many illustrational strategies exemplified by his drawing for 'The Disciple' and adds to them a number of other elements, including a red/orange wash that makes this the only illustration to incorporate colour. Most important, the illustration is an example of the kind of

³⁴ Wilde, 'The Disciple', p. 23; for *The Spirit Lamp* version, see *The Spirit Lamp*, 6 June 1893, 49–50; repr. in *Complete Works, Volume 1*, p. 172n.



Figure 2 Charles Ricketts, *Illustration for Oscar Wilde's 'The House of Judgment'*, n.d.. Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery, Carlisle. Pen, ink, water-colour and Chinese white, 22.2 x 16.1cm. 1971.85.35A.16 (Image courtesy of Tullie House Museum & Art Gallery; reproduced by kind permission of the copyright holders, Leonie Sturge-Moore and Charmian O'Neil).

original art that Wilde calls for in 'The Critic as Artist', in which he bemoans art that is 'immobile, hieratic, and confined to the reproduction of formal types'.³⁵ It explores the limits of what illustration means through a dialogic engagement with Wilde, enacting the drama of subverted authority that is at the centre of Wilde's prose poem.

A brief analysis of Wilde's 'The House of Judgment' will serve to illuminate the relationship between Ricketts' illustrations and the text. Centred on the relationship between textural authority and orality, the prose poem recounts the dialogue between God and a sinner standing before him for judgment. Largely a catalogue of sins, the tale begins with an attempt by God (or, perhaps, the narrator) to preserve the authority of the text over and against the oral: 'And there was silence in the House of Judgment, and the Man came naked before God' (p. 24). Immediately afterward, God 'open[s] the Book of the Life of the Man' (p. 24). It is only after silence has been secured that God turns to the textual record, protecting the written history from the destabilising effects of the spoken word. The god described here is the authoritarian God of the Book of Revelation, who proclaims that he encompasses the entire narrative of the world; he is 'the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and ending'.³⁶ The book of life from which God reads in Wilde's prose poem is an embellishment on a passage from the book of Revelation, in which the book's author, assumed to be St. John, describes seeing 'the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened: and another booke was opened, which is the booke of life: and the dead were iudged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works'.³⁷ Wilde's prose poem exploits the question of authorship already suggested by the book of Revelation. If God is to judge these sinners by the content of books written by their own deeds, then ostensibly God does not author the text. Of course, Wilde's prose poem is not an exegetical reading of the book of Revelation, and so the philosophical and theological question of free will is immaterial here. 'The House of Judgment' does not seek to answer the question of free will, but instead explores the nature of authorship and textual authority. God, by virtue of his omniscience and assertion of narrative sovereignty in the Book of Revelation should be the author of the text, but his inability to anticipate the sinner's verbal replies indicates that he ceases to author the narrative of the man's life.

Orality consistently undoes God's authority—his ability to fix the meaning of words—throughout the text. The written account of the sinner's life is insufficient as a judgment in itself and must be performed—read aloud—in order to be enacted. Once God's judgments are spoken, however they acquire the improvisational attributes of orality and his narrative authority is consequently undermined. After each of three times God reads the list of transgressions from 'the Book of the Life of the Man', he must close the book to await the sinner's reply. The sinner's subsequent response in

³⁵ Wilde, 'The Critic as Artist', p. 123.

³⁶ KJV, Revelation 1:8.

³⁷ KJV, Revelation 20:12.

turn reveals how the oral undoes the textual by emphasising that the book is a record of his deeds only: 'Even so *did* I' (my emphasis). This is consistent with the Book of Revelation, which describes the books as records of sinners' lives 'according to their works'. Once God closes the book for the final time, he tries to maintain his narrative authority, saying to the sinner, 'Surely I will send thee into Hell. Even into Hell will I send thee' (p. 25). In reply, the man 'crie[s] out', as Wilde writes, and says, 'Thou canst not' (p. 25). This challenge to God's decree further demonstrates the dexterity of the oral versus the predominantly static quality of the textual. God attempts to form a narrative out of the written record, but his judgments, spoken to the sinner, possess the same fluidity inherent in oral tales. The man does not question what God reads from the book of his life, but he does challenge what God *says*. The oral is, thus, always susceptible to being undone, misheard, reinterpreted, and reworded. When the man goes on to say that God cannot cast him into Hell because he has always lived there, Wilde gives God no reply—'And there was silence in the House of Judgment' (p. 25). Not only is God unable to reply, but he is forced to change his mind entirely: 'Seeing that I may not send thee into Hell, surely I will send thee unto Heaven. Even unto Heaven will I send thee' (p. 25). God's loss of authority is apparent in his language. The multiplicity of meanings inherent in the word 'even' demonstrates this. Ostensibly, God is using the word in the way it frequently appears in the King James Version of the Bible, which is as an adverb denoting exactly or just as; however, 'even' also has the connotation of level or to the ground, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes one old English usage as a verb meaning 'to throw (a person) down'.³⁸ The latter meaning is appropriate to God's announcement that he will cast the sinner into Hell, but, in the context of sending the man to Heaven, it reveals a slippage in God's ability to control both the situation and his language. Even insofar as the word signifies 'exactly' or 'precisely', it still reveals God's loss of control because his proclamations are challenged and undermined by the man both times. God is no more successful when he attempts to send the sinner to Heaven; the man responds to this command that 'never, and in no place, [has he] been able to imagine it' (p. 25). Ultimately, God is unable to say anything because of his own reliance on a written narrative, which is why the prose poem ends on the refrain 'And there was silence in the House of Judgment' (p. 25). This ending is not so much a narrative cul-de-sac as it is an acknowledgement that orality creates open-ended, malleable narratives.

One of the chief ways in which Ricketts recreates this narrative flexibility in his illustration is by visually translating the written text into an instrument for his own narrative—specifically by depicting the 'Book of the Life of the Man' as a tablet or canvas. By portraying the book as a symbol of seemingly static art, Ricketts underscores the rigidity of the written text (as envisioned by the book of the life in 'The House of Judgment') and, furthermore, suggests the book's place, [has he] been

³⁸ *OED* online (accessed 15 March 2010).

able to imagine it' (p. 25). Ultimately, God is unable to say anything because of his own reliance on a written narrative, which is why the prose poem ends on the refrain 'And there was silence in the House of Judgment' (p. 25). This ending is not so much a narrative cul-de-sac as it is an acknowledgement that orality creates open-ended, malleable narratives.

One of the chief ways in which Ricketts recreates this narrative flexibility in his illustration is by visually translating the written text into an instrument for his own narrative—specifically by depicting the 'Book of the Life of the Man' as a tablet or canvas. By portraying the book as a symbol of seemingly static art, Ricketts underscores the rigidity of the written text (as envisioned by the book of the life in 'The House of Judgment') and, furthermore, suggests the book's usefulness as a tool for the visual artist. If the text is a tablet or canvas, then the illustrator can inscribe his own narrative onto the book. Ricketts' argument that illustration is a sufficiently flexible form challenges Wilde's implicit and explicit arguments to the contrary. Whereas Wilde argues that only language can embody all the other arts, Ricketts rejects Wilde's limiting of the synaesthetic power of visual art. Paradoxically, he achieves this by extending visual arts' reach beyond the visual, most clearly by drawing the figure of God larger than the illustration's frame, thereby cutting off his eyes and symbolically eliminating the visual from the drawing.³⁹ In so doing, he mirrors Wilde, whose prose poems attempt to imbue the written word with the flexibility of the oral tale, thereby expanding the form by creating a liberating paradox: a written text with the traits of an oral tale. Taking his cue from Wilde's paradoxes, Ricketts turns the symbol of bibliocentrism—the Book of the Life of the Man—into a work of visual art. This is yet another example of Ricketts' faithful infidelity in illustrating Wilde. The form of 'The House of Judgment' performs what the narrative of the prose poem enacts. Ricketts proves to be most faithful to Wilde's text by translating the narrative into the language of his own medium. Simultaneously, he undermines Wilde by demonstrating that it is not just the oral tale (or even the written text), but also the art of illustration that can possess the mobility for which Wilde strives.

Furthermore, Ricketts emphasises his freedom from Wilde's text by mimicking the latter's use of allusion and parody. Wilde's prose poem is not only an elaborate parody of the Book of Revelation, but also a dense patchwork of literary allusion. For example, the list of sins that God reads is an appropriation of Tannhäuser's recitation of his transgressions to the pope. (Wilde would have been familiar with the legend of Tannhäuser through a number of sources including Swinburne's 'Laus Veneris' [1866], Morris' 'The Hill of Venus' [1869], and most important Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*, first performed in 1845.) Wilde alludes to Wagner to demonstrate further the power of words to cross genres. Moreover, the language of the list of sins is itself also imbued with a musicality recreated elsewhere in Wilde's work, notably in the elaborate

³⁹ This is also an allusion to George Frederic Watts' *Time, Death and Judgment* (c. 1870s–1886).

catalogues of Chapter XI in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Wilde promotes this densely allusive writing style in 'The Decay of Lying':

Art finds her own perfection within, and not outside of, herself. She is not to be judged by any external standard of resemblance. She is a veil, rather than a mirror. She has flowers that no forests know of, birds that no woodland possesses. She makes and unmakes many worlds, and can draw the moon from heaven with a scarlet thread.⁴⁰

Ricketts' illustration for 'The House of Judgment' heeds Wilde's call for art to be hermetic, responding to Wilde's allusiveness by duplicating it within the field of art history. Ricketts incorporates elements from a number of paintings—especially those with models for the figure of god—including Watts' *Time, Death and Judgement* (c. 1870s–1886) and *The Court of Death* (c. 1870–1902), and Gustave Moreau's *Salome Dancing before Herod* [so-called 'Salome Tattooed'] (c. 1874), *Salome* [Salome Dancing before Herod] (c. 1874–1876) and *Jupiter and Semele* (c. 1889–1895). These paintings, particularly Moreau's, are in turn highly allusive. For example, the figure of Jupiter in Moreau's *Jupiter and Semele*—one source for Ricketts' God figure—was also constructed with borrowings from a number of earlier god models, described by Geneviève Lacambre as being: 'The central Trinity panel of Jean Bellegambe's *Polyptych of Anchin*', 'a small bronze that decorated [Moreau's] mantelpiece, an ancient fresco that he had copied in Naples, Ingres's *Jupiter and Thetis*, and an Apollo with his lyre in one of John Flaxman's line engravings'.⁴¹

Ricketts' God figure goes beyond mere allusion, revealing itself to be the representation of an artwork within an artwork. In other words, Ricketts' God figure represents a figurine rather than a deity. The human (or angelic) figures that make up his throne show the God figure to be inanimate. The two figures flanking God's torso reveal that he has no agency because they, and not God, are apparently controlling God's arms, turning the pages for him. God is, then, at best a puppet or a pliable statue. The figures are neither the damned nor the saved—they are merely decorative flourishes, as is suggested by the frieze behind God. Initially appearing to be a halo or the back of God's throne, this frieze rehearses some of the dominant themes in Ricketts' illustrations. The centaur in the frieze evokes the pediment sculptures from Zeus' Temple at Olympia, which depict the fight between the Lapiths and the centaurs, in which the centaurs disrupt the wedding that the Lapiths have gathered to celebrate. Like the centaur in 'The Disciple', this centaur also represents Wilde, repeating the parody of Wilde's behaviour and visualising an emblem of orality.

⁴⁰ Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying', in *Intentions* (London: James R. Osgood McIlvaine, 1891), pp. 1–55 (p. 30).

⁴¹ Geneviève Lacambre and others, *Gustave Moreau: Between Epic and Dream* (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago in association with Princeton UP, 1999), p. 236.

Ricketts again symbolically injects the oral and literary into his illustration and emphasises that illustration is equally as multifaceted as the oral tale.

Ricketts' use of a reddish-orange wash in 'The House of Judgment' reveals another one of the illustrator's critical tools. Unique amongst the illustrations in its use of colour, the drawing evokes Watts' *Time, Death and Judgement*, which Ricketts describes in a letter as 'all red, orange and gold'.⁴² This allusion continues Ricketts' engagement with other visual artworks; moreover, the wash suggests a literary source, Isaiah 1:18, in which God implores, 'Come now, and let us reason together [. . .] though your sinnes be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimsin, they shall be as wooll'.⁴³ Not content merely to comment on Wilde's own use of Biblical sources, Ricketts himself draws from the Old Testament to re-imagine the Judgment. Furthermore, Ricketts use of colour serves as a parody of Wilde, who employs the word 'scarlet' frequently throughout *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and in many other works. In *Dorian Gray*, Basil Hallward directly alludes to the passage from Isaiah: 'It is never too late, Dorian. Let us kneel down and try if we cannot remember a prayer. Isn't there a verse somewhere, "Though your sins be as scarlet, yet I will make them as white as snow"?'⁴⁴ This passage precedes Dorian's murder of Basil, which adds another sin to the catalogue. Undoubtedly Ricketts would have been aware of Wilde's penchant for the word 'scarlet', and thus he casts Wilde in the role of the sinner by covering his illustration in a red wash. He thereby both reinforces and undermines 'The House of Judgment', in which orality undoes textual authority, placing Wilde in the role of the poet whose voice-infused writing undoes fixed textual analysis. Ricketts also physically locates Wilde within the illustration for the second time, making him the sinner figure held up by a sphinx. This association of Wilde with the sphinx is clear to an audience familiar with Ricketts' role as the designer and illustrator of Wilde's *The Sphinx*. The sphinx image not only serves to link the sinner with Wilde himself, but it also reminds the reader of Ricketts' collaborative authorship of *The Sphinx*. Ricketts' illustration, then, casts Wilde into a broadly, though not exclusively, visual environment. If Wilde promotes himself, and is perceived by others, including Ricketts, as a conversationalist and teller of tales more than an author of written texts, then Ricketts' depiction of him in his illustration is, in part, another attempt to infuse the oral into the visual, thereby demonstrating illustration's own improvisational quality.

Perhaps more than any of Ricketts' other illustrations, his drawings for *Poems in Prose* directly challenge Wilde's explicit critique of the visual arts in 'The Critic as Artist' and the implicit critiques in his fiction, such as the implied critique in 'The Poet'. Ricketts combines autonomous illustrations with faithful renderings of Wilde's text in order to declare Ricketts' independence as an illustrator—his freedom from

⁴² Ricketts to unidentified recipient (probably Shannon), 1927 (BL Add MS 61720).

⁴³ KJV, Isaiah 1:18.

⁴⁴ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (London: Ward, Lock and Co., 1891), p. 235.

having accurately to depict the written text—and his autonomy as a thinker—his freedom from having to draw only what the text evokes. Furthermore, because the prose poems centre thematically and structurally on themes of orality, and because Wilde promotes voice as the most dynamic artistic mode, Ricketts's illustrations for the *Poems in Prose* are able to countermand Wilde's views by recreating the prose poems' fluidity and fecundity within a visual medium. Ricketts challenges Wilde, not just in the ways described in this essay, but in varying ways throughout his entire series of drawings for the prose poems. For example, Ricketts composes two designs and three drawings for 'The Doer of Good', and, in so doing, shows that the visual artist can revisit the same theme in ways similar to the oral story-teller. There is no evidence of Wilde's having seen the illustrations for *Poems in Prose*, and so it is difficult to register how he might have received them. The fact that Ricketts never published the set, in spite of Bottomley's imploring him to do so, also suggests that Ricketts was somewhat ambivalent about his achievement. One might read his reluctance to publish the illustrations and to keep the project perpetually open-ended, however, as another means of resisting Wilde's denigration of visual art as a static artistic mode.

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WALTER PATER — IMAGISM — OBJECTIVIST VERSE

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Abstract

In this paper I make a two-fold argument; first that the Objectivist inheritance from modernism is, in a specific sense, Paterian, and secondly, that this Paterian influence (manifested principally in the form of the Paterian aesthetic moment) is not, as might be assumed, in conflict with the political tendencies exhibited by my central examples—Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky—but that the arguably apolitical aesthetic moment is in fact key to their political understandings. I will begin analysing how the Paterian moment lingers in Pound's poetry, especially his Imagist and Vorticist work, and is still at the core of his poetics when he begins *The Cantos*. I will then go on to argue that this same Paterian aesthetic moment continues in the early work of second-generation Modernists the Objectivists, and will look at the works of Louis as a representative example. I will then argue that this group of poets' Communism is not a break with their engagement with Paterian aestheticism, but that the Paterian moment is in fact alloyed with their understanding of Marxist-Leninism. The engagement with the far left that is generally supposed to mark these writers' defining divide with their modernist forebears will therefore be shown to be more closely linked to the older generation's practices than it might be thought and I will, finally, question the apparently aesthetic basis of Pound's alignment with the far-right.

A consensus has developed regarding Walter Pater's influence upon the early stages of literary modernism. The claims for Pater's importance are various; his eclectic cultural criticism was a useful model for Pound and other modernists, as well as his distinctive historical sense. Helen Carr writes that, 'emotionally and artistically the introduction to Pater, the Pre-Raphaelites and their successors was for some years to be much the most significant [influence on Pound] in his rejection of the American doctrine of progress and its materialist present.'¹ The ramifications of this influence are manifold, and are as clearly seen in Pound's youthful criticism as in his early poetry, particularly in his first full-length critical work *The Spirit of Romance* (1910) in which Pound develops a critical and historical sense aligned with his Victorian predecessor. Pater's most lasting contribution to Pound's poetics, however, is the moment of aesthetic transcendence that he describes in a short section of the 'Conclusion' of *Studies in the Renaissance*. The 'Conclusion' was first published in 1873, when the essays of *The Renaissance* were first collected, later suppressed and

¹ Helen Carr, *The Verse Revolutionaries: Ezra Pound, H.D. and the Imagists* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), p. 19.

finally accepted as a central text of nineteenth-century aestheticism and, despite Pater's many other achievements, remains his most cited and influential contribution to modern criticism. Pater's central dictum, that '[t]o burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life',² has indeed been cited so often as to have grown about itself the calluses of cliché, and has become unapproachable to an extent commensurate with its fame. The aesthetic state he describes in the 'Conclusion' is attained through a blend of sensual and mental stimulation primarily provided by experiencing works of art; it is a moment of aesthetic understanding and personal fulfilment amounting to, though not directly equalling, spiritual transcendence, and would be Pater's most lasting gift, though often in debased and misunderstood forms, to both his contemporaries and the modernists that would follow in putative rebellion against the excesses of the late nineteenth-century. We should not underestimate the ubiquity of this Paterian moment in both the British and American understandings of art as Pound was beginning his career. That Pater was so well known means that for Pound, who makes little direct mention of Pater, to draw attention to this inheritance would not be necessary, and that the Victorian may well have found his way into Pound's work in foundational ways without the young poet always being fully aware of it.

Pound's early work certainly echoes Pater's at a number of significant junctures, and to an extent that argues for more than the osmotic influence of London's Paterian milieu at the turn of the century. *The Spirit of Romance*, a collection of essays on late medieval writing based on lectures given in 1909 at the London Polytechnic, for example, bears extended comparison with *Studies in the Renaissance*. Pound's essays expand upon Pater's assertion that 'the Renaissance was an uninterrupted effort of the middle age',³ with Pater's desire to highlight the interconnectedness of the late medieval period and early renaissance extended earlier, with the renaissance's achievements shown as shadows of the middle ages' glory. Both writers accordingly read Dante as transmitter into the medieval of a troubadour tradition imbued with a quasi-mysticism that connects, in turn, to the classical period. A high value is thus placed on the Provençal language, implying its centrality to the transmission of the mysteries of a conflated classical / troubadour tradition. Pound and Pater also both evince an enjoyment of less well-known artists and a corresponding desire to promulgate their reputations, thus thickening their descriptions of the late medieval and early renaissance periods. Thus both writers approach the paintings of the then relatively unknown Sandro Botticelli. In *The Renaissance* Pater picks out his 'Venus' for comment and provides a description of the process of aesthetic appreciation that connects the painter to the classical world:

² Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 151.

³ *The Renaissance*, p. 152.

At first, perhaps, you are attracted only by a quaintness of design, which seems to recall at once whatever you have read of Florence in the fifteenth century; afterwards you may think that this quaintness must be incongruous with the subject, and that the colour is cadaverous or at least cold. And yet, the more you come to understand what imaginative colouring really is, that all colour is no mere delightful quality of natural things, but a spirit upon them by which they become expressive to the spirit, the better you will like this peculiar quality of colour; and you will find that quaint design of Botticelli's a more direct inlet into the Greek temper than the works of the Greeks themselves even of the finest period.⁴

Botticelli's 'Venus' takes on a similar role in Pound's Canto 17 (published in 1928, far later than *The Spirit of Romance*, but containing a related insistence on the transmissive powers of the artists of the middle-ages):

Cave of Nerea,
 she like a great shell curved,
 And the boat drawn without sound,
 Without odour of ship-work,
 Nor bird-cry, nor any noise of wave moving,
 Nor splash of porpoise, nor any noise of wave moving,
 Within her cave, Nerea,
 she like a great shell curved
 In the suavity of the rock,
 cliff green-gray in the far,
 In the near, the gate-cliffs of amber,
 And the wave
 green clear, and blue clear,
 And the cave salt-white, and glare-purple,
 cool, porphyry smooth,
 the rock sea-worn.
 No gull-cry, no sound of porpoise,
 Sand as of malachite, and no cold there,
 the light not of the sun.⁵

Here Pound, like Pater, emphasises Botticelli's restricted colour scheme; where Pater calls it 'cadaverous or at least cold' Pound insists that there is 'no cold there / the light not of the sun' – involving Neoplatonic light philosophy in his reckoning; a

⁴ *The Renaissance*, pp. 37-38.

⁵ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1987), pp. 76-77.

manifestation that, I would argue, is not unconnected with his essentially Paterian aesthetic sensibilities.

In addition to these critical parallels, the vocabulary of Pater's aestheticism would be important for the young Pound at various points in his criticism. The preface to *The Spirit of Romance* echoes Pater's contention that the 'service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit, is to rouse, to startle it to a life of constant and eager observation':⁶

Good art never bores one. By that I mean that it is the business of the artist to prevent ennui; in the literary art, to relieve, refresh, revive the mind of the reader—at reasonable intervals—with some form of ecstasy, by some splendor of thought, some presentation of sheer beauty, some lightning turn of phrase—laughter is no mean ecstasy. Good art begins with an escape from dullness.⁷

This concentration on the *process* of the aesthetic—of the physical and mental sensations that accompany the apprehension of the aesthetic—is quintessentially Paterian and can be read both in the 'Conclusion' and in the approach to Botticelli above. That Pound sounds quite so Paterian in his critical work is telling, for Pater did not bequeath modernism solely a useful conception of the aesthetic moment, but also an historical and critical method predicated upon that moment.

It would be in his poetry that the young Pound would give freest rein to his Paterian tendencies. Pater's 'hard, gem-like flame' is reignited in the early poem 'The Flame', from the collection *Canzoni* (1911), a piece that describes a moment of aesthetic transcendence at Sirmione:

Sapphire Benacus, in thy mists and thee
Nature herself's turned metaphysical,
Who can look on that blue and not believe?⁸

Benacus is Catullus' Lake Garda, and by its shores Pound details the culmination of a centuries long tradition in a moment of personal transcendence and links this epiphany to the medieval poets of *The Spirit of Romance*:

'Tis not a game that plays at mates and mating,
Provence knew;
'Tis not a game of barter, lands and houses,

⁶ *The Renaissance*, p. 152.

⁷ Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (New York: New Directions, 1953), p. 8.

⁸ Ezra Pound, *Poems & Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: Library of America, 2003), p. 169.

writes, quoting Pater: '[t]he imagist poem in its brief intensity would be in itself, one could argue, an attempt to record "the highest quality of [our] moments as they pass".¹⁴ Pound's most successful Imagist poem, 'In a Station of the Metro' (1913), clearly enacts the doctrine of the image, and in a manner that is not foreign to Pater. It reads, in its entirety, 'The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough.'¹⁵ The poem is an enactment of the experience of apprehending beauty, and, in a very Paterian manner, insists on the instantaneousness of its temporality. In his memoir *Gaudier-Brzeska* (1916) Pound writes of 'In a Station of the Metro' in the following terms: 'In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective.'¹⁶

The 'vortex or cluster of fused ideas [...] endowed with energy'¹⁷ of Vorticism, Pound's next poetic movement, might be read as a further development of Pater, as adapted for Imagism, and while Mary Ellis Gibson suggests that 'Pater's language is significant only in Pound's early poetry',¹⁸ elements derived from the Paterian aesthetic-paradisal moment are also still sporadically present throughout *The Cantos*, sometimes in situations that recall the jewelled paradise of 'The Flame' together with the insubstantiality of 'The Return'. Chrysoprase and other mineral manifestations of '90s aestheticism recur throughout the early passages of *The Cantos*. In a dense passage in Canto 5 (written in 1919, published 1921) Pound brings such multihued stone into the proximity of Iamblichus' Neoplatonic light philosophy, J. A. Symonds's *In the Key of Blue* (1893), Dante and a conception of time and the aesthetic moment, all the while employing an identifiably Paterian vocabulary:

Iamblichus' light,
 the souls ascending,
 Sparks like a partridge covey,
 Like the "ciocco", brand struck in the game.
 "Et omniformis": Air, fire, the pale soft light.
 Topaz I manage, and three sorts of blue;
 but on the barb of time.
 The fire? always, and the vision always,
 Ear dull, perhaps, with the vision, flitting
 And fading at will.¹⁹

¹⁴ *The Verse Revolutionaries*, p. 20.

¹⁵ *Poems & Translations*, p. 287.

¹⁶ Ezra Pound, *A Memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 103.

¹⁷ Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, ed. William Cookson (London: Faber, 1973), p. 345.

¹⁸ Mary Ellis Gibson, *Epic Reinvented: Ezra Pound and the Victorians* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 28.

¹⁹ *The Cantos*, p. 17.

Various threads are brought together in this passage. Pound makes a complex approach towards light here, beginning with a comparison between Neoplatonic light and Dante's spark-like 'souls ascending' and moving on to an aesthetic manifesto enacting the 'hard, gem-like flame' with a brief paraphrase from Symmonds leading onto a fire as eternal and transient as Pater's. At the end of this passage, Pound articulates, in his high *Cantos* manner, the impossibility of clasp[ing]-fast the aesthetic moment, for while the vision persists 'always', it is the ear that is 'dull'. For Pound, as for Pater, it is the adherent's job to coax himself towards aesthetic fulfilment, and it remains present, though our delicate perceptions of it flit and fade 'at will', unable because of our physical shortcomings quite to match the transcendence with which great artworks are imbued.

Pound's telos however was moving away from this Paterian mental and physical summation, and, as the 1920s progressed, such heady Victorian moments as were retained no longer moved *The Cantos* towards a strictly Paterian goal, with Pound incrementally relinquishing, until its resurgence in the poem's closing stages, Pater's potentially transcendental intimations. Through *Eleven New Cantos* (1934) and *The Fifth Decad of Cantos* (1937) such moments are progressively outweighed by societal, historical and historiographical concerns, until, with *Cantos LII- LXXI* (1940) they effectively disappear, a process that coincides with Pound's increasingly fascistic worldview; his focus shifting to an analysis of the (economic) 'game[s] of barter, lands and houses' he had dismissed in 'The Flame'.

Canto 73, the second 'Italian' canto, published in the naval magazine the *Marina Repubblicana* in February 1945, at Fascist Italy's darkest hour, is the most uncomplicatedly fascistic, war-like and least Paterian Canto. It tells the story of an Italian woman leading a group of Canadian soldiers to their deaths in a minefield, both in revenge for rape and in last-ditch support for the crumbling regime. It concludes with lines that perhaps mark the nadir of literary modernism's troubled flirtation with the hard-right: 'Ma che ragazza! / che ragazze, / che regazzi, / portan' il nero!'²⁰ This celebration of bloodshed would have been impossible in the earlier, less politicised periods of Pound's work. Where his work had been violent before – as in 'Sestina Altaforte', in which Bertran de Born offers an aestheticised encomium of war, declaring 'But ah! when I see the standards gold, vair, purple, opposing / And the broad fields beneath them turn crimson',²¹ or the 'Malatesta Cantos' in which the medieval condottiere Sigismundo Malatesta is lauded for his eminently practical skill with the machineries of conflict—Pound had insulated himself from the ramifications of such violence by setting it in distant periods and concentrating, as with Malatesta, on his warriors' artistic achievements. In 73, however, these qualifications are removed, and the passivity of Pater's aestheticism is expunged from Pound's poetics.

The Italian Cantos come at the very last gasp of his primarily political phase, at

²⁰ *The Cantos*, p. 441.

²¹ *Poems & Translations*, p. 104.

the moment at which he displays his anti-aestheticism most clearly. Near the beginning of Canto 72, published in part in the January number of the *Marina Repubblicana*,²² Pound refers ironically to 'Dio / Il grande esteta',²³ making his contempt for both conventional religion and aestheticism clear. Pound's political materialist phase, with residue of aestheticism, would last until the collapse of Italy at the end of the Second World War; his parallel distrust of aestheticism and conventional religion deepening as his paradiso terrestre seemed, with the advance of the Allies, less immanent. But with Pound's capture shortly after this period, his forcible repatriation and imprisonment in Washington's St. Elizabeth's hospital, the dam broke and, with *The Pisan Cantos* (1948), Pound would successfully reinsert something resembling the Paterian moment into his poetics. Thus in the late Cantos Paradise, which is closely associated in Pound with the Paterian moment, is 'spezzato apparently / it exists only in fragments'²⁴ and thus only available temporarily and occasionally to the aesthete-suppliant; a final reminder, getting on for forty years after 'The Flame' and *The Spirit of Romance*, of how central Pater was to Pound's verse.

I will now turn to Zukofsky, who is generally considered to have been influenced by Pound's modernism, but whose own interactions with the Paterian inheritance have often been overlooked. Zukofsky's connection with Pound began in 1927, when Zukofsky was just 23 and Pound 41. Immediately, the poets began an intense collaboration, with Pound publishing Zukofsky in his journal *Exile* and advising the younger poet extensively in the practicalities of movement-building, editing, networking and other typically Poundian activities. Zukofsky sprang into action as Pound's New York errand-boy, securing and dispatching books and manuscripts for Pound, as well performing sundry other necessary tasks. Pound also secured Zukofsky's fledgling Objectivist movement space in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, and was therefore key for the February 1931 special number of that magazine that Zukofsky was, very unusually at that time, permitted to guest-edit. The conscious marketing of the Objectivist brand and the uncompromisingly modernist productions of the group's members that featured in *Poetry* both speak clearly of the mature Pound's influence, yet I would argue that the mutated version of Pater's aesthetic moment that persisted into Imagism lingered also, largely undetected, in Objectivist verse.

²² 15th Jan. 1945. This controversial statement was, not included in the *Marina Repubblicana* extract and would be withheld until New Directions included them in their 1987 edition of *The Cantos*. See Massimo Bacigalupo's translation, introduction and notes to the Italian cantos in *Paideuma* for details of these poems' publication histories: 'Ezra Pound's Cantos 72 and 73: An Annotated Translation,' *Paideuma*, 20, 1-2 (1991), pp. 11-41.

²³ *The Cantos*, p. 425.

²⁴ *The Cantos*, p. 452.

Some similar impulses and formal strategies relevant to the Paterian aesthetic moment in Imagism would also be employed in the early works of the Objectivist poets, though for Zukofsky—who was both the originator and chief theorist of that pseudo-movement—when he came to write his long poem "A", as with Pound in *The Cantos*, the introduction of utopian political concerns would soon necessitate a form with the capacity to accommodate historiography and political analysis. The Objectivists' Paterian inheritance is unacknowledged partly through Zukofsky's own packaging of his early career. Our record of his early work, as presented by Zukofsky in *All: The Collected Short Poems* (1965-66) and in the posthumous *Complete Short Poetry*, suggests that Zukofsky emerged effectively fully formed as a modernist poet in 1927, and that he was already a politicised anti-aesthete like the Pound of *The Cantos*. Hugh Kenner is misled by this careful editing and makes a rash claim for the Objectivists, suggesting that '[t]he quality of their very youthful work is that of men who have inherited a formed tradition';²⁵ the tradition that Pound had worked his way towards after the early teens, with paths not taken like 'The Flame' thereby judiciously avoided by Zukofsky et al. Mark Scroggins, however, argues that the lyrics Zukofsky left *uncollected* in fact contain, in contradiction to Zukofsky's mature work and the popular tendency at Columbia University in the 1920s, moments of 'unabashed Paterianism',²⁶ revealing that Zukofsky himself experienced a truncated version of Pound's aesthetic phase. 'Moments', published in Columbia's *The Morningside* in 1922, explores themes and employs a vocabulary familiar from 'The Flame' and *Studies in the Renaissance*:

And the most perfect moment is the twilight's
 When we see golden strands through mist; the sky lights
 Its stars; a radiance shines through all things –
 Truth, seraph with bare sword and fire-tipped wings,
 We seem to see beyond our turbid strife,
 Yet there is no flamed truth but that is life.²⁷

Zukofsky rejects Pound's depiction of an at least symbolic heaven with the final assertion that 'there is no flamed truth but that is life', making this youthful effort of Zukofsky's more strictly Paterian than 'The Flame';²⁸ here the ecstatic state is entirely bound-up in that momentary and essentially physical experience outlined at the

²⁵ Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers* (New York: Marion Boyars, 1977), p. 169.

²⁶ Mark Scroggins, *The Poem of a Life: A Biography of Louis Zukofsky* (Berkeley: Shoemaker Hoard, 2007), p. 34.

²⁷ *The Morningside* 10, nos. 5-6 [April-May 1922], p. 27. Quoted in *Poem of a Life*, p. 34.

²⁸ Zukofsky turned 18 in January 1922, 'Moments' was published in the April-May number of Columbia's *The Morningside*.

conclusion of *Studies in the Renaissance*.

With 'Poem Beginning "The"', Zukofsky's central early work, the first in the eventual *Collected*, he would cast himself as equally anti-aesthetic and as political as Pound had become. That poem's 'Fourth Movement', 'More "Renaissance"' deals primarily with Zukofsky's education at Columbia, with John Erskine's Great Books Movement the subject of Zukofsky's ire, his Masterworks of Western Literature course here becoming 'Askforaclassic, Inc.'.²⁹ Zukofsky's explanatory dedication reveals that the "'Renaissance'" of the title refers to *Studies in the Renaissance*, and Pater reappears as a nebulous daydream in Erskine's lecture:

On Weary bott'm long wont to sit,
 Thy graying hair, thy beaming eyes,
 Thy heavy jowl would make me fit
 For the Pater that was Greece.
 The siesta that was Rome.³⁰

The Paterian moment is confounded with a mid-lecture nap, and would be dismissed on similar grounds in 1928's "A"-1, where, after the potential transcendence of a seat at a Carnegie Hall performance of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Zukofsky finds himself 'Not boiling to put pen to paper',³¹ a straightforward refusal of the Paterian/Poundian flame of 'The Flame' and the moment of 'Moments'.³²

That moment was not removed from Objectivist verse however; it would be retained in camouflaged form in that movement's characteristic short poems. These were typically compacted lyric works after the Imagist model that are closer to the Objectivist ideal than the comparatively loose 'Poem Beginning "The"'. Short pieces by the young George Oppen in his 1934 *Discrete Series* show this, as do many of Charles Reznikoff's revelatory bathetic early poems on American urban and industrial life. Zukofsky's short poems, particularly those in the late 1920s sequences '29 Poems' and '29 Songs' display this proximity most clearly, however—with a number of them following a template familiar from both Pater's own descriptions of the

²⁹ For this detail and other exegetical material on "'The'" see the *Z-Site*, <http://www.z-site.net/notes-to-poetry/Poem-beginning-The.php>.

³⁰ Louis Zukofsky, *Complete Short Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 15.

³¹ Louis Zukofsky, "A" (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 4.

³² The importance of music both thematically and as structuring principle is central to "A"-1 and much of the rest of Zukofsky's oeuvre, a moment that Brad Bucknell, Pound in *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), argues is derived from (he suggests that Zukofsky was 'very much under Pound's spell in [his] sense of the *Cantos*' music', p. 247, n. 70). Elsewhere in this volume Bucknell argues persuasively for the centrality of Paterian aesthetics to Pound's particular understanding of music and for modernism's interaction with the musical more generally.

transcendent aesthetic state and Pound's practice. The central aesthetic locale for '29 Poems' and '29 Songs' is Long Island Beach, which functions much as Pound's Garda shoreline in 'The Flame', while the sequences are recognisably Paterian in their combination of sensual experience and the fleeting moment in the crucible of clement meteorological conditions; as Pater writes in *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), 'it oftenest happens [...] with natures of genuinely poetic quality, those piecemeal beginnings come suddenly to harmonious completeness among the fortunate incidents, the physical heat and light, of one singularly happy day.'³³ In the 14th poem of '29 Poems' Zukofsky enjoys just such a suggestively Paterian flame on his beach:

Only water –

We seek of the water
The water's love!

Shall we go again
Breast to water-breast,

Gather the fish-substance,
The shining fire,
The phosphor-subtlety?

We sing who were many in the South,
At each live river mouth
Sparse-sighted, carried along!³⁴

The openly Paterian aestheticism of 'Moments' lingers here, coupled with a summery eroticism reminiscent of Marius and Flavian's fleeting moments of adolescent revelation in *Marius the Epicurean*. In a note appended to the 'Conclusion' in later editions of *The Renaissance* Pater writes: 'I have dealt more fully in *Marius the Epicurean* with the thoughts suggested by [the 'Conclusion']'.³⁵ Here the sentiments that 'might possibly mislead some of those young men into whose hands in might fall'³⁶ are indeed developed more clearly than in *The Renaissance*, with the processes of omission, reinsertion and redirection around the 'Conclusion' adding a valency of semi-submerged and reticent desire to proceedings.

There is also a discernible political element in Zukofsky's Long Island

³³ Walter Pater, *Marius the Epicurean*, ed. Gerald Monsman (Kansas City: Valancourt Books, 2008), p. 69.

³⁴ *Complete Short Poetry*, p. 29.

³⁵ *The Renaissance*, p. 150.

³⁶ *The Renaissance*, p. 150.

sequences that is absent from Imagist verse. The poems describe a summer spent with a group of politically minded Columbia students, key among whom was Whittaker Chambers.³⁷ The summer days spent with Chambers, described by Zukofsky's widow as '[h]is closest friend at Columbia'³⁸, mark the moment at which Zukofsky's nascent left-wing politics and his aesthetic tendencies first coincided. Though his years in the Communist underground and turn as Cold War state-witness were ahead of him, Chambers was already a committed member of the Communist Party U.S.A. at this time, and was working on his own aesthetically- and politically-tinged writing. Chambers was also a card-carrying Objectivist, with work appearing in the foundational Objectivist number of *Poetry* in 1931,³⁹ while the centrality of his artistic interests to his politics is underlined in his autobiography *Witness* (1952) in which he reveals how privileged artistic productions were, before political or philosophical texts, to his development; insisting upon Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) as the foundation of his own utopian politics (as well as his eventual apostasy), that novel outlining to him for the first time 'the play of forces that carried me into the Communist Party, and carried me out'.⁴⁰ Pater links Hugo to *his* aesthetic project, quoting him in the 'Conclusion': 'Well! we are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death, but with a sort of infinite reprieve.'⁴¹ Chambers, then, places a high value on the aesthetic on his route towards political action: this is not the dry politicisation we might expect, but a specifically bourgeois and cultural indoctrination that goes so far as sharing sources with the arch-aesthete Pater. This is the milieu in which the Objectivists were arriving at their aesthetic-Communism.

A poetic project begun in 1923 that Chambers recalls in *Witness*, and which potentially echoes Zukofsky's beach poems, emphasises the Paterian/Poundian importance of Long Island Beach and its climate for the young writers' development:

I set about a definite poetic project. Its purpose was twofold. I wished to preserve through the medium of poetry the beautiful Long Island of my boyhood before it was destroyed forever by the advancing City. I wished to dramatize the continual defeat of the human spirit in our time, by itself and by the environment in which it finds itself.⁴²

It is this political element and its combination with an identifiably modernist praxis

³⁷ See *Poem of a Life* p. 48 for details of this Long Island cadre.

³⁸ Carroll F. Terrell (ed.), *Louis Zukofsky: Man and Poet* (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1979), p. 51.

³⁹ 'October 21st, 1926', [*Poetry*, vol. XXXVII, no. V, pp. 258-59.] a eulogy to Chambers's dead brother Richard, who would also be the subject of Zukofsky's "A"-3.

⁴⁰ Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (New York: Random House, 1952), pp. 133-37.

⁴¹ *The Renaissance*, p. 153.

⁴² *Witness*, p. 165.

that marks what I would argue is the distinctive flavour of Objectivist verse, one which would seem to mark a conflict with the aesthetic inheritance I have identified and yet is actually closely associated with it. Such work certainly marks a break with Pound's early verse and his reading of aestheticism; where for *The Cantos* a break from the Paterian moment was required to allow his poetry to incorporate his political-utopian world-view, for Zukofsky Communist politics and an identifiably Paterian aesthetic sensibility coexist, at least for a time, in early poems such as 'Memory of V.I. Ulianov', 'During the Passaic Strike of 1926' and "'Mantis'".

This disjunction originates, however, in Pound and Imagism, rather than in Pater—for a closer look at the Victorian's formulations of the aesthetic moment reveals a clearly utopian, implicitly political, intent. Thus, in *Marius the Epicurean*, the work in which Pater would propound his aesthetic vision most extensively, Marius' developing aesthetic doctrine, closely modelled on that espoused in the 'Conclusion', develops in parallel with a social consciousness:

[W]hile [Marius] learned that the object, or the experience, as it will be in memory, is really the chief thing to care for from first to last, in the conduct of our lives; all that was feeding also the idealism that was constitutional with him—his innate and habitual longing for a world altogether fairer than that he saw.⁴³

Pater goes so far as to call Marius' Epicureanism 'the special philosophy of the poor',⁴⁴ which insistence, when combined with the telling reference to the aesthetic moment as 'object', adds nuance to Zukofsky's Objectivist theory, suggesting that a turn to his prose explanation of his movement may be of use in tracking down Pater's lingering influence in second-generation modernism.

The eroticism of Zukofsky's Long Island poems, combined with their reticence and insistence on a non-aggressive politics, recalls an element of Pater's thought that has been studied by some recent critics. Heather Love writes that

We might read all of Pater's writings as dedicated to the figure of the victim: in this sense, he cultivates a modernist aesthetic based not on violent transgression but rather on refusal and passivity. Such a form of shrinking resistance is at odds with the protocols of modernist rebellion, and it has often been read as a sign of Pater's aestheticist withdrawal from the field of the social. I suggest recasting his aesthetics of failure as a complex response to a particular historical experience of exclusion. [...] The key practices of such a politics—secrecy, asceticism, the vaporization of the self, and temporal delay—depart significantly from

⁴³ *Marius the Epicurean*, p. 33.

⁴⁴ *Marius the Epicurean*, p. 274.

the modernist protocols of political intervention. Nonetheless, I argue that we should understand his backwardness as an alternative form of politics—one that is consonant with the experience of marginalized subjects.⁴⁵

This kind of political refusal speaks strongly to Zukofsky poetics and to his nearly impenetrable early prose. Thus Pater's particular brand of aestheticism can be seen to be linked to his experience of desire as a Victorian; the Paterian moment therefore a utopian expression of repressed or, more accurately, oppressed desire. This conception of a aesthetic politics that was concerned primarily with the marginal would have appealed strongly to Chambers, who was involved in homosexual relationships around the time of the summer trips to Long Island, and his circle, while the politics of the oppressed minority speaks directly to the Objectivists as predominantly Jewish, working class Americans, as well as to a core constituency of the C.P.U.S.A. Love sees Pater's politics as a 'politics of refusal'⁴⁶ and bound up tightly with his characteristic approach to aesthetics; I believe a similar refusal, which is likewise imbued with desire and the insult of marginalisation, lies at the heart of Zukofsky's partial, brief, and yet somehow intensely committed, interaction with the American Communist Party. That this politics of refusal sits so uncomfortably with the High Modernist project also makes it more attractive to these younger writers attempting to redress the faults of their oppressive forebears.

Zukofsky's theorisation of Objectivist verse privileges something called the 'rested totality', an intangible, utopian poetic state that owes something to Pound's doctrine of the image but is even more reminiscent of the Paterian moment. Zukofsky addresses it in the following manner in 'Sincerity and Objectification: With Special Reference to the Work of Charles Reznikoff' (1931):

Presented with sincerity, the mind even tends to supply, in further suggestion which does not attain rested totality, the totality not always found in sincerity and necessary only for perfect rest, complete appreciation. This rested totality may be called objectification—the apprehension satisfied completely as to the appearance of the art form as an object.⁴⁷

The 'rested totality' is found in 'perfect rest, complete appreciation', much like Pater's 'flame'—it may, in fact, be interchangeable with it. Elsewhere in Zukofsky's early

⁴⁵ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), pp. 57-58.

⁴⁶ *Feeling Backward*, p. 70.

⁴⁷ Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions +: The Collected Critical Essays* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), pp. 194.

prose, Zukofsky argues for a kind of 'non-predatory' reading which, I would suggest, comes closer to Pater's reticent and defensive aestheticism than Pound:

One can go further, try to dissect capillaries or intelligent nerves—and speak of the image felt as duration or perhaps of the image as the existence of the shape and movement of the poetic object. The poet's image is not dissociable from the movement or the cadenced shape of the poem.

An idea—not an empty concept. An idea—its value including its meaning. The desk, i.e. as object including its value—The object unrelated to palpable or predatory intent—Also the meaning, or what should be the meaning of science in modern civilization as pointed out in Thorstein Veblen.

No predatory manifestation—Yet a manifestation making the mind more temperate because the poem exists and has perhaps recorded both state and individual.⁴⁸

In this extract Zukofsky begins familiarly enough by directing the reader towards the physical and mental processes behind aesthetic apprehension—the attempt to 'dissect capillaries or intelligent nerves'—before moving even more clearly into the Paterian realm with an insistence on the aesthetic moment's 'duration'. This trajectory is continued in the second and third paragraphs, initially through Zukofsky's foregrounding of the non-predatory nature of such experience, which is much in accordance with Love's analysis of Pater, and then on to his conviction that the reading of poetry can beneficially contribute towards 'making the mind more temperate', which goal is presumably a restatement of the 'rested totality'. The surprise in this extract, then, is the appearance of Veblen, probably the least aesthetically susceptible thinker Zukofsky could have included at this juncture and a key theorist in the young Zukofsky's leftist philosophy. I would argue, however, that the wilfully perverse inclusion of Veblen in the midst of this recognisably Paterian rhetoric is in fact key to Zukofsky's aesthetic-Communism; Veblen, who one would assume to be *against* aestheticism, can be worked into Zukofsky's aesthetic pattern because of the purity of his aesthetic conceptions. Zukofsky, in line with Veblen, throws out the Poundian chrysoprase and malachite, instead choosing to site his aesthetic moments on Brooklyn's docks (as in 'Not much more than being'), sporting with other young leftists on the elemental Long Island seafront, and, in line with Pater, discovering transient moments of transcendent beauty in those places. Whether Veblen would have approved of this conjunction is another matter, but his presence in Objectivist aesthetic theory is nonetheless crucial to his project of conjoining a version of 1930s Communism with a Paterian aesthetic sensibility.

⁴⁸ *Prepositions* +, pp. 16.

The political distinction between Pound and Zukofsky provides, of course, the primary stress in their relationship, though race, class and educational tensions are also present throughout in addition to the inevitable struggle between mentor and pupil. Politics also provides the primary division between first generation High Modernism and second generation Objectivist verse; one that might be read as stemming from, or at least being intimately associated with, their differing aesthetic concerns. But if the link, as I have attempted to show above, between aestheticism and conservative politics is not as inevitable as it might seem—and that the rightward lurches of Pound, Yeats and other writers between the wars need not necessarily be ascribed to their links with a particular brand of Victorian aestheticism—then their political disagreement needs to be traced to another source.

This is not to say, however, that their political positions are in no way influenced by their aesthetic understandings. Benjamin famously insists in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' that '[t]he logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life.'⁴⁹ Pound is not as brutal as the Futurist F.T. Marinetti, Benjamin's example of the aestheticised fascist, and, specifically in his politicised phase—if not clearly in his early Paterian lyrics or Vorticist work—displays a concern for society that is anathema to the Futurists. Nonetheless, the polarity that Benjamin sets up between Fascism and Communism is applicable to Pound and Zukofsky, the critic's final (less frequently quoted) corollary offering a ready description of Zukofsky's route towards political aestheticism: 'Communism responds by politicizing art.'⁵⁰ For Benjamin the movement is double, and modernism must exist dialectically between the polarities of aesthetics and politics. As applied to the issue of the Paterian inheritance in the political poetics of Pound and Zukofsky: Paterian aestheticism might be seen as essential both to Pound's fascism and Zukofsky's unusual Communism, though the dialectic is twisted differently in both cases.

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**"IT IS IMPOSSIBLE THAT ALL THIS SHOULD BE LOST":
VICTORIAN NARRATIVE IN JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS***

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Abstract

Critics debate the designation of Joseph Conrad's 1902 novella *Heart of Darkness* as either "Victorian" or "Modern." The novella's protagonist embodies Victorian notions of British imperialism, whilst Conrad's experimental style and content pre-figure modernist sensibilities. I suggest that the final scene of the novella illuminates Conrad's simultaneous embodiment and interrogation of Victorian narrative convention. Kurtz's fiancée shows an astonishing degree of agency in constructing a master narrative apart from the tale that Marlow tells his masculine audience. Such a close-up view of the construction of this narrative exposes the frailty of narratives in general and the dependence of "truth" upon prescribed gender roles. This article discusses how Conrad's tale of gender and period crossings centres around the attempts of Marlow and Modernism to leave behind feminine and Victorian "delusions." These attempts inevitably fail because such delusions are themselves essential to masculine and Modern self-invention.

For over a century, critics have debated the designation of Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* as either 'Victorian' or 'Modern.' The novella's protagonist Marlow embodies Victorian notions of British imperialism and reveals a vested interest in the ideology of 'separate spheres,' the 19th century doctrine that lauded women for tending the private domestic space that enabled men to succeed in the political and public realm. At the same time, Conrad's experimental style and content prefigure modernist sensibilities, particularly the sense that 'truth' might be revealed through a less linear narrative strain and can even transcend the identity or gender of its narrator. The novella's publication dates—serialised in 1899 and published as a complete text in 1902—represent yet another way in which the novella resists easy classification. The final scene in particular illuminates Conrad's simultaneous embodiment and interrogation of Victorian narrative convention. In the scene, Marlow tells a bereaved woman that her fiancée's dying words were her name when, in fact, the man cried out 'The horror! The horror!' The irony is lost on neither Marlow's hearers nor his readers.¹ In a text that seems to layer narrative upon

¹ A selection of critical readings that interpret 'the horror' as the Intended's name, or as slang for 'whore,' include David Bruffee, 'The Lesser Nightmare: Marlow's Lie in Heart of Darkness,' *Modern Language Quarterly*, 25 (1964), 322-29; James Ellis, 'Kurtz's Voice: The Intended as "The Horror"', *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 19.2 (1976), 105-10; Carola M. Kaplan, 'Colonizers, Cannibals, and the Horror of Good Intentions in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness,' *Studies in*

narrative, however, this final scene offers the only example of a cohesive, coherent narrative. Because the narrative created is a 'lie,' Conrad appears to critique Victorian notions of truth and imperialism. However, in a novella that constantly calls into question its own authority and undercuts any notion of an omniscient narrator, such an intimate view of the construction of this narrative exposes the frailty of narratives in general and the dependence of 'truth' upon prescribed gender roles. I will illustrate how Marlow's and Modernism's attempts to leave behind feminine and Victorian 'delusions' inevitably fail because such delusions are themselves essential to both masculine and Modern self-invention. The brilliance of Conrad's narrative is that it both records and deconstructs these attempts.

Conrad frames *Heart of Darkness* as a story-within-a-story. A nameless, first-person narrator recalls the tale of Marlow, indicating himself to have been one of the listeners, and then Marlow relates his own story (also in first-person) about his sojourn into the 'heart of darkness'—the Belgian Congo. Marlow confides in a small community of men (including the narrator) aboard a ship. The story he tells is this: when Kurtz, a European company man, 'goes native,' apparently adopting customs that horrify Marlow (such as cannibalism, taking an African mistress, and engaging in unnamed sexual and religious rites), the company employs Marlow to bring Kurtz back to his native Europe and the fiancée he left behind. On the trip home, Kurtz dies. Marlow, haunted by what he has seen in the Congo, sits beside Kurtz's deathbed and fantasizes about the final thoughts running through the dying man's mind:

Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: "the horror! The horror!" (p. 86)

In the year following Kurtz's death, Marlow grows increasingly obsessed with this 'complete knowledge' that Kurtz possesses. Driven to death's door by the trauma, he becomes convinced upon his recovery that he alone understands the truth about the life and death of the man who has occupied his every thought and action for so long. He imagines that the connection he feels is a spiritual one, and frames his 'jealous' refusal to share Kurtz 'with any one' in prophetic terms: 'it was ordered I should never betray him—it was written I should be loyal to the nightmare of my choice' (p. 81). The word 'choice' betrays the extent to which Marlow imagines he can play God with Kurtz's legacy. Back in Europe, Marlow gradually gives away most of Kurtz's belongings to carefully selected individuals. Eventually, only 'a slim packet of letters'

Short Fiction 34.3 (1997), 323-33; Gerald B. Kauver, 'Marlow as Liar,' *Studies in Short Fiction* 5.3 (1968), 290-292; Bruce R. Stark, 'Kurtz's Intended: The Heart of Heart of Darkness,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 16 (1974), 535-555; and Fred L. Milne, 'Marlow's Lie and the Intended: Civilization as the Lie in Heart of Darkness,' *Arizona Quarterly* 44 (1985), 106-112.

and a portrait of Kurtz's fiancée (known only as 'the Intended') remain in his possession. She remains the one aspect of Kurtz's life that eludes Marlow's grasp. He follows his own mysterious impulses to visit her and bequeath the remaining fragments of Kurtz's life to her care: 'Perhaps it was an impulse of unconscious loyalty, or the fulfillment of one of those ironic necessities that lurk in the facts of human existence. I don't know. I can't tell. But I went' (p. 90). Yet in the course of the exchange, it becomes clear that Marlow wants something from her as well. By ridding himself of all Kurtz's earthly possessions, he fears the loss of his own particular connection with Kurtz. In order to possess Kurtz entirely, Marlow must 'shield' his only competitor—the Intended—from the Truth about Kurtz and keep his legacy safe and unsullied by feminine hands.

When Marlow arrives on the Intended's doorstep, he fantasizes that he feels keenly the presence of Kurtz there with him as 'a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence. The vision seemed to enter the house with me' (p. 90). He insists that he must stave off this dreadful presence 'for the salvation of another soul' (p. 90)—the imperilled female soul of the Intended. The domestic setting of his encounter with the Intended only serves to intensify Marlow's sense that he must preserve and protect the realm of feminine fancy and delusion from the 'separate sphere' of masculine knowledge, of sacred truth, forged in the heart of darkness and in the bowels of a ship.

Marlow's saviour complex epitomises the 'white man's burden' of nineteenth-century imperialist ideology: protecting the innocent female from the truth about the big bad world of commerce and imperialism. The Intended clearly participates in and perpetuates these masculine enterprises—her parlour features a piano with ivory keys, one of the two major commodities (alongside rubber) motivating Western rape of the Congo—but Marlow conveniently maintains she is too fragile to learn the truth behind the inanimate objects that adorn her drawing-room. It is in the name of her 'salvation' that Marlow lies to her about Kurtz's final words. In doing so, Marlow occupies familiar ground. By the time Conrad published *Heart of Darkness* at the turn of the century, King Léopold of Belgium's harsh tactics for 'colonising' the Congo had come under attack. On July 17, 1906, in response to an editorial criticizing his tactics, Léopold sent a letter to *The London Times* containing thirty seven articles that characterise his brutal policies of slavery, mutilation, misery, and death as humanitarian and Christian in nature. He stresses the need for 'order' and 'security' in the Congo in the face of the native population's natural 'laziness' and 'propensity for lying.'² Whether or not Conrad himself intended to critique Western imperialism lies outside the realm of this argument, but Marlow certainly epitomises the good Victorian imperialist and patriarch in his treatment of the Intended, just as Kurtz had embodied the enlightened Victorian missionary gone bad in his relations

² Leopold, 'Letter', in *The Times* archives <http://archive.timesonline.co.uk/tol/searchOnDay.arc>

with the Africans within the narrative Marlow tells.³

As in the African jungle, death permeates every corner of the European home. Marlow meets the Intended 'in a lofty drawing-room' decorated with a 'marble fireplace' and 'grand piano' that give the room the appearance of a graveyard: the fireplace is 'monumental' in its 'whiteness' and the piano 'gleams' in the corner 'like a sombre and polished sarcophagus' (p. 91). As for the Intended, she wears black: 'I—I alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves,' Marlow imagines her to imply by virtue of her dark clothing and 'sorrowful head' (p. 91). When Marlow fears that he sees Kurtz there united with her, he immediately stakes his own claim to Kurtz's ghost: in answer to her statement 'You knew him well,' he replies, 'Intimacy grows quickly out there [...] I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another' (p. 92). He emphasizes their shared gender, seizing the opportunity to identify with Kurtz in an intimate circle of shared knowledge sacred from feminine access or interpretation. Shortly thereafter, Marlow begins to lie. He starts a sentence, 'It was impossible not to—' and the Intended 'finish[es] eagerly' his sentence: 'Love him!' (p. 92). At the moment she makes this assertion, the Intended completely subverts Marlow's authorial expectations. Previous to their meeting, he fantasises about finding in her the perfect audience for 'his' narrative: imagining a 'delicate shade of truthfulness' in her portrait, he assumes that 'She seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself' (p. 90). In person, she proves less pliable. She seizes control of the narrative, 'silencing [Marlow] into an appalled dumbness' by interrupting his tale with a version of her own. He makes no move to correct her; indeed, he reiterates her claim by saying 'You knew him best' (p. 92). He acquiesces to the Angel of the House in a perfect performance of gender that critics like Nancy Armstrong have astutely identified as politically and literarily powerful.⁴

Bette London, in her seminal 1989 article 'Reading Race and Gender in Conrad's Dark Continent,' argues that Marlow ultimately displaces the Intended by occupying a 'feminine' position as 'Kurtz's most enduring conquest' (p. 245)⁵ Andrew Roberts likewise suggests that Conrad invites readers to empathise with female characters as well as male characters who temporarily occupy a 'feminised' position (p. 121).⁶ I would argue that Marlow's anxiety certainly arises from his desire to 'displace the Intended,' but that he clings to his masculinity as the bond that ultimately unites him with Kurtz and places both of them beyond her reach. As the

³ For an authoritative account of this period in Belgian history, see Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998).

⁴ Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987).

⁵ Bette London, 'Reading Race and Gender in Conrad's Dark Continent,' *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts*, 31.3 (1989), 235-252.

⁶ Andrew Roberts, *Conrad and Masculinity* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).

Intended expounds upon her grief, Marlow vacillates between anger and pity. When she begs to hear Kurtz's final words, Marlow assures her that he was with Kurtz 'to the very end.' However, the text leaves this point ambiguous. When Marlow visits Kurtz on the night that he dies, he is 'startled to hear him say a little tremulously, "I am lying here in the dark waiting for death."' Marlow stands over him 'as if transfixed,' and watches a 'change' that comes over 'his features,' 'as though a veil had been rent.' It is 'of an intense and hopeless despair.' Shortly thereafter, in response to 'some image or some vision,' Kurtz utters what Marlow claims are his final words: 'the horror! The horror!' Marlow blows out the candle he has carried with him and leaves the cabin. One might certainly infer that Kurtz has died in Marlow's presence; however, Marlow never explicitly confirms this, 'successfully ignor[ing]' the questioning glance of his dinner companion. It is the manager's young native boy who interrupts their meal shortly thereafter to exclaim, 'Mistuh Kurtz-he dead!' (p. 94).

Marlow's 'lie' to the Intended represents the first time that he claims to have heard Kurtz's last words. By sheer force of will, the Intended forces Marlow to give her a version of Kurtz's death that upholds and affirms everything she 'knows' about him. Marlow insists that Kurtz's final words seem 'to swell menacingly' around him in the parlour, yet he acquiesces not to Kurtz but to the Intended, who wields her feminine 'weakness' in a perfect performance that wins her the affirmation that she needs to preserve her own special knowledge of Kurtz. Goaded on by her tears, Marlow cries, 'The last word he pronounced was—your name' (p. 94). He mimics her response, 'I knew it—I was sure,' by saying, 'She knew. She was sure' (p. 94). In doing so, Marlow affirms the new 'truth' that will govern both their lives.

Johanna M. Smith argues that Marlow's return to 'civilisation' reflects 'the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, in which the white woman's role is to create a realm of domestic bliss to which the white man can return and recover from the brutality of the world of commerce' (p. 366). Whilst his aunt's drawing-room at the beginning of his journey offers Marlow the kind of "bliss" that Smith describes (the room 'most soothingly looked just as you would expect a lady's drawing-room to look,' Marlow recalls) (p. 27), the Intended's parlour where his journey comes to a close offers no rest for the weary. Instead, signs of the imperial project are everywhere, and the parlour is haunted not only by the ghost of Kurtz but by an active female author, all too alive, with an agenda of her own.

The threat that Marlow senses in the Intended's presence is heightened by the fact that very few women appear on the pages of *Heart of Darkness*. The anonymous author of a 1903 review in the *Glasgow Evening News* observes that Conrad's *oeuvre* 'has either ignored women, or at best made use of them as figures to fill a space in the background of his painting.' Whilst feminist and gender criticism of the novella remain comparatively sparse, more and more contemporary critics join Gabrielle McIntire in insisting that despite their 'near invisibility,' women are nonetheless 'an

always-palpable presence in the background of the text.⁷ It is this virtual yet palpable absence of women elsewhere that makes the final scene of the novella even more compelling: all of a sudden, the action of the tale shifts from the homosocial space of the ship where Kurtz dies, and where Marlow tells his tale, into an overtly 'feminine' domestic space: the parlour of Kurtz's nameless fiancée. Equally startling is the sudden presence of a female voice; with a few minor exceptions, such as Marlow's 'out of touch' aunt (p. 27) and the African Mistress (Marlow, unable to speak her language, conveniently compares her indecipherable cries to a 'satanic litany' [p. 84]), the women of the text remain silent.⁸

When the Intended insists, 'it is impossible that all this should be lost' (p. 93), she clings not only to the cherished memory of a single man, but also to all that he signifies ideologically, namely a singular truth embodied in a singular white man who lives up to his God-ordained role as imperialist, patron of women and minorities, and master narrator of their experiences. It is a defiant cry, but also quite prophetic. She refuses to 'lose' Kurtz to the man who stands before her, just as she defies death to separate her from her beloved. She encloses herself in the graveyard of her parlour-room, clothes herself in black, and colludes with Marlow to construct a Victorian narrative about Kurtz that serves her agenda just as conveniently as his own. In a novella packed with silent women, her voice breaks the spell that Marlow's tale spins for his homosocial audience, and reminds the reader that multiple competing agendas of gender and period crossings are at play.

From Marlow's perspective, the lie reifies his role as saviour and (ironically) as keeper of the truth. The Truth about Kurtz remains safely and finally in his keeping. Yet his hard-won homosocial bond is fraught with tension. Throughout the novella, Marlow questions the truthfulness of certain labels the Company assigns to the natives: 'enemies,' 'criminals,' and 'rebels.' When a fellow white man defends Kurtz's murderous practices by telling Marlow his victims were rebels, Marlow

shocked him excessively by laughing. Rebels! What would be the next definition I was to hear? There had been enemies, criminals, workers—and these were rebels. Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks (p. 75).

His refusal to accept these terms as legitimate labels for the natives he encounters

⁷ Gabrielle McIntire, 'The Women Do Not Travel: Gender, Difference, and Incommensurability in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*,' *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, 48.2 (2002), 257-284. Important exceptions to my claim that a paucity of feminist and gender criticism exists in the critical canon of the novella include Nina Pelikan Straus, Bette London, Johanna M. Smith, and Elaine Showalter.

⁸ For a foundational reading of the role female silence plays in allowing Marlow to uphold the notion of 'separate spheres' in his narrative, see Johanna M. Smith's "'Too Beautiful Altogether': Ideologies of Gender and Empire in *Heart of Darkness*," in *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by Ross Murfin (Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 1996), 169-184.

seems to support his insistence that he 'hate[s], detest[s], and can't bear a lie' because it reeks of death (p. 42). Understood in the context of his preceding claim, the Intended's ability to undermine his conviction is remarkable. At her insistence, he embraces a living death and tastes the 'flavour of mortality in lies' that allows her privileged access to the narrative of her choosing (p. 42).

Yet even as he caves to the Intended's demands, Marlow continues to subscribe to a narrative that assures white men they hold the very power of the universe in their hands. After uttering his lie, 'It seemed to [him] that the house would collapse before [he] could escape, that the heavens would fall upon [his] head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle.' 'Trifle' though it might be, he immediately goes on to wonder 'Would they have fallen [...] if [he] had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due?' (p. 94), that is, if he had applied the same critique to Kurtz's words that he applies to 'enemies,' 'criminals,' and 'rebels'? Even after succumbing to a lie, he believes that his word alone is powerful enough to dismantle the "house" where it is told and the occupant who forced the lie from him in the first place.

The white man's burden that he takes upon himself ostensibly distresses him; it certainly conflicts with his earlier disavowal of titles like 'emissary of light' and 'a lower sort of apostle' that might glorify his trip to the Congo (he writes off such discourse as 'such rot' [p. 26]). Yet in the presence of the Intended, his self-imposed plight seems to result in a measure of pleasure insofar as it binds Marlow more closely with Kurtz. He fails to join Kurtz in death, but perhaps the lies he tells will allow him to share in his damnation. The heavens may fall, but they will do so at his discretion. As Cedric Watts argues, *Heart of Darkness* suggests

the appalling paradox that whereas the majority of men who led secular lives are heading for a death which is extinction, Kurtz has at least the significance granted by the intensity of his evil. If he has sold his soul, at least he had a soul to sell (p. 51).

Marlow's pretence of saving the Intended's soul functions as yet another opportunity for reifying his own special connection to Kurtz, even as the images of the graveyard and of death that pervade the parlour of the Intended (as well as her own spectre-like appearance that renders her 'a pale head, floating towards [Marlow] in the dusk) (p. 91) suggest that she, rather than he, occupies this liminal space with her beloved.

By placing two versions of Marlow's story alongside each other—the version he tells his shipmates that comprises the majority of the novella and the version he tells the Intended that concludes it—Conrad illuminates the gender crossing and period crossing that intersect in the text. Without the 'lie' to the Intended, I might agree with critics like Debrah Raschke who comfortably classify *Heart of Darkness* as Modern.⁹ Yet the final scene problematizes such comfortable conclusions. By

⁹ Debrah Raschke, *Modernism, Metaphysics, and Sexuality* (New Jersey: Associated University

lying to the Intended, Marlow casts his own reliability as a narrator into doubt. Raschke points out the irony of Marlow's attempts to silence women, particularly his insistence at the conclusion of the novella that 'the women are out of it' even as their presence underlies the text from beginning to end (p. 87). Likewise, Nina Pelikan Strauss highlights the many ways in which Marlow's own version of the 'truth' absolutely depends upon 'the guarding of secret knowledge' from a woman capable of 'deconstruct[ing] and demystify[ing]' it, should she gain access to the masculine sphere (p. 214). Thus, the complex style of Marlow's narrative is exposed as a desperate attempt to escape the influence and sphere of the feminine because *her* presence and voice will expose its debt to Victorian notions of imperialism, patriarchy, and gender identity, and of the dubious grounds upon which Modernism builds its critique.

Marlow's obsession with preserving separate spheres of knowledge reflects a deep indebtedness to an ideology that, like the ideology of imperialism, "was under pressure in the late nineteenth century" (Smith, p. 176). Yet the historical anachronism is less important here than the discursive investment Marlow displays in keeping the ideology alive. Marlow desperately attempts to narrate his story in a way that renders the Intended pure trope. In the tale Marlow intends to tell, the Intended functions as a symbol of 'feminine knowledge' that upholds the very myth of masculinity and imperialism that underlies Kurtz's every action in the Congo and Marlow's subsequent, desperate attempts to control the legacy Kurtz leaves behind. As Pelikan Strauss argues, 'Heroic maleness is defined precisely in adverse relation to delusional femininity' (p. 207). To remedy this definition, she advocates a 'radical feminist criticism of high art' that 'would remove the mask' of masculine objectivity 'to disclose the particular delusions intrinsic to a particular literary work' like *Heart of Darkness* (p. 209). I mean to suggest that the Intended is in no need of such rescue—that, in fact, her authorship of an alternative narrative or 'lie' performs the work of a feminist critique on Marlow's narrative that precedes it, and exposes the many 'delusions' at play. Unlike her female predecessors in the novella, the Intended intervenes as co-author, disrupting Marlow's narrative and forcing him to tell a different version altogether. Marlow's audiences are left with two authors, two versions of a story for which the word 'truth' has lost its relevance, and with their own allegiance divided between Victorian and Modern notions of identity equally grounded in common 'lies.' Contrary to Marlow's best-laid plans, the Intended asserts her own authorship both of the story that will govern her life, and of the Modern age that imagines it can leave her behind.

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LITERATURE AND THE ECOLOGICAL IMAGINATION: RICHARD JEFFERIES AND D. H. LAWRENCE

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Abstract

This paper suggests that early twentieth-century representations of the pastoral were informed by late nineteenth-century environmentalism. Richard Jefferies, Victorian author and journalist, was one of the earliest proponents of an ecological movement that warned against humans losing connection with nature. Jefferies' spiritual autobiography, *The Story of my Heart*, published in 1883, attempted to defy the passive response to late-Victorian ecological ignorance and boldly anticipated the more dynamic literary forms of the Modernist era. Although Jefferies' expression of the relationship between the psyche and the natural world has been labelled as 'pantheistic', 'pretentious' and a 'failure', a similar strain of dramatic self-consciousness is recognisable in the work of early Modern authors. D. H. Lawrence stated that he 'didn't like' *The Story of My Heart*. However, close readings of passages from the autobiography, and from Jefferies' post-apocalyptic novel *After London* (1885) compared with close readings from Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915) highlight latent affinities between the late work of Jefferies and the work of D. H. Lawrence. These affinities include imaginative connections between the psyche and the natural world—which afforded partial consolation for the post-Romantic loss of equilibrium between man and nature, and the potential implications of ecological imbalance for the relationship between man and woman—in particular the struggle for individual identity within an increasingly industrial environment. Considering these affinities in the context of the broader literary transition between late-nineteenth century realism and the more reactionary genres of the early twentieth century, this paper concludes that continuity between late nineteenth-century environmentalism and early modernist ecological narratives afforded a more imaginative understanding of the relationship between the self and the natural world.

The term 'ecology' was first used in 1866 by biologist and philosopher Professor Ernst Haeckel in *General Morphology*. Haeckel, described in the *Saturday Review* in 1931 as 'the renowned leader of the materialistic school of thought',¹ based 'ecology' on the classical Greek words *oikos*, meaning 'household or homestead,' and *logos*, meaning 'study'. Ecologist Stanley Dodson has noted that in his definition Haeckel publicised the concept of the 'economy of nature' discussed by Darwin in *On the Origin of Species*.² Darwin suggested that nature seemed to be an orderly, well-regulated system of interactions between plants, animals, and their environment, and

¹ Anonymous, 'The Love Letters of Ernst Haeckel', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 151:3923 (1931:Jan. 3), 30-3 (p. 30).

² *Ecology*, ed. by Stanley Dodson and others (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 2.

that the appearance of organisation was the result of a natural process of evolution based on a struggle for existence by each individual organism.³ Haeckel defined ecology as:

The economy of nature—the investigation of the total relations of the animal both to its inorganic and its organic environment; including, above all, its friendly and inimical relations with those animals and plants with which it comes directly or indirectly into contact—in a word, ecology is the study of all those complex interrelations referred to by Darwin as the conditions of the struggle for existence.⁴

Ten years after Haeckel coined the term 'ecology' a revolution was ongoing in rural England. The arrival of new agricultural machinery altered ways of life which had remained untouched for centuries. Mechanised steam engines promised to increase yield and reduce labour, but polluted the air with noise and fumes. The implications of these practical changes for a society seeking to secure itself in the aftermath of a 'great and sudden revolution' in the way in which Victorians perceived the history of the world,⁵ was documented by journalists and fiction writers. One of the most consistent and insightful records of this acute period of change was Richard Jefferies who between 1874 and 1887 contributed hundreds of pastoral essays to a range of leading periodicals including *Chambers's Journal*, *Fraser's Magazine*, *Longman's*, *The Examiner*, and the *National Review*. In chronicling the implications of change on man's relationship with the environment, Jefferies' pastoral representations became a rich holding ground for experiments in early modern thought.

Brian Morris, in *Richard Jefferies and the Ecological Vision* (2006), identifies Jefferies as a pioneer environmentalist, and discusses, among other things, his interest in the preservation of the rural environment and his observations of insect life. Although an accurate account of Jefferies's observations, Morris's work fails fully to acknowledge the deep symbolism employed in Jefferies' nature journalism from 1882 and 1887, which sought to express natural history as philosophy. Despite Jefferies's attempts to sow seeds of modern thought—which sought to expand the parameters set by mid-Victorian values—the latent crossovers of his work with Lawrence's writing,

³ Kevin Padian, in *Nature* 451 (February, 2008), notes that Darwin's work is behind many of the ideas in ecology. Padian observes that the word 'ecology' was not known in Darwin's time, and that Darwin's 'the economy of nature' caused the formerly 'divinely ordained balance of nature' to become 'the autocatalytic war of nature.' The word 'ecology' was a virtual neologism at this time and had not yet been popularised, however it is likely that Darwin, considering his profession, would have been aware of the term during his lifetime (pp. 632-634).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁵ The physician Charles Murchison wrote in *Paleontological memoirs and notes* (London: Hardwicke, 1868) of the 'great and sudden revolution' that was occurring in England during the late nineteenth century (p. 486).

and the relationship between the two writers has been overlooked. Like Lawrence, Jefferies was not limited to delineating rural England but represented a broad spectrum of life—from labouring classes to London high society. Like Jefferies, Lawrence sought to address Victorian ideas with modern solutions, recognising that the gradual conscious response to a radically changing society, that had characterised the mid nineteenth century, needed to accelerate in order to keep up. Roger Ebbatson, in *The Evolutionary Self*, writes that Lawrence's 'cultivation of the circle of thought' and the 'laborious growth' of *The Rainbow* are agents of change which contribute to achieving a more complete 'unit of consciousness'.⁶ Both Jefferies and Lawrence recognise the emotional implications of the 'struggle for existence' and offer new ways to think about how tensions between the significance of the individual and the race of humanity as a whole might be resolved. Jefferies, also an experimenter in fiction, sought to imbue late-Victorian realism with an early modern dimension, exploring meeting places between the tangible and the unknown. Through the employment of a more radical and controversial mode of expression Lawrence nurtured and grew these early modern beginnings into his individual version of Modernity, thus maintaining essential affinities with his predecessors.

Jefferies's early work is characterised by country books such as *The Gamekeeper at Home*, first serialised in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1878, and articles on agricultural subjects, including 'An English Homestead' in *Fraser's Magazine* (1876). Both the article and the serial, written in an acute documentary style, explore the relationship of the landowner or agricultural worker to their environment. The human struggle for individual existence within a dynamic social and natural order was to become a theme of his work during the 1880s. In an article titled 'Just before Winter', published in *Chambers's Journal* in December 1886, Jefferies's observations of gypsies in the natural environment identify a more simple, less regulated form of existence than the organisation of civilised late nineteenth century society. He writes that 'the gipsy loves the crescent moon, the evening star, the clatter of the fern-owl, the beetle's hum. He was born on the earth in the tent, and he has lived like a species of human wild animal ever since.'⁷ For Jefferies, the relationship between man and the natural world was not wholly dependent upon biologically determined impulses or inclinations, but upon a deeper, more soulful exchange between the mind of man and the cadence of natural surroundings. He wrote in the knowledge that the gradual relationship with the land, which mankind had built up over centuries, was in the process of being disassembled and rebuilt within in the space of fifty years. In *On the Origin of Species* Darwin refers to 'varying, and insensible changes' which are 'slowly and unconsciously accumulated': Darwin's observations of 'slow action' and 'the slow and successive appearance of new species' had made visible a grander scale of

⁶ Roger Ebbatson, *The Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence*. (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1982), p. 96.

⁷ Richard Jefferies, 'Just before Winter', *Chambers's Journal* (December 1886), pp. 801-4 (p. 801).

existence in which the individual had to find a place.⁸ The form of Victorian realism struggled to accommodate this new direction in thought and was subject to broadening experiments in fiction, often rejected by the markets of the time, but which are now receiving their due scholarly attention.⁹ Unlike many of his contemporaries, Jefferies did not believe that Darwin's theory of natural selection could fully explain the complexities of the relationship between mankind and the natural world. In his essay 'The Prodigality of Nature and the Niggardliness of Man' he directly contradicts Darwin's theory of natural economy, stating that 'there is no *enough* in nature. It is one vast prodigality [...] There is no economy: it is all one immense extravagance [...] I would it could be introduced into our human life.'¹⁰ Jefferies perceived that the mind of man was entirely separate, and natural selection alone seemed an insufficient explanation for the existence of life.

In 1883 Jefferies wrote a spiritual autobiography about the relationship between thought and the natural world; an account of 'the successive stages of emotion and thought through which [he] passed [...] to enter upon a larger series of ideas than those which have occupied the brain of man so many centuries.'¹¹ In the book, Jefferies recognised the evolution of his own thought—beginning at age 17—but sought to transcend what Darwin termed the 'slow succession of stages', and to break through into new spheres of thought, using short staccato sentences and soulful emotive language. However, Jefferies's desire that 'thought must yet grow larger' was ultimately held back by the lack of a suitable form to express it.

In *The Story of My Heart* Jefferies explores in detail the connections between mind and environment, and seeks to adopt some of the physical qualities of nature in order to achieve a stronger physique and fuller experience of life. His observations of the individual life progressed from Haeckel's idea of the 'homestead' to the larger idea of man at home on the earth. He describes ascending Liddington Hill, to a prehistoric fort, where he lay beneath the sun, 'utterly alone with the sun and the earth'—as if he could 'hear the great earth speaking' to him.¹² The activity of walking in a natural environment clears the mind of 'the heaviness accumulated at home.' Once away from the 'familiar everyday scene' the mind is free to imagine how material qualities of the

⁸ Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, ed. Gillian Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 32-5, p. 389, p. 252 respectively.

⁹ See for example, Jefferies' 1884 novel *The Dewy Morn*, republished for the first time since in 2009, which Q. D. Leavis recognised as one of the earliest modern novels. (Q. D. Leavis, 'Lives and Works of Richard Jefferies', *Scrutiny*, VI (March 1938), p. 445 (In Richard Jefferies, *The Dewy Morn*, (Oxford: Petton Books, 2009), p. xxvi).

¹⁰ Richard Jefferies, 'The Prodigality of Nature and the Niggardliness of Man', in *The Old House at Coate: And Other Hitherto Unpublished Essays*, ed. Samuel J. Looker (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1948), p. 68.

¹¹ Richard Jefferies, *The Story of My Heart: My Autobiography*. (Portland, ME: Thomas B. Mosher, 1905), p. xi.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

landscape might imbue the body with greater strength. Within the ancient setting, Jefferies imagines back to 'the forest-days' when the warrior interred there in a tumulus once 'hurled the spear' and 'shot with the bow', sensing the warrior's existence 'the same' as his own. In 'Darwin and the Uses of Extinction', Gillian Beer quotes the same passage from *The Story of My Heart* to support her suggestion that the concept of extinction was, for the Victorians, coupled with the idea of an absolute mortality, and that in contemporary secular society people have 'very contracted life spans compared with Victorian believers':

Far fewer could now share Jefferies's assurance of the naturalness of the immortal soul, though he well pinpoints the fundamental resistance of the living being to imagining extinction. The loss of belief in a personal eternity shifts the time-scale of human fears and brings everything within the single life span.¹³

Beer speaks of the 'terror of extinction' facing contemporary societies; a fear only just being realised in the late nineteenth century. What she terms the 'bring[ing] within the single life span' of existential fears was keenly felt by Jefferies who in the autobiography acknowledges *fin-de-siècle* disillusionment, while at the same time struggles to maintain his hope in something existing beyond the material world. Within this narrative of imaginative retrospect Jefferies visualises what contemporary expert in ecology, Eric Zencey, terms a prehistoric 'state of ecological grace',¹⁴ which contrasts with the ecological uncertainty of industrialised Victorian England. Jefferies's ecological imagination conceives of a vision of evolution wherein hunters and gatherers once lived in accordance with nature, in what Zencey identifies as a tribal and pre-literate, yet 'rich and participatory culture', whose population and means of subsistence did not threaten the planet's capacity to support them.¹⁵

When D. H. Lawrence read *The Story of My Heart*, he wrote in a letter to Edward Garnett that '[he didn't] like' the book due to its openness and betrayal of the author's 'deeply personal' thoughts and feelings.¹⁶ It was perhaps the spiritual and emotional indulgence of the book that Lawrence also found problematic, coupled with the idea that Jefferies was unable to clearly express what he meant by a 'fourth idea' or a new territory of the mind. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1911) has similar strains of emotional intensity and ambition to *The Story of My Heart*, yet presents them in a more accessible form. Kate Flint notes that the historical breadth of *The*

¹³ Gillian Beer, 'Darwin and the Uses of Extinction', *Victorian Studies*, 51 (2009), 321-331 (p. 326).

¹⁴ Eric Zencey, 'Apocalypse and Ecology', *The North American Review*, Vol. 273, No 2 (Jun., 1988), 54.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ D. H. Lawrence in a letter to Edward Garnett, 21st of Jan, 1912, in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence* (London: William Heinemann, 1932), p. 21.

Rainbow, covering a period of sixty five years from 1840 to 1905, chronicles the emergence of the modern, whereby 'the novel, social and personal identities are shown to be irrevocably entangled with the environment and opportunities offered by one's time.'¹⁷ Flint also notes that Lawrence 'counterpoints his sharp sense of local history, and the forces which shape each individual, with a search for values which are more transcendent of particular time and space,'¹⁸ highlighting his ambition to identify the complexities that shape an individual's relation to his or her immediate environment. In the book, the personal and domestic implications of an increasingly industrialised England are used to negotiate moral consciousness—an increasingly significant component of early twentieth-century ecology that constituted making the right choices about how mankind behaved towards the environment.

For Lawrence's heroine Ursula Brangwen, the 'struggle for existence' is an emotional one. Insight into a more complicated understanding of the position of herself in the world occurs when she is a young woman, engaged to the Polish Anton Skrebensky. They kiss with 'subtle, instinctive economy [...] knowing subconsciously that the last [is] coming.' Beneath an oak tree at night Ursula experiences a new dimension, away from 'the undercurrent of darkness' and her parents' lack of understanding:

They had come down the lane towards Beldover, down to the valley. They were at the end of their kisses, and there was the silence between them. They stood as at the edge of a cliff, with a great darkness beneath.¹⁹

'At home'—in the context of Haeckel's definition of ecology—the observations of Ursula's relationship with Skrebensky by her family are inaccurate. Ursula's desire to experience more than the 'social imposition' of the time allowed goes unnoticed; they believe her to be 'like any other girl who is more or less courted by a man'. It is only outside the domestic environment, within the protective 'circle' of the oak tree, where the couple, referred to as 'two creatures', experience temporary suspension of moral and social expectations. Lawrence explores the possibilities of life on 'the edge' of the industrialised world where the noise and sight of the mine—the lights and the 'clink-clink-clink'—which by day are intrusive, are 'below', 'far-off'; and 'tiny'. Initiated into a new micro environment, contained by the presence of the ancient oak, Ursula discovers a new imaginative territory; an unmapped 'original' state. Ursula's fearless exploration into 'the dark fields of immortality' is a bolder delivery of Jefferies's intimation in *The Story of My Heart* of a new thought-world, imagined through what he calls the 'star hollow' - where the isolated individual, seeking to transcend the known, stands on the threshold of new imaginative terrain. Jefferies imagines there

¹⁷ D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow*, ed. Kate Flint (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. vii.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. vii.

¹⁹ *The Rainbow*, pp. 448-9.

being nothing between him and space: 'this is the verge of a gulf, and a tangent from my feet goes straight unchecked into the unknown.' He describes being on 'the edge of the abyss as much as if the earth were cut away in a sheer fall of eight thousand miles to the sky beneath, thence a hollow to the stars.'²⁰ In comparison, Lawrence was more content with temporary insight—Ursula is prepared to return to the ordinary world—whereas Jefferies sought desperately to sustain his perception of something beyond it: 'the vast hollow yonder makes me feel that the mystery is here. I, who am here on the verge, standing on the margin of the sky, am in the mystery itself.'

In *The Dewy Morn*, set during the height of agricultural change in the 1870s, Jefferies experiments with the idea of the unconventional heroine, Felise, being immune to moral judgement, and suggests that her nymph-like qualities and imaginative engagement with the natural world can transcend the implications of improper conduct. It is beneath a 'solitary beech' where the two lovers first meet, and into the beech bark that Felise carves Martial Barnard's initials. When the couple become engaged, a scene beneath a chestnut tree suggests balance between qualities of the natural environment and the characters' thoughts and feelings:

So overcome was he with the violence of his emotion that instead of supporting her, she supported him. Her physical exhaustion disappeared quickly; his moral excitement could not subside. She held his head upon her breast; she soothed him; she whispered gently; her strong arms were about him.

Once again they knew no Time. The shadow of the chestnut-tree swung slowly round; the doves came to the wood from the stubble; a blue kingfisher past, going to the brook; the gleaners rested in the field.²¹

Here the calmness of a summer's day is the antithesis to the 'indomitable' oak in the darkness of Lawrence's narrative. This does not however detract from the affinities between the two novels. In both accounts, the couples need the natural world to transcend the circumstances of their ordinary life, and in both accounts time subsides while love affords new emotional territory. Jefferies perceived the interplay between the psyche and the calm activity of the summer landscape to facilitate a progressive emotional freedom. Lawrence took this further because Modernity left him with no choice—'they could not turn back to the world—they could not.'

For Lawrence, industrialisation—although threatening to encroach on the territory of the mind – does not necessarily compromise man's relationship with the environment. In *The Dewy Morn*, Jefferies suggests that the mechanisation of

²⁰ *The Story of My Heart*, p. 83.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 279.

agriculture need not threaten the character of the landscape, and perceives humane qualities in mechanic inventions:

From afar came the hum of a threshing-machine, winnowing out the fresh corn from the ear. A hum that sank to a mournful note and rose again—a curve of sound. There is something inarticulately human in the cry of the threshing-machine. Wheat and bread—labour and life—the past of the sowing, the future of the uncertain autumn, hazy and deepening into the gloom of winter. In the glow, and light, and heat of to-day, forget not that the leaves shall fall and the stubble be beaten by the rains and whitened by the snow; yet hope on, because the sunlight and the flowers shall assuredly succeed again. Inarticulately expressing the meaning of the years and the rise and fall of time, the low hum stretches itself across the wide fields of grain.²²

For Jefferies, mechanisation did not necessarily mean loss of identity or tradition. Rather, for agriculture to progress it was necessary to embrace designs which eased the load of human labour and increased the yield of crops. The divide between the natural and the mechanical was perhaps not so great—the design of the machine was, after all, a product of the human mind—and thus the noise of the machine 'stretches itself' across the fields as might a rumble of thunder or a gust of wind. However, the mechanical drone, akin to 'the rise and fall of time', carries an intrinsic warning that although the seasonal rhythms of nature will remain, industrial progress has the potential to irrevocably alter the relationship between humans and the landscape. The sound is 'inarticulate'—a 'mournful [...] human [...] cry'—suggesting it will be the human race that is most at risk from ecological imbalance while the 'flowers will assuredly succeed again.' Jefferies explored this idea further in his 1885 novel, *After London*, which chronicles life after ecological disaster in Britain. The earth around London becomes 'unctuous and slimy, like a thick oil', producing toxic emanations which are of no use to man. Jefferies likens the loss of communication between people, at the very heart of society, to a machine that can no longer function:

The cunning artificers of the cities all departed [...] Communication between one place and another was absolutely cut off, and if one perchance did recollect something that might have been of use, he could not confer with another who knew the other part, and thus between them reconstruct the machine.²³

²² Ibid., pp. 240-41.

²³ Richard Jefferies, *After London*, (Fairford, Gloucestershire: Echo Library, 2007), p. 15.

The Victorian trust in the industrial machine, whereby the component parts work together to contribute to the movement of the whole, no longer holds. The human race is 'disjointed', and the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment has been lost. *After London* foresees that the machine of human society needs to be rethought and repositioned in accordance with the ideals of a new modern era. The hero Felix, based on Jefferies, seeks to create a new existence for himself in a world that has yet to recover from the years of unchecked environmental violation. With his wife Aurora, who helps found a new religion from 'scraps' of manuscript which survive the social and ecological collapse, the couple find their own balance within an unbalanced world.

Like Jefferies, D. H. Lawrence did not accept that industrial activity was necessarily going to result in ongoing ecological problems and had faith in the human mind to regain the state of balance, however hard it might be. The visionary conclusion of *The Rainbow* uses the metaphor of spring to denote Ursula's reawakening after the miscarriage of her child and the ending of her relationship with Skrebensky. Her emotional landscape has been wiped out; from her bedroom window she searches for signs of hope in the men and women who walk past. Lawrence writes of 'a dry, brittle, terrible corruption spreading over the face of the land' and upon the appearance of a rainbow Ursula sees the 'old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away' in the budding of a 'new germination'. Lawrence addresses the late-Victorian anxiety that the future was to be shaped by the dynamic activity of man alone, without omnipotent guidance, echoing an unpublished note in Jefferies's manuscripts, that 'if God does nothing then he is dead'.²⁴ Lawrence asserts the liberatory promise of modernism, the hope of new Utopian forms, not just in literature but in the built environment too:

And the rainbow stood on the earth. She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new, clean, naked bodies would issue to a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the overarching heaven.²⁵

The rainbow, like the oak tree, is an 'indomitable' and enduring symbol of the natural rhythms which mankind cannot control. Balance between humans and the

²⁴ London, British Library, MS Richard Jefferies 58816, vol. XIV.

²⁵ *The Rainbow*, pp. 493-4.

environment may yet have the potential to be restored, if only through experiencing the collapse of all that has gone before and the emergence as a collective 'new growth' ignorant of, and yet receptive to, the future.

In 1886, in one of Richard Jefferies's last essays, 'Hours of Spring', written when he was dying from tuberculosis, the concept of rebirth is tangibly embraced, although tinged with regret at his own vulnerability. Writing in the knowledge of his imminent death, Jefferies laments the ease with which spring continues, without him to record its phases. He writes: 'I thought myself so much to the earliest leaf and the first meadow orchis [...] For they were so much to me, I had come to feel that I was as much in return to them,' and refers to '*the old, old error: I love the earth, therefore the earth loves me.*' Outside his window, dark clouds which he calls 'messengers'—go drifting by:

After a time there will be a rainbow. Through the bars of my prison I can see the catkins thick and sallow-grey on the willows across the field, visible even at that distance; so great the change in a few days, the hand of spring grows firm and takes a strong grasp of the hedges. My prison bars are but a sixteenth of an inch thick; I could snap them with a fillip—only the windowpane to me as impenetrable as the twenty-foot Tower of London. A cart has just gone past bearing a strange load among the carts of spring; they are talking of poling the hops. In it there sat an old man, with the fixed stare, the animal-like eye, of extreme old age; he is over ninety. About him there were some few chairs and articles of furniture, and he was propped against a bed. He was being moved – literally carted—to another house, not home, and he said he could not go without his bed; he had slept on it for seventy-three years. Last Sunday his son—himself old—was carted to the churchyard, as is the country custom, in an open van; today the father, still living, goes to what will be to him a strange land. His home is broken up—he will potter no more with maize for the chicken; the gorse hedges will become solid walls of golden bloom, but there will never again be a spring for him. It is very hard, is it not, at ninety? It is not the tyranny of any one that has done it; it is the tyranny of circumstance, the lot of man. [...] A stranger, I see, is already digging the old man's garden.²⁶

Unlike Ursula's observations from her sickroom, the appearance of the rainbow is not a Biblical symbol, but represents a more ambiguous lifecycle in which one generation does not necessarily succeed the next; where loss, or death itself, like the 'dark

²⁶ Richard Jefferies, 'Hours of Spring', *Field and Hedgerow* (London: Longmans Green and Co., 1892), pp. 1-18 (pp. 5-17).

patches' of the clouds which drift past can spontaneously obscure the hope of the living. The clouds—as 'spots of ink' and 'messengers'—herald a warning of impending change that throws a blanket of inertia upon the inquisitive mind: what Thomas Hardy termed in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) 'the ache of Modernism'. Jefferies, writing in the tradition of late-Victorian realism, was just learning how to leave behind the significance of the individual life—but was unable to fully embrace the letting go of the self that characterised Lawrence's thought-experiments. Jefferies the invalid watches the disassembling of the elder man's domestic security—his home is 'broken up'—while the natural growth around continues indifferently, and the gorse will bloom in a 'solid wall'. The growth of spring, likened to a 'hand' that 'takes a strong grasp of the hedges', is implicitly compared to the life of man, and man is weaker. As in the concluding scene of *The Rainbow*, the perspective from a window affords momentary transcendence from the restrictions imposed upon the psyche by the threat of a progressive world ('so great the change in a few days'). The human instinct to stake claim to a particular piece of land and stay there for the duration of a life is the antithesis to the spontaneous replenishment of spring. The aged agricultural worker, with his 'animal-like eye', is a unique 'species' carried along on a cart, away from his only home, like an agricultural commodity. He survives—despite the competition of younger men who succeed him—but cannot defend his patch of ground so that 'a stranger [...] is already digging [his] garden.' The old man is representative of the displacement that characterised the Victorian era: he is borne along on a current of change beyond his control, towards a 'strange land'; one that D. H. Lawrence was not afraid to inhabit.

Lawrence sought to develop these seeds of modern thought and expand consciousness, thus continuing Jefferies's effort to break the mould set by the Victorians; what he called in his *Study of Thomas Hardy* 'heaving into uncreated space ... actually living, becoming himself.'²⁷ The apocalyptic end to *Women in Love*, the sequel to *The Rainbow*, seeks to respond to the late-Victorian anxiety that the human race might face extinction by its inability to restore the environment. But more importantly, the book as a whole develops the idea of adaptation to survive. Extinction through death does not necessarily mean annihilation, and therefore the desire is not as desperate as Jefferies's in *The Story of My Heart*. When Ursula and Birkin face the loss of their close friend Gerald after a skiing accident in the Alps, Lawrence strips away the abundance of nature to explore the implications of an irretrievable past in a colder, more hostile environment. When Birkin ascends the snowy slopes, in 'greyness and stillness', to find the spot where Gerald died, he imagines 'the timeless creative mystery' whereby new species soon come to replace the old. Lawrence was not afraid of qualifying what the late-Victorians had begun to acknowledge. The spiritual progress that Jefferies spoke of in *The Story of My Heart*,

²⁷ D. H. Lawrence, *Study of Thomas Hardy and other essays* ed. by Bruce Steele (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 41.

what he termed the 'slow continual rise', Lawrence sought to accelerate through the catalyst of modernism. Modern imaginative thought required a repositioning of the self - the transplanting of the Victorian transcendent ideal outside the arena of domestic realism: a process that had already begun in the late nineteenth century. Lawrence's frozen ending to *Women in Love*, one of his most epic novels, allows for the suspension of time. Even amidst the frozen wastes, Lawrence reassures that the end of a race does not mean the end of life itself. The irreconcilable difference between the mind of man that tires, ages, and eventually dies, and the 'inexhaustible' replenishment of the natural environment—what Jefferies referred to as 'divine chaos'—Lawrence explains as 'the game' that '[is] never up'. Within this conception of natural time that manifests itself in cycles and shifts, ecological imbalance itself might be only a phase, far briefer than that of the human species. Like the passing blots of cloud in Jefferies's 'Hours of Spring' Lawrence freely imagines species to come and go; a late-Victorian concept couched in an early modern form yet retaining an essential affinity.

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ON LINES AND THEIR CROSSING: REFLECTIONS ON THE CONFERENCE CLOSING SESSION

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In her short tale 'The Story of an Hour', first published in *Vogue* in 1894, the American writer Kate Chopin allows her heroine to cross a line only to be subsequently encircled and strangled by it. The story concerns Mrs Louise Mallard, a woman 'afflicted with a heart trouble',¹ over whom 'great care was taken' (p. 137) when it came to telling her of her husband's death. Mr Mallard, she is told, by 'her sister Josephine ... in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing' (p.137), has been killed in a railroad disaster. His widow weeps with 'wild abandonment' before leaving to spend time alone in her room. It is while reflecting on the news that she begins to comprehend a new sense of separation and a 'monstrous joy' as she utters 'over and over under her breath: "free, free, free!"' (p.138). The phrase becomes her mantra, "'Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering.' (p.139) Her sense of emotional elation in the discovery of a renewed identity, a coming into consciousness that is focussed on her individuality rather than her conception of selfhood as one smaller player in a marriage of two, revitalises Mrs Mallard's awareness of life as she crosses from one state of classification (wife) to another (widow). Recovering her composure at her sister's insistence, even though she 'was drinking in a very elixir of life', Louise Mallard descends the staircase only to hear the latchkey in the lock as her husband, far from dead, arrives home to the 'piercing cry' of his sister-in-law and the instantaneous death of his wife before him. The doctors' verdict is that she 'died of heart disease – of joy that kills' (p.139).

Chopin's text is three short pages long yet it encapsulates a strange and ethereal sense of the period that was the focus of the 'Crossing the Line: Affinities Before and After 1900' postgraduate conference held at the University of Liverpool in January 2010. A story about a widow who wasn't in 1894 - as opposed to Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* in 1895 - may seem like an odd place to start a discussion on lines and their crossing. Yet Chopin's fragment of a tale, in form and content, context and fashioning, signals precisely those issues of temporality, the episodic, the notion of freedom, individualism, consciousness and interiority, social convention vs. personal liberty, that lie at the core of our perception of the period's changing, vibrant, conflicted and fluctuation sense of values, beliefs, and aesthetic judgements.

This short piece represents the story of a (half) hour feedback and roundtable

¹ Kate Chopin, 'The Story of an Hour' in *Women Who Did: Stories by Men and Women, 1890-1914* ed. Angelique Richardson (London: Penguin, 2002), pp.137-139, p.137. Further page references appear in the text.

session between Professor Regenia Gagnier, the conference keynote, and myself at the end of the event. Roundtables are necessarily responsive, off-the-cuff comments on things heard and considered during the course of the two days. The attempt to capture such reflections is an imprecise mode of writing and there is neither the space nor the memory to represent the range of that discussion or the audience's participation. Instead these pages hopefully offer a flavour of how some of the interconnections and themes of the papers came across to me during the conference, and how these strands might be brought together not to unify our sense of the period but rather to accentuate the very openness of the theme itself to versatility and variety.

The period of literature and culture known as the *fin de siècle* is acknowledged as one of borders, limits, and demarcations. It is a period of conscious transgression over those lines between which classification and uncertainty mix, mingle and metamorphose. The proposition laid down by the 'Crossing the Line' conference was, even if only subconsciously, partly that Virginia Woolf's famous dictum in 1924 that human nature changed on or about December 1910² could itself be backdated to the start of that decade; that a line which was more than temporal, or arbitrarily generated by the chronology of centuries, monarchical reign or any other calendrical device, was crossed. But in what sense is a crossing also a passing over, a dying gesture towards immortality even as it reinforces its own termination and regeneration?

Writing in their well known anthology of 1880s and 1890s source materials, Roger Luckhurst and the late Sally Ledger stated in 2000 that

[t]he Victorian *fin de siècle* was an epoch of endings and beginnings. The collision between the old and the new that characterised the turn of the century marks it as an excitingly volatile and transitional period; a time when British cultural politics were caught between two ages, the Victorian and the Modern; a time fraught with anxiety and with an exhilarating sense of possibility.³

The version of literary and cultural narrative here which perceives the 1890s as both fixed between 'two ages' bigger than and more constructed than itself is a compelling one. But as Ledger and Luckhurst and others have since gone on to explore, it is the 'volatil[ity]' of the transition or crossing that demonstrates so much to us about the draw back to the 1890s for contemporary critics. The range of the papers presented at the conference illuminated the ways in which the lines we might perceive in play within the period can be viewed as geographic, temporal, generic, sexualised, gendered, and hybrid. Several papers focused on the relationship between Modernist

² See Virginia Woolf, *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown* (London: Hogarth Press, 1924).

³ Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst eds. *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History, c.1880-1900*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.xiii.

and Victorian texts, often filtered through the classificatory or definitional moments enacted by the *fin de siècle* as a period marking the line – or gap – between these literary movements. Sometimes these relationships are consciously invoked in the forms of writing back or legacy and afterlife that are now part of our own contemporary engagement with the nineteenth century in all its varieties. Such negotiation of a literary and cultural inheritance that is more often unwanted in its inescapability than we might at first suppose centres on that dividing generational line between artistic movements and moments.

Yet instances of transitional influence are often useful in creating a deeper sense of the permeability of lines, their openness to transgression and crossing. The Victorian *fin de siècle* in all its duality as both Victorian and *end-of-Victorian*, modern but *not-yet-Modernist*, adds a sharpness to our sense of cultural connection and division. Lines are chains, linkages, and means of association at the same time as they have the possibility of marking out difference and conflict. Thus it was most refreshing to see the ways in which papers, often in sophisticated ways, enriched our sense of the cross-temporality and epistemological (dis)continuities of periodisation and its (re)fashioning. Kate Hext's (University of Exeter) paper on Walter Pater's 'philosophical aestheticism' provided just such an engagement and worked particularly well with Sarah Townley's (University of Nottingham) paper in the same panel through its invocation of both the theoretical and concrete perception of 'the reader as art' in the work of Virginia Woolf and Walter Pater.

Pater and Woolf had a clear presence over the proceedings throughout, as is appropriate for figures so central to their respective aesthetic modes and periods. They also provided a useful line of canonical connectivity across the broadest understanding of the chronological crossing envisioned by the conference theme, from the 1870s to the 1930s, three decades either side of that 'before and after 1900' subtitle. What was perhaps more surprising at first was the figuration of Charles Dickens (Catherine Malcolmson, University of Leicester), Charlotte Brontë (Andrew Harding, University of Chester) and Elizabeth Gaskell (Emma Karin Brandin, Mid Sweden University) alongside Joseph Conrad (Kayla Walker Edin, Southern Methodist University), E. M. Forster (Brandin), and W. H. Auden (Katarzyna Winiarski, University of Warsaw). Seemingly eclectic in nature these figures all came to represent individual imaginative (re)enactments of these very margins and lines that failed to hold on or around 1900. It was thus fitting to hear deeply engaged accounts of the formation of literary and cultural legacies earlier in the period and to extend the lifetime of influence they generated. Indeed, there seemed to be something of the mortmain or dead hand about elements of the programme that justified that sense in which 'affinities' (another keyword from the conference subtitle) are both enforced upon us and provide a self-electing connection with the past and the future. That bigger question of how conscious and precise our invocation of legacy might be proved a fruitful note in several papers.

In her more recent collection of 1890s materials, Talia Schaffer develops Ledger and Luckhurst's sense of periodic confliction mentioned earlier by focusing on the 'namelessness' that hinders any strict definition of the line's borders or margins:

Everyone who lived through it agreed that the period between the 1870s and 1910s was complex, vital, tumultuous, confusing, and exciting... Yet the period from the 1870s to the 1910s also has a unique problem: It has no widely accepted name. What can we call this era? "The turn of the century"? "The 1890s"? "Late-Victorianism"? "Early modernism"? "The *fin de siècle*" (French for end of the century)? Our nameless era swings up onto the back of the Victorian carriage or clammers onto the running boards of the modernist automobile, tolerated as an extra passenger without being admitted to the full comforts of the vehicle. Its namelessness is not just an inconvenience; it signals something fundamental about the period.⁴

To raise this period into profile by demarcating its beginnings and endings, or to seek to classify its divisive or delectable desires, would be to veer towards safety. The papers at the conference demonstrated how the range of the period and its imprecision act as one of its greatest strengths in relation to the interpretative possibilities for reading into the response to the past, the fixation on the present and the anticipatory mode for what would follow. Such temporal issues, refractions and dilutions, formed the backdrop to many of the conference presentations as cross-currents, cross-influences and cross-references between different writers, artists, and thinkers emerged.

All these issues provided an appropriate range for reflection during the final feedback session of the event. Both Regenia Gagnier and I felt that the range of perspectives, as indicated above, had very usefully complicated our sense of the potential for thinking through the connections to be made on the themes of continuity, change and classification around the period. Discussion therefore centred on the possible ways in which the theme could be taken forward as a means of considering the present relevance of *fin de siècle* cultural issues. As highlighted in Gagnier's keynote lecture at the conference's start, issues of individualism, decadence and their global contexts hold an increasing contemporary relevance. Several papers had picked up on this theme in often oblique ways: the consideration of a 'Pater speaking to Pater' (Kate Hext) or the metacritical approach suggested by Sarah Townley in speaking of the 'artist who writes for the scholar' both underlined the inwardness of the internal lines of engagement. Here, as in Gagnier's argument, questions of the

⁴ Talia Schaffer ed. *Literature and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Pearson Longman, 2006), p.xx.

formalism of genre and style came to the fore and it was noticeable how many papers combined a neat sense of theoretical inflection with a deep appreciation of attentive literary reading and a nuanced awareness of the slipperiness of linguistic constructions of meaning and identity. In this sense, the 'line' adopted both a metaphorical and literal presence: be it in the 'poems in prose' of Oscar Wilde (Jeremiah Mercurio, University of St Andrews – one of the articles in this special issue), the figure of the observing but non-participatory flaneur (Chiung-Ying Huang, University of Bristol), the language of mythology and aesthetic criticism in Ruskin (Cristina Pascu-Tulbure, University of Liverpool) or the figurative line in visual art (Nicola Capon, University of Reading).

In locating their research, many speakers also focussed on geographic or regional specificity. The panel on 'The Modern Metropolis' with papers by Neil Coombs (Liverpool John Moores University), Laura Torrado Marinas (University of Vigo) and Patrick Wright (Manchester Metropolitan University) combined Victorian, Modernist and Surrealist imaginings of the cityscape in a manner that underlined the connections between physical environment and personal character, principally the routes through which individuals crossing into different spaces inevitably encounter diverse notions of their affinity with others and with the architectural landscape of perception. Here borders are frequently physical lines but also the perceptual or imaginary demarcations in which individuals are trapped, find voice or travel through as spectators such as in the figure of the *flâneur*. The liminality of movement testifies to what Gagnier indicated in her plenary as the global hobo, using the striking image of John Currin's *The Hobo* (1999), the traveller who follows the lines and pathways of an experience unburdened by the constraints of place, space and time yet inextricably initiated within those conceptualisations as they construct identity and individualism.

In this respect, the papers and the roundtable discussion inspired interesting reflections on issues of fixity, proximity, distance and perspective. Opening up the theoretical positioning within so much critical material on the *fin de siècle* period, the discussion charted a different move in the slippage between subjective and collective willed experience. The will here serves that dual function as both determined and bequeathed. The afterlife or aftermath narrative projected by several of the papers throughout the two days provided ample sustenance for the idea that temporal change, the distance engendered by the passing of time, was rather more circulatory in nature than might appear to be the case. Thus the influence of and the influencing by the voices of the Victorians into the 1890s and 1900s and its doubling up through those new narratives into a refracted thread of the nineteenth century in the early decades of the twentieth century, is not solely about continuity. Such affinities might instead be traced to a greater awareness of the bonds of historical kinship, familial and familiar divides, and a deeper perspective on the nature of an individualism asserting itself within the group, the sect or the social collective. As Catherine

Malcolmson put it in her paper in relation to the Dickensian celebrations in the early years of the twentieth century, there is an importance which resides in the cultural negotiations of this period with the question of how to value the Victorian past. These questions are perhaps even more pertinent at the present time given that the conference took place in the year following the bicentenaries of Charles Darwin, William Ewart Gladstone, Alfred Lord Tennyson and the sesquicentennials of *On the Origin of Species* and John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*; in 2010 even Woolf's comment about human nature changing a century before received a memorial conference in its own right. The 2012 Dickens Bicentenary celebrations will mark a further temporal line of distance but also a crossing back into or revision involving our perception of the relevance or significance of such anniversaries. The early decades of the twenty-first century are likely to be no less marked by their renegotiation of what the Victorian period (and its end) represents to us now than the first decades of the twentieth century.

All these issues were in play in the plenary roundtable's discussion of the continual need to rearticulate and reformulate our own boundaries or lines (crossed or otherwise) with the affinities of this earlier period of transition, change and development. Beneath such concerns lies, one suspects, a nervous relationship with progress and evolution as the limitations of our sense of the Victorian period itself. As the conference as a whole demonstrated, these questions are not new and the responses of the 'before and after' then do not provide us with strict models for such negotiations now. Nor should they. Holbrook Jackson commented in his now almost a century old 1913 'Introduction' to *The Eighteen Nineties* that

Anybody who studies the moods and thoughts of the Eighteen Nineties cannot fail to observe their central characteristic in a widespread concern for the correct – that is, the most effective, the most powerful, the most righteous – mode of living. For myself, however, the awakening of the Nineties does not appear to be the realisation of a purpose, but the realisation of a possibility. Life aroused curiosity. People became enthusiastic about the way it should be used. And in proof of sincerity there were opinionated battles – most of them inconclusive. But they were not wasteful on that account, for the very circumstance of idea pitting itself against idea, vision against vision, mood against mood, and, indeed, whim against whim, cleared the way for more definite action when the time ripened.⁵

Jackson published his book at the time when those 'opinionated battles' were about to transmogrify into bloodier conflicts, not necessarily the 'more definite action' he had

⁵ Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939 [first published 1913]), p.12.

in mind here. However, it is in the dictum 'Life aroused curiosity' that we find connection with the conference theme itself. It is the period's own contradictions, slippages and anxieties as much as any conscious affinities that indicate the myriad ways in which we can continue to view, interrogate and negotiate those curious lines of enquiry, crossed or otherwise.



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