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,
> Provençe 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.

Provençe knew.

[…]

There *is* the subtler music, the clear light
Where time burns back about th' eternal embers.
We are not shut from all the thousand heavens:
Lo, there are many gods whom we have seen,
Folk of unearthly fashion, places splendid,
Bulwarks of beryl and of chrysoprase.[9]

Through connections with Provençe and Catullus Pound's moment is linked explicitly to the experience and transmission of the work of art, just as Pater counsels in the dénouement of *Studies in the Renaissance,* while his description of the sensations of the aesthetic moment itself further allies the poem with Pater's method. In the sunshine at Sirmione Pound depicts a paradise in which 'there are many gods' and in which, in what seems almost a caricature of aestheticism, paradise's bejewelled decoration is described more concretely than the particular religious model this poem reproduces (it is hard to imagine a less 'modernist' line of poetry than 'Bulwarks of beryl and of chrysoprase', and it should be noted that 'chrysoprase' would reappear in Canto 17, along with various other types of rare stone, at moments of potential transcendence throughout the early sections of *The Cantos*). In an explicit refusal of social and political concerns, Pound insists this youthful work is not involved with 'a game of barter, lands and houses'; thus the young Pound conforms to the aesthetic stereotype and rejects the political from his aesthetic vision, a move that, as I shall demonstrate, underestimates Pater.

This plainly Paterian tone would persist through Pound's most successful early work. 'The Return', published in *Ripostes* (1912), is perhaps the best known of these Paterian pieces—it dramatises an aesthetic connection with lost gods and cultures that is as diaphanous as Pater's aesthetic moment, and more successfully modernist in presentation and intent than 'The Flame':

See, they return; ah, see the tentative
Movements, and the slow feet,
The trouble in the pace and the uncertain
Wavering!

See, they return, one, and by one,
With fear, as half-awakened;
As if the snow should hesitate

[9] *Poems & Translations*, pp. 168-69.

And murmur in the wind,
and half turn back;
These were the "Wing'd-with-Awe,"
Inviolable.

Gods of the wingèd shoe!
With them the silver hounds,
sniffing the trace of air![10]

'The Return' marks a watershed in Pound's early verse. Where 'The Flame' had resorted to the pentameter, 'The Return' breaks into sonorous free verse, with Pound masterfully varying his rhythms to represent the semi-visible, shifting gods as they attempt their return. Yet Pater is still retained, and centrally. In fact, this poem is if anything more truly Paterian than the earlier work—that Paterian process of describing, or perhaps miming, the aesthetic moment is more surely enacted in this so mysteriously diaphanous piece. It is not the air that they sniff but the 'trace of air'; the returning gods are made as incorporeal and as untouchable as Pater's momentary flame.

After 'The Return' Pound would modernise himself further, and with some violence, and he would never write in such a straightforwardly Paterian manner again. The Victorian would, however, remain important for Pound in a submerged form, significant principally for his pinning of the timelessly aesthetic to the transitory moment. As both Carr and Peter Nicholls note[11] the aesthetic moment lived on into Imagism as an unacknowledged but integral part of Pound's 'doctrine of the image', described by Pound as 'that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time'[12] an instant that, like Pater's aesthetic moment, implies a transcendent, static temporality. This is how Pound describes it in 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste':

> It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.[13]

The truncated lyric that would become the archetypal Imagist form would grow directly out of this idea; its compression imitating that moment of realisation. As Carr

[10] *Poems & Translations*, p. 244.
[11] See Peter Nicholls, *Ezra Pound: Politics, Economics and Writing* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 7-10 and *The Verse Revolutionaries*, p. 20.
[12] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays,* ed. T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 4.
[13] *Literary Essays,* p. 4.

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) Pounds 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 clasping-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 regazze, / 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-supplicant; 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.

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[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 *un*collected 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. he 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, ascesis, 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 poetries 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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