WALTER PATER
1839–1894

The unassuming and reserved critic and theorist Walter Pater was somewhat surprised at the influence of his writings; without ever quite intending to, he became regarded as the father of the aesthetic movement in late-Victorian British art and literature. In the famous conclusion to his collection of essays, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873; later retitled *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*), Pater memorably articulated the doctrine of "art for art's sake":

> To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life ... Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you the fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.

Without specifically advocating hedonism, Pater was nevertheless reacting against the prevailing aesthetic (formulated by such contemporaries as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, and Matthew Arnold) that charged the artist with ethical responsibilities. The response to his essay was in some quarters embarrassingly positive; so influential was it upon some readers that Pater withdrew the conclusion from the book's second printing, lest it "mislead some of those young men into whose hands it might fall." He allowed it to be reprinted in subsequent editions, while making slight alterations to "bring it closer to my original meaning."

The events of Walter Horatio Pater's early life did not give any indication of the effect his work would eventually have upon Victorian aesthetics. Born in London, Pater lost his father, Dr. Richard Glode Pater, at a young age, and moved with his siblings and mother, Maria Hill Pater, to Enfield. At the age of 13, the year before his mother died, Pater entered the King's School in Canterbury and five years later entered Queen's College, Oxford, where, to his disappointment, he graduated in 1862 with only second-class honors. After tutoring for two years (the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins was among his students), Pater became a fellow at Brasenose College and remained a teacher at Oxford for most of his life. Soon after his appointment, he began publishing critical essays, beginning with "Coleridge's Writings," in which he spoke of abandoning his faith in the High Church for the "religion of art." Previously influenced by Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, Pater began to rethink his notions of beauty upon reading about the classical scholar Johann Winckelmann (1717–68), in whose life he saw a model for an ideal critic's dedication to beauty. He set out these thoughts in

his essay "Winckelmann," published in the *Westminster Review* in 1867. This essay represented a key moment not only in the development of Pater's thought but also in his career; "Winckelmann" so impressed the editor of the *Fortnightly Review* that it initiated a decades-long relationship between Pater and the magazine.

In 1873, the essay on Winckelmann and essays on the Italian artists Botticelli, Michelangelo, and Leonardo da Vinci, among other figures, were collected in *The Renaissance*. Pater's preface and conclusion attracted much attention, setting out as they did his Epicurean theories. The preface defines the work of the aesthetic critic:

> The aesthetic critic ... regards all objects with which he has to do, all works of art, and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar or unique kind.... What is important ... is not that the critics should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects. To him all periods, types, schools of taste, are in themselves equal.

For many, Pater's subjective vision of art, literature, and music—and indeed of one's responsibility to enjoy life—appeared self-indulgent and even amoral. The book, however, with its rich and eloquent prose style, established him as an important critic and placed him at the center of a school of aesthetes that included such poets as Oscar Wilde (perhaps his most devoted disciple), Arthur Symons, and Michael Field (the pen name of Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper).

Possibly due to the controversy over *The Renaissance*, Pater was passed over for a proctorship at Oxford, and thereafter, although his lectures were popular, he was never considered for important positions at the university. He did, however, continue to publish articles and reviews, as well as a novel, *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), which brought together his philosophies on art and religion, expanding in fictional form the ideas from the conclusion to *The Renaissance*. In 1887 he published *Imaginary Portraits*, a series of psychological studies of fictional figures, often intellectually or artistically rebellious; in 1889 *Appreciations: With an Essay on Style*; and in 1893 a group of lectures, *Plato and Platonism*. His prose style was so meticulous and highly-wrought that W.B. Yeats reprinted Pater's description of the Mona Lisa in verse form as the opening piece in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* (1936). This style, along with his theories of aesthetics, influenced not only Yeats but many other modernists as well, most notably Virginia Woolf and Ezra Pound.

Pater died suddenly of rheumatic fever, at Oxford, on 30 July 1894, at the age of 54. He is buried at Oxford's Holywell Cemetery.

from *The Renaissance*

Preface

Many attempts have been made by writers on art and poetry to define beauty in the abstract, to express it in the most general terms, to find a universal formula for it. The value of such attempts has most often been in the suggestive and penetrating things said by the way. Such discussions help us very little to enjoy what has been well done in art or poetry, to discriminate between what is more and what is less excellent in them, or to use words like beauty, excellence, art, poetry, with a more precise meaning than they would otherwise have. Beauty, like all other qualities presented to human experience, is relative; and the definition of it becomes unmeaning and useless in proportion to its abstractness. To define beauty, not in the most abstract, but in the most concrete terms possible, to find, not a universal formula for it, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it, is the aim of the true student of æsthetics.

"To see the object as in itself it really is,"[1] has been justly said to be the aim of all true criticism whatever; and in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly.

1 *"To see … really is"* Matthew Arnold's formulation, in ★"The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" (1864).

The objects with which aesthetic criticism deals—music, poetry, artistic and accomplished forms of human life—are indeed receptacles of so many powers or forces: they possess, like the products of nature, so many virtues or qualities. What is this song or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it really produce on me? Does it give me pleasure? and if so, what sort or degree of pleasure? How is my nature modified by its presence, and under its influence? The answers to these questions are the original facts with which the aesthetic critic has to do; and, as in the study of light, of morals, of number, one must realise such primary data for oneself, or not at all. And he who experiences these impressions strongly, and drives directly at the discrimination and analysis of them, has no need to trouble himself with the abstract question what beauty is in itself, or what its exact relation to truth or experience—metaphysical questions, as unprofitable as metaphysical questions elsewhere. He may pass them all by as being, answerable or not, of no interest to him.

The aesthetic critic, then, regards all the objects with which he has to do, all works of art, and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less peculiar and unique kind. This influence he feels, and wishes to explain, analysing it, and reducing it to its elements. To him, the picture, the landscape, the engaging personality in life or in a book, *La Gioconda*, the hills of Carrara, Pico of Mirandola,[1] are valuable for their virtues, as we say, in speaking of a herb, a wine, a gem; for the property each has of affecting one with a special, a unique, impression of pleasure. Our education becomes complete in proportion as our susceptibility to these impressions increases in depth and variety. And the function of the aesthetic critic is to distinguish, analyse, and separate from its adjuncts, the virtue by which a picture, a landscape, a fair personality in life or in a book, produces this special impression of beauty or pleasure, to indicate what the source of that impression is, and under what conditions it is experienced. His end is reached when he has disengaged that virtue, and noted it, as a chemist notes some natural element, for himself and others; and the rule for those who would reach this end is stated with great exactness in the words of a recent critic of Sainte-Beuve:—*De se borner à connaître de près les belles choses, et à s'en nourrir en exquis amateurs, en humanistes accomplis*.[2]

What is important, then, is not that the critic should possess a correct abstract definition of beauty for the intellect, but a certain kind of temperament, the power of being deeply moved by the presence of beautiful objects. He will remember always that beauty exists in many forms. To him all periods, types, schools of taste, are in themselves equal. In all ages there have been some excellent workmen, and some excellent work done. The question he asks is always:—In whom did the stir, the genius, the sentiment of the period find itself? who was the receptacle of its refinement, its elevation, its taste? "The ages are all equal," says William Blake, "but genius is always above its age."[3]

Often it will require great nicety to disengage this virtue from the commoner elements with which it may be found in combination. Few artists, not Goethe or Byron[4] even, work quite cleanly, casting off all *débris*, and leaving us only what the heat of their imagination has wholly fused and transformed. Take, for instance, the writings of Wordsworth.[5] The heat of his genius, entering into the

1 *Pico of Mirandola* Italian Neoplatonist philosopher (1463–94), the subject of Chapter 2 of *The Renaissance*; *Carrara* Picturesque city in Tuscany, near which are located some of Italy's finest marble quarries; *La Gioconda* The painting known in English as the Mona Lisa, discussed by Pater in his chapter on Leonardo da Vinci (see excerpt below).

2 *De se borner … accomplis* To limit ourselves to knowing beautiful things in detail, and to nourish ourselves with them as sensitive connoisseurs and accomplished humanists (French). Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804–69) was an important French literary critic.

3 *"The ages … above its age"* From the English poet and engraver William Blake's (1757–1827) annotations to *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1798).

4 *Goethe or Byron* The German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) and his English contemporary Lord Byron (1788–1824) could be considered archetypes of the inspired, impassioned Romantic writer.

5 *Wordsworth* Already in his lifetime William Wordsworth (1770–1850) was considered the pre-eminent English Romantic poet, but his work was criticized for sometimes lapsing into prosaic commonplaces. The two poems Pater mentions, "Resolution and Independence" and "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" (both 1807), are among Wordsworth's most admired compositions.

substance of his work, has crystallised a part, but only a part, of it; and in that great mass of verse there is much which might well be forgotten. But scattered up and down it, sometimes fusing and transforming entire compositions, like the Stanzas on *Resolution and Independence*, and the Ode on the *Recollections of Childhood*, sometimes, as if at random, depositing a fine crystal here or there, in a matter it does not wholly search through and transform, we trace the action of his unique, incommunicable faculty, that strange, mystical sense of a life in natural things, and of man's life as a part of nature, drawing strength and colour and character from local influences, from the hills and streams, and from natural sights and sounds. Well! that is the *virtue*, the active principle in Wordsworth's poetry; and then the function of the critic of Wordsworth is to trace that active principle, to disengage it, to mark the degree in which it penetrates his verse.

The subjects of the following studies are taken from the history of the *Renaissance*, and touch what I think the chief points in that complex, many-sided movement. I have explained in the first of them what I understand by the word, giving it a much wider scope than was intended by those who originally used it to denote only that revival of classical antiquity in the fifteenth century which was but one of many results of a general excitement and enlightening of the human mind, and of which the great aim and achievements of what, as Christian art, is often falsely opposed to the Renaissance, were another result. This outbreak of the human spirit may be traced far into the middle age[1] itself, with its qualities already clearly pronounced, the care for physical beauty, the worship of the body, the breaking down of those limits which the religious system of the middle age imposed on the heart and the imagination. I have taken as an example of this movement, this earlier Renaissance within the middle age itself, and as an expression of its qualities, two little compositions in early French; not because they constitute the best possible expression of them, but because they help the unity of my series, inasmuch as the Renaissance ends also in France, in French poetry, in a phase of which the writings of Joachim du Bellay[2] are in many ways the most perfect illustration; the Renaissance thus putting forth in France an aftermath, a wonderful later growth, the products of which have to the full that subtle and delicate sweetness which belongs to a refined and comely decadence; just as its earliest phases have the freshness which belongs to all periods of growth in art, the charm of *ascêsis*,[3] of the austere and serious girding of the loins in youth.

But it is in Italy, in the fifteenth century, that the interest of the Renaissance mainly lies, in that solemn fifteenth century which can hardly be studied too much, not merely for its positive results in the things of the intellect and the imagination, its concrete works of art, its special and prominent personalities, with their profound aesthetic charm, but for its general spirit and character, for the ethical qualities of which it is a consummate type.[4]

The various forms of intellectual activity which together make up the culture of an age, move for the most part from different starting-points, and by unconnected roads. As products of the same generation they partake indeed of a common character, and unconsciously illustrate each other; but of the producers themselves, each group is solitary, gaining what advantage or disadvantage there may be in intellectual isolation. Art and poetry, philosophy and the religious life, and that other life of refined pleasure and action in the open places of the world, are each of them confined to its own circle of ideas, and those who prosecute either of them are generally little curious of the thoughts of others. There come, however, from time to time, eras of more favourable conditions, in which the thoughts of men draw nearer together than is their wont, and the many interests of the intellectual world combine in one complete type of general culture.

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1 *the middle age* The term, usually plural in English ("the middle ages"), that traditionally refers to the period in European history and culture between the end of classical antiquity in the fifth century CE and the beginning of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century.

2 *Joachim du Bellay* French poet and critic (c. 1522–60), subject of Chapter 8 of *The Renaissance*. The two French compositions that Pater refers to as the subject of his opening chapter are *Amis et Amile* and *Aucassin et Nicolette*, anonymous tales of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

3 *ascêsis* Defined by Pater in his essay "Style" (1888) as "Self-restraint, a skillful economy of means." The Greek word is the root of the English "ascetic."

4 *type* Model, exemplar.

The fifteenth century in Italy is one of these happier eras; and what is sometimes said of the age of Pericles is true of that of Lorenzo:[1]—it is an age productive in personalities, many-sided, centralised, complete. Here, artists and philosophers and those whom the action of the world has elevated and made keen, do not live in isolation, but breathe a common air, and catch light and heat from each other's thoughts. There is a spirit of general elevation and enlightenment in which all alike communicate. It is the unity of this spirit which gives unity to all the various products of the Renaissance; and it is to this intimate alliance with mind, this participation in the best thoughts which that age produced, that the art of Italy in the fifteenth century owes much of its grave dignity and influence.

I have added an essay on Winckelmann,[2] as not incongruous with the studies which precede it, because Winckelmann, coming in the eighteenth century, really belongs in spirit to an earlier age. By his enthusiasm for the things of the intellect and the imagination for their own sake, by his Hellenism, his life-long struggle to attain to the Greek spirit, he is in sympathy with the humanists of an earlier century. He is the last fruit of the Renaissance, and explains in a striking way its motive and tendencies.

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from *Chapter 6: Leonardo da Vinci*

La Gioconda[3] is, in the truest sense, Leonardo's masterpiece, the revealing instance of his mode of thought and work. In suggestiveness, only the Melancholia of Dürer[4] is comparable to it; and no crude symbolism disturbs the effect of its subdued and graceful mystery. We all know the face and hands of the figure, set in its marble chair, in that cirque[5] of fantastic rocks, as in some faint light under sea. Perhaps of all ancient pictures time has chilled it least.[6] As often happens with works in which invention seems to reach its limits, there is an element in it given to, not invented by, the master. In that inestimable folio of drawings, once in the possession of Vasari, were certain designs by Verrocchio,[7] faces of such impressive beauty that Leonardo in his boyhood copied them many times. It is hard not to connect with these designs of the elder, by-past master, as with its germinal principle, the unfathomable smile, always with a touch of something sinister in it, which plays over all Leonardo's work. Besides, the picture is a portrait. From childhood we see this image defining itself on the fabric of his dreams; and but for express historical testimony, we might fancy that this was but his ideal lady, embodied and beheld at last. What was the relationship of a living Florentine to this creature of his thought? By means of what strange affinities had the person and the dream grown up thus apart, and yet so closely together? Present from the first incorporeally in Leonardo's thought, dimly traced in the designs of Verrocchio, she is found present at last in Il Giocondo's house. That there is much of mere portraiture in the picture is attested by the legend that by artificial means, the presence of mimes and flute-players, that subtle expression was protracted on the face. Again, was it in four years and by renewed labour never really completed, or in four months and as by stroke of magic, that the image was projected?

The presence that thus rose so strangely beside the

1 *the age of Pericles … of Lorenzo* The ancient Greek general and politician Pericles (c. 495–429 BCE) led Athens during its golden age, while Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–92) was the *de facto* ruler of Florence at the time of its greatest artistic achievement.

2 *Winckelmann* On the importance of the German classicist and art historian Johann Winckelmann (1717–68) for Pater, see the biographical note above; Pater's essay on Winckelmann forms the final chapter of *The Renaissance* before the book's famous conclusion.

3 *La Gioconda* Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of Lisa del Giocondo, known in English as the *Mona Lisa* (c. 1505), now hangs in the Louvre in Paris.

4 *the Melancholia of Dürer* The allegorical engraving *Melencolia I* (1514), by the German artist Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528). It is the subject of the final section of James Thomson's **The City of Dreadful Night* (1874).

5 *cirque* Ring.

6 *Perhaps … it least* "Yet for Vasari there was some further magic of crimson in the lips and cheeks, lost for us" (Pater's note). Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Painters* (1550) is the source of much of our information about Italian Renaissance art, including the *Mona Lisa*.

7 *Verrocchio* The Italian artist Andrea del Verrocchio (c. 1435–88) was Leonardo's teacher.

waters, is expressive of what in the ways of a thousand years men had come to desire. Hers is the head upon which all "the ends of the world are come,"[1] and the eyelids are a little weary. It is a beauty wrought out from within upon the flesh, the deposit, little cell by cell, of strange thoughts and fantastic reveries and exquisite passions. Set it for a moment beside one of those white Greek goddesses or beautiful women of antiquity, and how would they be troubled by this beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed! All the thoughts and experience of the world have etched and moulded there, in that which they have of power to refine and make expressive the outward form, the animalism of Greece, the lust of Rome, the reverie of the middle age with its spiritual ambition and imaginative loves, the return of the Pagan world, the sins of the Borgias.[2] She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary;[3] and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands. The fancy of a perpetual life, sweeping together ten thousand experiences, is an old one; and modern thought has conceived the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life. Certainly Lady Lisa might stand as the embodiment of the old fancy, the symbol of the modern idea.

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Conclusion

Λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει[4]

To regard all things and principles of things as inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought. Let us begin with that which is without—our physical life. Fix upon it in one of its more exquisite intervals, the moment, for instance, of delicious recoil from the flood of water in summer heat. What is the whole physical life in that moment but a combination of natural elements to which science gives their names? But these elements, phosphorus and lime and delicate fibres, are present not in the human body alone: we detect them in places most remote from it. Our physical life is a perpetual motion of them—the passage of the blood, the wasting and repairing of the lenses of the eye, the modification of the tissues of the brain by every ray of light and sound—processes which science reduces to simpler and more elementary forces. Like the elements of which we are composed, the action of these forces extends beyond us; it rusts iron and ripens corn. Far out on every side of us those elements are broadcast, driven by many forces; and birth and gesture and death and the springing of violets from the grave are but a few out of ten thousand resultant combinations. That clear, perpetual outline of face and limb is but an image of ours, under which we group them—a design in a web, the actual threads of which pass out beyond it. This at least of flame-like our life has, that it is but the concurrence, renewed from moment to moment, of forces parting sooner or later on their ways.

Or if we begin with the inward world of thought and feeling, the whirlpool is still more rapid, the flame more eager and devouring. There it is no longer the gradual darkening of the eye and fading of colour from

1 *"the ends … are come"* See 1 Corinthians 10:11: "Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

2 *the Borgias* Prominent Spanish-Italian family, notorious for many reputed crimes, including murder and incest.

3 *mother of Helen … mother of Mary* In Greek mythology, Leda was seduced by Zeus in the form of a swan and gave birth to four children, including Helen, on account of whom the Trojan War was fought; in Christian tradition, St. Anne was the mother of the Virgin Mary, although she is not named in the gospels.

4 *Λέγει … μένει* Heraclitus says somewhere that all things give way and nothing abides (Greek). This is Plato's summary, in his dialogue *Cratylus*, of the philosophy of the pre-Socratic thinker Heraclitus (c. 500 BCE), whose work survives only in fragments.

the wall,—the movement of the shore-side, where the water flows down indeed, though in apparent rest,—but the race of the midstream, a drift of momentary acts of sight and passion and thought. At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp and importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflexion begins to act upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like a trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions—colour, odour, texture—in the mind of the observer. And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further; the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world. Analysis goes a step farther still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it, of which it may ever be more truly said that it has ceased to be than that it is. To such a tremulous wisp constantly reforming itself on the stream, to a single sharp impression, with a sense in it, a relic more or less fleeting, of such moments gone by, what is real in our life fines[1] itself down. It is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off—that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves.

Philosophiren, says Novalis, *ist dephlegmatisiren, vivificiren*.[2] The service of philosophy, of speculative culture, towards the human spirit is to rouse, to startle it into sharp and eager observation. Every moment some form grows perfect in hand or face; some tone on the hills or the sea is choicer than the rest; some mood of passion or insight or intellectual excitement is irresistibly real and attractive for us,—for that moment only. Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. A counted number of pulses only is given to us of a variegated, dramatic life. How may we see in them all that is to be seen in them by the finest senses? How shall we pass most swiftly from point to point, and be present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy?

To burn always with this hard, gemlike flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. In a sense it might even be said that our failure is to form habits: for, after all, habit it relative to a stereotyped world, and meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike. While all melts under our feet, we may well catch at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment, or any stirring of the senses, strange dyes, strange colours, and curious odours, or work of the artist's hands, or the face of one's friend. Not to discriminate every moment some passionate attitude in those about us, and in the brilliancy of their gifts some tragic dividing of forces on their ways, is, on this short day of frost and sun, to sleep before evening. With this sense of the splendour of our experience and of its awful brevity, gathering all we are into one desperate effort to see and touch, we shall hardly have time to make theories about the things we see and touch. What we have to do is to be for ever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy of Comte, or of Hegel,[3] or of our own. Philosophical theories or ideas, as points of

1 *fines* Refines.

2 *Philosophiren … vivificiren* To philosophize is to cast off apathy, to come alive (German). Novalis was the pseudonym of the German poet and polymath Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772–1801).

3 *of Comte, or of Hegel* The French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857) and the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) both proposed all-encompassing systems of thought.

view, instruments of criticism, may help us to gather up what might otherwise pass unregarded by us. "Philosophy is the microscope of thought."[1] The theory or idea or system which requires of us the sacrifice of any part of this experience, in consideration of some interest into which we cannot enter, or some abstract theory we have not identified with ourselves, or what is only conventional, has no real claim upon us.

One of the most beautiful passages in the writings of Rousseau is that in the sixth book of the *Confessions*,[2] where he describes the awakening in him of the literary sense. An undefinable taint of death had always clung about him, and now in early manhood he believed himself smitten by mortal disease. He asked himself how he might make as much as possible of the interval that remained; and he was not biassed by anything in his previous life when he decided that it must be by intellectual excitement, which he found just then in the clear, fresh writings of Voltaire.[3] Well! we are all *condamnés*, as Victor Hugo says: we are all under sentence of death but with a sort of indefinite reprieve—*les hommes sont tous condamnés à mort avec des sursis indéfinis*:[4] we have an interval, and then our place knows us no more. Some spend this interval in listlessness, some in high passions, the wisest, at least among "the children of this world,"[5] in art and song. For our one chance lies in expanding that interval, in getting as many pulsations as possible into the given time. Great passions may give us this quickened sense of life, ecstasy and sorrow of love, the various forms of enthusiastic activity, disinterested or otherwise, which come naturally to many of us. Only be sure it is passion—that it does yield you this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness. Of this wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for art's sake, has most; for art comes to you professing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments' sake.

—1873

1 *"Philosophy … thought"* From the novel *Les Misérables* (1862), by the French poet and novelist Victor Hugo (1802–85).

2 *Confessions* Autobiographical work (1782) by Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78), Swiss writer and philosopher.

3 *Voltaire* Pen name of the French writer and philosopher François-Marie Arouet (1694–1778).

4 *les hommes … indéfinis* Pater offers the translation before the French original; the quotation comes from Hugo's 1829 novel *The Last Day of a Condemned Man*.

5 *"the children of this world"* See Luke 16:8: "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light."