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Reception — a new humanism? Receptivity, pedagogy, the transhistorical

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Redeeming the Text: Latin Poetry and the Hermeneutics of Reception (hereafter *RTT*), whose twentieth anniversary falls in 2013, was designed in the main as a theoretical intervention. It mounted an argument — against what are often, if not wholly satisfactorily, termed 'positivistic' modes of enquiry — about how classical texts mean and how they may most profitably be interpreted, an argument that was at first fiercely resisted, though later, with the book's growing respectability, more often ignored.[1]

In the event the principal impact of *RTT* proved instead to be institutional, as it contributed to a major reconfiguration of Classics as a discipline, at least in the UK; a growth in classical reception studies has been one of the most notable features of the past twenty years. By now the battle for taking reception seriously within Classics has long been won, significantly with 'reception' as the key term, the word of power, which has not been the case, at least to the same degree, elsewhere within the humanities.[2] The signs of institutional success are everywhere. Rather bizarrely, 'reception' is included as a category within what we must now learn to call the Research Excellence Framework (formerly the Research Assessment Exercise) — as though reception were a subdisciplinary field of Classics, like Latin literature or ancient visual culture, which in my view is not the case. There is the journal within which I am writing, wholly devoted to classical reception studies. There are

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[1] Martindale (1993). Its arguments seem to me in general to hold up quite well, though I have tried to improve formulation and increase nuance (with greater stress on aesthetics) in subsequent writings on the issues involved: among them Martindale (1997, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a). For what is involved in disputes about the merits or dangers of 'positivism' see in particular Martindale (1993: preface and chapter 1).

[2] Classical reception includes areas of study that are, in other disciplines, more commonly described with different words, for example, translation studies, performance history, history of scholarship, history of the book. There are of course many alternative ways to map the (shifting) terrain (and indeed to determine what 'the terrain' is, or might be), and we should not neglect to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of particular key terms, lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

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introductions and handbooks.[3] There is a prestigious series published by Oxford University Press, *Classical Presences*, edited by two leading practitioners, Lorna Hardwick and James I. Porter. Following discussion between myself and the Classics editor at Cambridge University Press, Pauline Hire, the initial policy was that Cambridge Companions on classical authors or topics should always contain a section on reception — indeed only those authors and topics were to be chosen where there was a significant reception history to be recounted.[4] Books, essays, and articles appear in ever-increasing numbers under the banner of reception; some showing great learning and sophistication, some frankly amateurish in a way that would probably not be tolerated if the subject were simply Greek tragedy, say, or Latin literature. It cannot be said too often that reception studies, if they are to be taken seriously, require skills in the practitioner at least as great as those needed for more traditional studies, perhaps greater in view of their cross-disciplinary character and the consequent need for credibility within all the disciplines involved (it may also be the case that there is, as yet, less of an agreed evaluative framework than in more established areas of Classics).

Of course the institutional reconfiguration of Classics was not a result of reception alone, but was fed by many different streams. When I went to Oxford in 1968, Latin poetry ended with Juvenal, philosophy was confined to Plato and Aristotle, history largely kept within two periods (classical Greece and late Republican and early Imperial Rome); Late Antiquity, social history, gender studies including the history and representation of women, and innumerable other topics that are now standard parts of a Classical degree did not feature. But reception posed a particular challenge, because the material to be studied no longer belonged to classical antiquity in the usual chronological sense. The result is that any text from any culture or any period, in any language or in any medium, which has some connection with antiquity, might now — at least potentially — find itself in a Classics degree. And this necessarily creates problems in constructing a credible syllabus based on defensible pedagogical principles (the key questions being, as ever, what should students read, and within what intellectual framework(s), and what should they write). Of course, reception studies take many different forms, and have been differently theorized — or often untheorized (disappointingly, fewer students of reception than I had hoped have taken up *RTT*'s challenge to theorize,[5] and much that is written within reception studies conforms, relatively inertly, to traditional positivistic enquiry). I have argued persistently in favour of accounts in which reception is figured dialogically, as a two-way process of understanding, backwards and forwards, which illuminates antiquity as much as modernity (which is not to say that such dialogue is necessarily productive in outcome or easy to conduct). Antiquity is constantly changing as ever-changing modernities engage in dialogue with it; the ancient works come to mean differently under different modern conditions (scholarship as an important component of reception also plays its part here). When T. S. Eliot cited a passage from Petronius' *Satyricon* as an epigraph for the most influential of all Modernist poems, he rendered it modern; in 'The Waste Land' a fragmentary text from antiquity (though only contingently so) exerts its maximum power in the context of a fragmenting modern consciousness.[6] Milton's reception of Virgil then becomes potentially of as much significance for Virgilians as for Miltonists, as much a part of Classics as it is of English Literature. Furthermore when we look at the way one great author 'receives' another we should resist the notion that the character of either is already known or fixed. Classical texts (I use the word in the broadest sense) are remade and refashioned by later writers; as a result new light is cast on them, they are made newly 'readable'. In the most profound engagements with which we have to do — Dante's with Virgil, for example — the modern poet is attempting to find out what kind of writer the ancient poet is and, in finding that out, what kind of writer he himself is — or could be (neither is simply known in advance).[7] And we, by attending to that encounter, can learn to read both Dante and Virgil differently, and, it may be hoped, better: in so doing we cannot put ourselves 'outside' the process, nor should we wish to do so, for in that case it would no longer be 'we' who were doing the reading. In that dialogue the reader is necessarily always implicated as yet another receiver.

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[3] For example, Hardwick (2003); Hardwick and Stray (2008). Porter (2008) is an excellent essay on possible future directions for reception.

[4] The first two volumes, published in 1997, were on *Virgil* and *Greek Tragedy*; for the former we decided that the section entitled reception should be put first, as a clear signal of revised priorities. *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius* has more than half its chapters on reception topics: see Martindale (2008b). Putting (a small number of) reception chapters at the end of a volume carries particular connotations about the nature of the subject, what is core and what is peripheral. A distinguished Latinist once described work in reception as the equivalent of 'an after-dinner speech'.

Reception on this model (which derives from the work of the Constance School, led by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser) makes it more difficult to fall into one of two opposed illusions common in literary interpretation, which we may call vulgar historicism (the view that we can know the past as it really was, untainted by what came after) and an equally vulgar presentism (the view that everything is wholly adapted to what we think in the present).[8] With both historicism and presentism there are, so to say, only two points involved ('now' and 'then', differently privileged). With reception there are always at least three and generally many more (ourselves reading Milton reading Virgil . . .), where all the points also include the mediating texts subsumed within them ('ourselves' reading 'Milton' reading 'Virgil'. . .), and texts can speak to texts on a basis of equality, without a hierarchy *necessarily* being imposed on any of the points.[9] It is a central insight of the German hermeneutical tradition culminating in Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* that interpretation always takes place *within* history. But it is equally important to insist that we can have a dialogue *across* history. Interpretations demonstrably change over the course of history, but they do not change completely, and they continue to bear the traces of earlier meanings. 'Our' moment is not insulated from other moments, though access to past moments may be problematical in all kinds of ways. The past can be a corrective to the present and open a dialogue with the future (the challenge is for this to happen without recourse to belief in the immutable values of a frozen canon against which histories of reception rightly caution us). That is one way the human mind can work, within constantly changing contexts of production and reception: it can move easily and fleetly about in time. Modernists often capture the flavour of this aspect of mental life; a good instance would be the brilliant opening pages of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925). As Elaine Scarry puts it:

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[5] There are notable exceptions, of course, including a series of powerful books and articles by Simon Goldhill, arguing for a version of reception that is close to cultural studies; the most compelling is Goldhill (2011). Martindale and Thomas (2006) is an attempt to revitalize the debate.

[6] Perloff (2004: 77).

[7] This is one of my objections to the cultural studies model for reception favoured by Goldhill, at least as generally practised. There is too little sense of an open dialogue (in which we might well be the learners), too much of the placing of the material, ideologically, usually to its disadvantage.

> The material world constrains us, often with great beneficence, to see each person and thing in its time and place, its historical context. But mental life doesn't so constrain us. It . . . delights to find itself beached beside something invented only that morning or instead standing beside an altar from three millennia ago.[10]

The word 'transhistorical' appears a couple of times in *RTT*, but it is not a word of power there. Examples of transhistorical analysis, however, abound within the book, for example the sections on 'reading Dante and Lucan reading Virgil' or 'reading Marlowe and Titian reading Ovid'.[11] But the main theoretical stress was on the historical situatedness of both texts and interpretations of texts, on the proposition that to understand is always to understand historically. In the early 1990s it was certainly necessary to underline the importance of such historicism in relation to literary interpretation, but the results could too easily become just another version of traditional (unhistoricized) historical method (where the historian stands as it were at an Archimedean point 'outside' or 'above' historical process). The transhistorical was also perhaps tainted by association with universalism (a view of things seen as designed to enforce undesired uniformities), and complicit with the kind of 'grand narratives' of which postmodern critique was so suspicious. However, if I were writing an introduction to reception studies today, I would want to theorize the role of 'the transhistorical' much more explicitly, as indeed a crucial part of the experience of being human as well as necessary to the understanding of the great texts of the past. By the transhistorical I do not intend what is usually meant by 'universal human nature' or any crude version of 'universalism' but rather the seeking out of often fugitive human communalities across history,[12] communalities that emerge only in the processes we may term 'reception'. My main exhibit and role model for the kind of reception involving the transhistorical which I am advocating will be Walter Pater, classicist and aesthetic critic, the practice of whose writings anticipates — and in my judgement surpasses in quality and insight — the 'reception-aesthetics' of Hans-Robert Jauss (since *RTT* I have placed much more stress, when writing about reception, on the importance of aesthetics[13]).

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[8] Of course there is nothing *necessarily* to object to when a writer or film-maker adapts an ancient text for presentist ends, perhaps out of the urgency of political struggle (though little by way of productive dialogue with that text may come from it), or for a scholar to study the results. What I am condemning here is a wholly presentist intellectual framework for the modern critic who writes about an ancient text.

[9] Here I reiterate the argument of Hopkins and Martindale (2012: 4–7).

[10] Scarry (1999: 48).

[11] Significantly the methodology here is attacked by Goldhill (2010) with a call to 'proper' contextualization.

It is today a commonplace to say that 'reception' implies passivity. It did not do so for Pater, for whom it rather entailed positive receptivity in aesthetic experience, that patient and passionate concentration on the object of attention that Pater — along with Wilde after him — sometimes termed 'seeing'. As Wilde puts it, 'To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty'.[14] That is one reason why we need artists from the past as well as the present, to help us *see*. Here is Wilde again:

> At present, people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were. But no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them.[15]

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[12] I am indebted for this felicitous formulation to my colleague Kurt Lampe.

[13] See in particular Martindale (2005, 2007, 2010a). Aesthetics, as well as the transhistorical, are at the centre of the (somewhat disputatious) dialogue between myself and Simon Goldhill over Performance Reception: Goldhill (2010); Martindale (2010a). For an attempted mediation between the two positions see Hopkins (2010): 'Introduction: Reception as Conversation'. On Pater's 'aesthetic historicism' as a radical fusion of the discourses of aestheticism and historicism see Williams (1989); the term was first used by Auerbach about Vico.

[14] Wilde (1970: 312).

[15] Ibid 312.

In his novel *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) Pater exhibits his hero undergoing a 'life of realized consciousness in the present' which constitutes an 'aesthetic education' — 'an education partly negative, as ascertaining the true limits of man's capacities, but for the most part positive, and directed especially to the expansion and refinement of the power of reception; of those powers, above all, which are immediately relative to fleeting phenomena, the powers of emotion and sense'.[16] In talking of the 'power' of reception, Pater is probably thinking of the title of Kant's Third Critique, *The Critique of the Power* (*Kraft*) *of Judgement* — with both Kant and Pater we are dealing with something important that the mind does, or can do, a faculty of cognition, an *active* principle. For both Kant and Pater the balance of passivity and activity, of attentiveness to the object and awareness of self, is what is important in aesthetic judgement (many moderns find the point hard to grasp, hence the charge of solipsism made against Pater both in his own day and in ours). To think of reception as passive is arguably to remain in an old mind set, where production is always primary. In 1968 in 'The Death of the Author' Barthes famously transferred agency from the producer, away from the Author, positing the birth of the reader.[17]

If we are thinking about the role reception should play within a Classics syllabus (in terms both of the material to be studied, and the way that material is studied), we perhaps need to ask first if classical reception is different from other sorts of reception. The arguments I presented in *RTT* could be applied to texts of any period (again I use the word 'text' in the extended postmodern sense in which it might be used of a sculpture or a marriage ceremony or a performance or a historical narrative). In a fine recent essay in *Classical Receptions Journal* Joshua Billings argues, with Hölderlin's *Symposium* as his prime exhibit, that a dialectic of resource and loss or absence or lack 'makes the relation to the ancient past simultaneously an imperative and an impossibility', such that '*erotics is a condition of classical reception*'. Put more simply, it is the intensity of desire for what is lost that for Billings specifically marks classical reception. If there were nothing specific about it, he argues, it would not belong in a department of Classics.[18] Now it is true that, if, in our fears about its future survival, Classics is in crisis in 2013, there is a sense in which it was always so, even within antiquity. Hence one motive for studying Classics/the classics is a longing for a past which is greater than the present but which is past — a motive to be found, for example, in Longinus's *Peri Hypsous*, a hugely powerful text from the translation of Boileau in 1674 (where *hypsos* becomes, definitively for this text which has apparently little importance outside its post-classical reception, 'the sublime') through the eighteenth century into the Romantic generation. The longing finds particularly plangent expression in a famous passage of Winckelmann:

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[16] Pater (1986: 84–5). 'Ascertaining the true limits of man's capacities' is a strictly Kantian project, while 'aesthetic education' rather suggests post-Kantian philosophers such as Schiller.

[17] The essay was in fact first published in an American magazine in 1967, but it was its republication in French the year after that made it a classic of poststructuralism.

[18] Billings (2010: 22). We might connect this analysis also with an intense desire for such lack, for some respite from the endless proliferation of data and images of undifferentiated value, evinced in much postmodern thought,

> Still I could not refrain from searching into the fate of works of art as far as my eye could reach; just as a maiden, standing on the shore of the ocean, follows with tearful eyes her departing lover with no hope of ever seeing him again, and fancies that in the distant sail she sees the image of her beloved. Like that loving maiden we too have, as it were, nothing but a shadowy outline left of the object of our wishes, but that very indistinctness awakens only a more earnest longing for what we have lost . . .[19]

It is the Classics of German Romanticism that Billings' analysis privileges. But there are other versions of Classics than this one, however seductive, while the feelings that Billings describes can characterize responses to any work that has been accorded the status of 'a classic', whether it comes from antiquity or some other period. Billings is surely wrong to say that 'an essential difference between the receptions of ancient Greece and Rome and the receptions of *Hamlet*' is 'the dialectic of absence and presence that antiquity cannot but evoke'. On the contrary, as Fred Parker observes, from the eighteenth century 'Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton were increasingly valued for their remoteness, their *antiquity*', thereby involving a wavering 'between the rejuvenating and the nostalgic', as the classic text becomes 'a magic portal into a world of value otherwise inaccessible and lost'.[20] In fact the temporality of the classic is a complex matter. In one sense the classic is always simultaneously both modern and ancient. But the temporality can shift. Towards the end of the nineteenth century works by Velazquez came to seem more modern than art that postdated them, Davidian neoclassicism, for example, or the Rococo (an 'antiquity' for the brothers Goncourt, to be revived).

So I disagree with Billings that there is something unique, or specific, about classical reception, but it does not follow that reception should not be part — or all? — of a degree in Classics. Just what part, then, should 'reception' play? I think the profession needs to think harder about that and about what a Classics degree should look like 'after reception' as it were, about what our overall pedagogical aims are or should be. *RTT* was not a book about such matters, though it did call for 'a broadly conceived, dialectical classics' in which the classical world is not studied in isolation, given that 'the interpretation of texts is inseparable from the history of their reception' (p. xiii). Some pedagogical elements can be deduced from its contents (a role for theory, for example, or the value of classic translations of ancient classics such as Dryden's Ovid, or the practice of backwards-reading through the reception to the great texts of antiquity). Anna Uhlig in an unpublished paper 'After the Party: Post-Reception Classics' raises significant questions about the potential risk to Classics as an independent separate discipline posed by the rapid growth of reception studies, in particular lack of focus and communality and consequent loss of traditional skills.[21] For a discipline called 'Classics' (should we think that worth preserving, if only as the best way of maintaining particular modes of enquiry and bodies of knowledge — which we may not) requires the classical to be in some sense the central object of study, not merely one among a number of proliferating contingencies; otherwise Classics becomes almost anything and everything (which is not to commit to any notion of an unchanging essence for the discipline). Certainly I have the impression that reception options are added somewhat randomly to degrees in Classics, according to the tastes and research interests of particular scholars, rather than out of any clear pedagogic principle. What, for example, is the intellectual justification for the proliferation of courses on Classics and film, which feature, according to the rough calculation by Joanna Paul, in at least a third of UK Classics departments? It is true that film is one way of thinking about the representation of antiquity, but there are other media (the novel, for example, or painting and sculpture) which might do this as well or better. To avoid misunderstanding I must make it clear that I am not arguing that film cannot be a major artistic medium, susceptible of subtle analysis; but many of the films about antiquity that classicists tend to study are neither important works of art nor complexly interesting, and much that is written about them is frankly banal. One suspects that film is often chosen, not without considerable condescension, out of a somewhat desperate desire for 'relevance' or modernity — proof that Classics is somehow still 'alive'. Classics is more alive to my thinking in Joyce's *Ulysses* or the poetry of Seamus Heaney than in *Gladiator* (2000: Ridley Scott). And does *Gladiator* or *Alexander* (2004: Oliver Stone) initiate us into a serious or profound dialogue with antiquity? (Of course a film *could* achieve this — *Agora* (2009: Alejandro Amenábar) comes closer.) To avoid misunderstanding I say again that what is wrong with *Gladiator* in terms of its suitability for a Classics syllabus is not that it is a popular film but that it does not present a thoroughly imagined classical world.[22] Ancient subject matter on its own should not confer such suitability. We may compare *Marius the Epicurean*, which provides an education in what might be knowable and representable in the classical past, and where the complex intertextual web of the writing incorporates words of Apuleius, Marcus Aurelius, the author of *Pervigilium Veneris*, Lucian, Roman inscriptions, religious texts both pagan and Christian, and so much else, within its distinctively Paterian voice. The specificity of classical studies is richly present in *Marius*, justifying its place on a Classics syllabus.

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[19] Lodge (1880: II. 364).

[20] Parker (2008: 230). The slide in my argument between Classics and the classic is conscious and deliberate, highlighting the centrality of value.

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[21] See for a fuller discussion Martindale (2010b). Uhlig's concerns link with another objection I have to the cultural studies model for reception. Goldhill (2011: 242–4) argues, powerfully and convincingly, that Victorians novels set in antiquity had great importance for contested issues in the period, notably in relation to Christianity. Certainly this means that students of *Victorian* culture should study them. But is it a reason for putting these works, most of them of little literary merit, on a Classics (or indeed an English) syllabus? (Of course, there are many subjects worthy of advanced research which are not suitable for teaching purposes, given that there are limits to what students can read.) Goldhill ends his book with the resounding line: 'The exercise of classical reception is, finally, finding one's own place in history' (p. 272). I dislike that 'finally', but even more the narcissism of the *sententia*.

[22] It has been put to me since that it does do so in terms of the material culture of the ancient world, but even in that respect it hardly matches the visual sophistication of (say) the paintings of Alma-Tadema.

In a reformed classical pedagogy, reception would be integral; not an addition, or the dilution of ancient by modern, because the interest in the classical world is on the wane or we lack the skills of traditional classicists (that would merely be to admit defeat). So my challenge to anyone proposing a course built mainly round post-classical material would be this: show me how that material can initiate or inform a significant dialogue with antiquity. One of the advantages of a dialogic model, where ancient and modern provide mutual illumination of each other, is that it explains why reception ought to be part of any Classics degree. Dialogic reception energizes the classics, and illuminates antiquity; superficial reception studies do not generate dialogue, do not tell us about the classical. One could go further and argue that Classics is *necessarily* a dialogue of ancient and modern, transhistorically. There is a sense that this is what the very name of our discipline means.

Might Classical Reception on this model be a New Humanism?

To start to answer that question, it may be useful to go back to the old humanism, the *studia humanitatis* — comprising grammar, rhetoric, history, literary studies, moral philosophy, all based on the study of ancient texts. Humanism can be linked with major developments in art and literature and general culture which the nineteenth century increasingly embraced under the idea of 'the Renaissance'. In 1873 Pater published a book entitled *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* that offers surprising insights into the whole phenomenon.[23] The contents page certainly surprises. There is a Preface on aesthetic criticism, and a Conclusion on art for art's sake. Between we have a number of essays. Some of the big names are there: Michelangelo (but for the poetry); Leonardo (at that date not yet ranked with Michelangelo and Raphael); in later editions Giorgione. Then there are chapters on figures comparatively little known in 1873: Botticelli (soon to be catapulted to greater fame, partly by this essay); Luca della Robbia; the humanist Pico della Mirandula. And the chronology is equally odd. The book begins in the thirteenth century in France, and ends in eighteenth-century Germany with Winckelmann, who is 'the last fruit of the Renaissance, and explains in a striking way its motive and tendencies' (p. 6). Pater was accused by critics of the time (and later) of not writing responsible history, and, probably in response, changed the title to the one by which the work is known today: *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*.

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[23] All quotations are from the Oxford World's Classics edition of the original 1873 text, edited by Matthew Beaumont: Pater (2010).

But the charge that Pater's thought is unhistorical is quite false.[24] The bent of Pater's mind was profoundly dialectical. He is always drawn to Hegelian historicism and the relativities it opens up; in the essay on Pico he shows evident sympathy with the view of what he terms 'a modern scholar' (that is, a scholar of a Hegelian kind) that 'every intellectual product must be judged from the point of view of the age and people in which it was produced' (p. 20). But Pater is equally drawn to Kant's unhistoricized understanding of the experience of beauty in the judgement of taste. In the words of Elizabeth Prettejohn, 'A work of art belongs to the past as soon as it has been made, whether it is the ancient *Venus de Milo* or the latest work of a contemporary artist . . . but its beauty is in the present moment of the observer's judgement'.[25] The Renaissance is then, specifically in the fifteenth century, but it is also now, and many times else:

> The word *Renaissance* indeed is now generally used to denote not merely that revival of classical antiquity which took place in the fifteenth century, and, to which the word was first applied, but a whole complex movement, of which that revival of classical antiquity was but one element or symptom. For us the Renaissance is the name of a many-sided but yet united movement, in which the love of the things of the intellect and the imagination for their own sake, the desire for a more liberal and comely way of conceiving life, make themselves felt, prompting those who experience this desire to seek first one and then another means of intellectual or imaginative enjoyment, and directing them not merely to the discovery of old and forgotten sources of this enjoyment, but to divine new sources of it, new experiences, new subjects of poetry, new forms of art. (p. 9)

Wilde understood the point when he explored the avant-garde artistic achievements of his own day in a lecture of 1882 which he delivered first in New York and called 'The English Renaissance of Art'.[26] So in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with the rediscovery of ancient sculptures, 'in the midst of a frozen world, the buried fire of ancient art rose up from under the soil' and 'on a sudden the imagination feels itself free' ('Winckelmann', pp. 89–90). So too when Winckelmann, in Hegel's words, initiated 'a new organ for the human spirit' (p. 86), in his interpretation of that art, once again the imagination feels itself free. Even sympathetic critics find it difficult to keep pace with the dialectical movement of Pater's thought. So Matthew Beaumont, the editor of the World's Classics edition, writes (quoting Jonathan Freedman):

> The 'Renaissance' is for Pater an ontological rather than a historical phenomenon: it is a trope for 'any moment of intense feeling encountered in a world that scientific enquiry, rational thought, "analysis" itself have reduced to a state of enervation and entropy'. (*Renaissance*, p. xiii)

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[24] See Williams (1989).
[25] Prettejohn (2005: 202).
[26] Wilde (1991).

I would say rather that we are dealing not with 'either ontological or historical' but with 'both/and'. I would further say that this is precisely how our encounters with the past are best conceptualized. And it is only a reception methodology that is likely to catch this dialectical movement, this implication of the historical and the transhistorical.

Pater was a classicist, and thought about Classics all his life, but initially obliquely. Who knows Classics who only Classics knows? Eventually he was to focus on what had in some sense always been his primary love: ancient Greece — with the late great works *Marius the Epicurean* (though set in Italy, centrally concerned with aspects of Greek philosophy and culture), *Plato and Platonism* (1892), the essays collected and published posthumously in *Greek Studies* (1895).[27] But earlier he had needed to explore the Renaissance, the period in which there was a great revival of antiquity. His approach is a version of reception, a layered transhistoricism (with at least four historical points): Pater reads back from the present (the Renaissance of English Art), through Winckelmann, through the Renaissance, to the antique. This is an exemplary journey of what is possible in our relationship to the past.

Let me distinguish three broad positions. First, what we might call the 'old humanism': the unproblematic view that students in the present could benefit from studying antiquity (I am not saying that the humanists of the fifteenth century all took anything like that view). Then there is anti-humanism, which takes two forms (which to an extent mutually reinforce each other): first the philistine view of some government ministers and many among the general public, that the ancient world is dead and has nothing in it for us; second the theorized view — the view of Foucault or, among classicists, Simon Goldhill, say — that the past is cut off from the present by its alterity, that it is radically different, alien. I am proposing a third way: the way of Pater, which, while respecting its historicity, shows how and why something like a Renaissance might be revived in the classroom of any time. For this 'new humanism', there must be a recognition of the importance and relevance *for us* of the past and its monuments — indeed we need to go into the past if we are to change the present, to escape our routinized habits (always Pater's principal enemy); it also involves an engagement with the modern world, but not merely to fawn upon it, as in presentism. Of course this argument can also be used to defend the arts and humanities in general, but Classics provides a powerful model for how the diverse elements can be united within a single coherent pedagogic and disciplinary structure (as, in a different way, would a degree in 'liberal arts', of the kind favoured in North America).

We can catch the transhistorical imagination in action in one of Pater's subtlest essays, 'The School of Giorgione' of 1877, included in revised form in later editions of *The Renaissance*. Giorgione, a canonical name since Vasari, is also something of a virtual painter; no surviving work has been universally attributed to him from Vasari down to our own time. A recent scholar asks 'how can we talk about Giorgione's significance unless we know what he painted?'[28] In that case we had best talk about something else, as Pater realised. Painting after painting, including what Pater calls the 'beloved' picture (p. 533) — the *Fête Champêtre* in the Louvre now usually attributed, though without decisive argument, to Titian or to Giorgione and Titian — were de-attributed, or reattributed to 'the brave work of other men' (p. 532), in a major scholarly work of 1871, *A History of Painting in North Italy* by J. A. Crowe and G. B. Cavalcaselle.[29] Pater deals with this positivistic enquiry with a combination of grave respect and fugitive but growing irony: 'The accomplished science of the subject has come at last', he writes, of what he four times terms a 'new Vasari': 'What remains of the most vivid and stimulating of Venetian masters, a live flame, as it seemed, in those old shadowy times, has been reduced almost to a name by his most recent critics' (p. 532). Out go Giorgiones, but only to return as instances of what Pater will now call 'the Giorgionesque'. The flame is re-ignited. In what can be read as a gentle parody of the method of the 'new Vasari' Pater uses as a touchstone one picture that Crowe and Cavalcaselle had regarded as definitely 'authentic', the *Concert* in the Pitti. Pater would have relished the irony that this painting has since been reassigned to Titian. Nor does that fact — or supposed fact — make one jot of difference to Pater's argument.

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[27] For Pater's Hellenism see Evangelista (2009: 23–54).

'The School of Giorgione' is a short essay but it contains innumerable transhistorical references: to the contemporary painters Legros and D. G. Rossetti, to Browning's 'Sordello', to Lessing, Giotto, Blake, Shakespeare, Hugo, and many more. And this transhistoricism is crucial to Pater's argument. Pater is not proposing a universal idea of Giorgionesque art 'outside' history, as it were, but nor is he making a historicist construction based on the supposed 'spirit of the age'; rather what connects the works termed by him 'Giorgionesque' is that, at some point, they have either been received as Giorgiones or can themselves be seen as insightful receptions of Giorgione, like the paintings of Legros or Burne-Jones. In Elizabeth Prettejohn's words: 'It is not artistic production that "grows" out of its historical and cultural milieu, but rather the *idea* of the Giorgionesque that grows out of the works *subsequently* attributed to Giorgione'.[30] All these receptions have something to tell us about the aesthetic 'virtue' (to use Pater's word from the Preface to *The Renaissance*) of certain works, some from sixteenth-century Venice but some belonging to other times and places including Pater's own day, a virtue marked by a certain refined melancholy, reminiscent of Virgilian pastoral. There are a number of

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[28] Anderson (1997: 9).

[29] Quotations are from the original version of the essay published in *Fortnightly Review*: Pater (1877).

[30] Prettejohn (unpublished).

superb passages describing this virtue, which have certainly helped shape the way that to this day works like the Louvre picture are perceived:

> Who . . . when the harmony of things inward and outward beat itself out so truly, and with a sense of *receptivity*, as if in that deep accord, with entire inaction on our part, some messenger from the real soul of things must be on his way to one, has not felt the desire to perpetuate all that, just so, to suspend it in every particular circumstance, with the portrait of just that one spray of leaves lifted just so high against the sky, above the well, for ever? . . . Well! in the school of Giorgione you drink water, perfume, music, lie in *receptive* humour thus for ever, and the satisfying moment is assured. (p. 536; my italics)

Once again there is the stress on the receptivity of the receiver. And once again we are not dealing with simple repetition or continuity — everything has its own historical specificity, though there are limitations in our knowing what that is. We cannot know the past as it really was, but illumination can come from the friction between different historical moments in our aesthetic perception of, our receptivity to, different objects from the past. We may not have the truth about Giorgione, as a positivist would see the matter, but we can have in its place what Pater, following the great French critic Sainte-Beuve, termed the *vraie vérité*, 'a serviceable expression by which the French recognise those more liberal and durable impressions which, in respect of any really considerable person or subject, anything that has at all intricately occupied men's attention, lie beyond and must supplement the narrower range of the strictly ascertained and numerable facts about it' (p. 538).

There are two great truths exemplified here. One is that no work of art has its meaning wholly determined by its point of origin, which is one reason why we need reception. The second is that we must go to the past if we are to make new the present, which is why the past is as important as the present. Pater knew this. Nietzsche knew this. Walter Benjamin and Erich Auerbach knew this. Edward Said knew this when he devoted the central chapter of his posthumously published *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* to 'The Return to Philology' (though we should perhaps beware of something defensively conservative in these now rather too frequent calls for 'returns' to various past states of grace).[31] That is why the humanist credo 'nothing human is alien from me' precisely need not entail belief in a universal human nature. And that is why reception of the right kind, of Pater's kind, could become a 'new humanism'. In this discourse 'Classics', 'humanism', and 'the Renaissance' all have transhistorical valence. Let us end then with Pater's thoughts on the 'old' humanist Pico. Pico's project, as Pater sees it, was the attempt to reconcile pagan religion with Christianity. Pico was a true scholar in that he knew the necessary languages, Hebrew as well as Greek (can there be Classics without Latin and Greek?[32]). If in the end that project was a failure, it was because Pico failed the historicizing part of the dialectic, sought the universal, not the transhistorical. But if a failure, it was a noble failure, and Pater ends the essay with these noble words:

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[31] Said (2004); but for some useful caveats Harpham (2009) and Prettejohn (2005).

[32] The study of language has been central to Classics for good reason – it introduced rigour and training for the mind. We will need something else to do such work if our pedagogy is

> He had sought knowledge, and passed from system to system, and hazarded much; but less for the sake of positive knowledge than because he believed there was a spirit of order and beauty in knowledge, which would come down and unite what men's ignorance had divided, and renew what time had made dim. And so while his actual work has passed away, yet his own qualities are still active . . . and he has a true place in that group of great Italians who fill the end of the fifteenth century with their names, he is a true *humanist*. For the essence of humanism is that one belief of which he seems never to have doubted, that nothing which has ever interested living men and women can wholly lose its vitality – no language they have spoken, nor oracle beside which they have hushed their voices, no dream which has once been entertained by actual human minds, nothing about which they have ever been passionate or expended time and zeal. (*Renaissance*, p. 28)[33]

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no longer to be based on language learning, and clearly the role of language (including the role of translations) needs to be constantly rethought. Language in translation is also a good figure for the transhistorical: the word/phrase in the other language *both* means 'the same' as its English equivalent *and* means something different.

[33] A rather different version of this paper was given at the Triennial Conference in Cambridge in 2011. I am grateful to my two respondents on that occasion, Jim Porter and Tim Rood, and to the audience generally; also to David Hopkins. My thoughts on Pater owe most to Liz Prettejohn. Especial thanks to Lorna Hardwick for taking forward this symposium, and encouraging me to express my ideas with due clarity.

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