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► **To cite this version:**

Anne-Florence Gillard-Estrada. “The Resurrected Youth and the Sorrowing Mother”: Walter Pater’s Uses of the Myths of Dionysus and Demeter. *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, 2008, *Studies in Walter Pater*, 68, pp.155-180. hal-02093269

HAL Id: hal-02093269

<https://normandie-univ.hal.science/hal-02093269>

Submitted on 8 Apr 2019

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THE RESURRECTED YOUTH AND THE SORROWING MOTHER: WALTER PATER'S USES OF THE MYTHS OF DIONYSUS AND DEMETER

Anne-Florence Gillard-Estrada
Université de Rouen

Shortly after the first publication of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* in 1873, Walter Pater wrote two essays on Greek mythology: from January 1875, he began working on "A Study of Dionysus", which was published, signed, in the *Fortnightly Review* in December 1876; and in November 1875, he delivered a lecture entitled "Demeter and Persephone" in Birmingham, which was the basis for the essay "The Myth of Demeter and Persephone", whose Part I was published, signed, in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1876 and which was only published in its totality in the posthumous volume *Greek Studies* in 1895¹.

This was a difficult context for Pater. In 1873, the publication of *The Renaissance* triggered much criticism on the part of reviewers, clerics and fellow Oxonians. Most notably, Pater was charged with disbelief in Christian immortality and with praising a selfish philosophy of Art that led to the aesthetic appreciation of religion. In 1874, he was involved in a private scandal with an undergraduate which brought his professional career to a check. And in 1876, W.H. Mallock satirized him as Mr Rose, an effete, boy-worshipping Hellenist, in his novel *The New Republic*. So after the publication in 1877 of a pamphlet associating British Hellenism with atheism and homosexuality, Pater cancelled his project of the publication of a volume on Greek studies with Macmillan originally entitled '*Dionysus*' and *Other Studies*.

Pater now exercised extreme caution with his work to avoid accusations of hedonism, positivistic materialism, or homoerotic aestheticism. These two articles on Greek mythology reflects Pater's new directions and his wish to answer critics. And yet, one also finds in them a strategic continuation of the principles that underscored the essays collected in *The Renaissance*. This he combined with an interest in the latest materials and discoveries provided by the new sciences of archaeology, mythography and anthropology².

Pater both re-interprets and rewrites these myths by choosing and selecting from his material, so as to assert certain themes or values which he stressed in his earlier works. One important characteristic of his approach is the desire to valorize the irrational or unpleasant aspects of Greek culture which Matthew Arnold or contemporary mythographers ignored or condemned. He also acknowledges the existence of a "universal pagan sentiment"³—man's feeling of vulnerability within the natural world: by making myths, man was able to feel less alienated from nature, and by elaborating religious rituals, man could retain control over it. Furthermore, Pater believes that Greek religion is marked by what he calls "the worship of sorrow":

The "worship of sorrow," as Goethe called it, is sometimes supposed to have had almost no place in the religion of the Greeks. Their religion has been represented as a religion of mere cheerfulness, the worship by an untroubled, unreflecting humanity, conscious of no deeper needs, of the embodiments of its own joyous activity. It helped to hide out of their sight those traces of decay and weariness, of which the Greeks were constitutionally shy, to keep them from peeping too curiously into certain shadowy places, appropriate enough to the gloomy imagination of the middle age; and it hardly proposed to itself to give consolation to people who, in truth, were never "sick or sorry." But this familiar view of Greek religion is based on a consideration of a part only of what is known concerning it, and really involves a misconception, akin to that which underestimates the influence of the romantic spirit generally, in Greek poetry and art; as if Greek art had dealt exclusively with human nature in its sanity, suppressing all motives of strangeness, all the beauty which is born of difficulty, permitting nothing but an Olympian, though perhaps somewhat wearisome calm. In effect, such a conception of Greek art and poetry leaves in the central expressions of Greek culture none but negative qualities; and the legend of Demeter and Persephone, perhaps the most popular of all Greek legends, is sufficient to show that the "worship of sorrow" was not without its function in Greek religion; their legend is a legend made by and for sorrowful, wistful, anxious people; while the most important artistic monuments of that legend sufficiently prove that the Romantic spirit was really at work in the minds of Greek artists, extracting by a kind of subtle alchemy, a beauty, not without the elements of tranquillity, of dignity and order, out of a matter, at first sight painful and strange. (GS 110-111)

Unlike Arnold, who argued that Greek religion, contrasted with that of medieval Christianity, did not know the sentiment of sorrow, Pater argues that such elements of sadness and even of irrationality or bloodiness were constitutive of Greek religion as well as of Greek poetry and tragedy. Pater reevaluates the Dionysiac dimension of Greek myths which is absent from Matthew Arnold's vision of Hellenism—the 'sweetness and light' he develops in his *Culture and Anarchy*. Pater thus concentrates on those 'Chthonian' gods whose stories and rituals are characterized by savagery, a mysticism verging on the mysterious, and even licentiousness. Pater's interest in the threatening doubleness of the gods demonstrates his constant oscillation between polarities, among which the dialectical interplay of the two opposing yet complementary tendencies which he calls "classicism" and "romanticism". These principles are engaged in a dialectics conducive to historic evolution in art, literature and culture. In the essay "Postscript" which he included in *Appreciations*, classicism and romanticism are not

¹ Walter PATER: *Greek Studies*, ed. C.L. Shadwell (London: Macmillan, Library Edition, 1910).

² For the attacks against Pater and his *Renaissance*, see Billie Andrew INMAN: *Walter Pater and his Readings 1874-77, with a Bibliography of his Borrowings 1878-94* (New York: Garland, 1990) xxv-xxvi, and Laurel BRAKE: *Walter Pater* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994) 12-15.

³ For a list of Pater's sources, see INMAN. See also Steven CONNOR: "Myth and Metamyth in Max Müller and Walter Pater", in J. B. Bullen (ed.): *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature and Mythology in the 19th Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 199-222. For a general survey of mythology in the Victorian period, see Frank Miller TURNER: *The Greek Heritage in Victorian Britain* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1981) 77-134.

⁴ See also Walter PATER: *The Renaissance*, ed. Donald Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 160.

separated into different, fixed historical frames but are seen to emerge at any time and in any artistic or literary movement in history'. Pater discerns the same dialectics in his two essays on Greek myths.

This paper aims to explore Pater's uses of these two myths, and in particular the tension between, on the one hand, the Apollinian, hellenizing tendency that was still dear to him, and, on the other hand, his insistence on the Dionysiac or the Chthonian elements which to him were central to these cults. It also intends to demonstrate how Pater's appropriation of these myths attests to the deployment of diverging discourses centred on the respective figures of Dionysus and of Demeter.

At the end of his essay on Demeter, Pater asks a question that echoes the enquiries raised at the beginning of the "Preface" to *The Renaissance*, which were the starting point for his definition of the aesthetic critic: "What is this song, or picture, this engaging personality presented in life or in a book, to *me*? What effect does it produce on me?" (R xix-xx) Here, Pater also wants to find out the relevance of myths to the modern mind: "What is there in this phase of ancient religion for us, at the present day?" (GS 151) One answer is that Greek mythology illuminates the workings of the human mind both in ancient times as well as in Pater's own epoch. When tracing the evolution of the myth of Demeter and Persephone, he sees a continuity between the primitive minds of the ancient Greeks and the contemporary mind: "Following its changes, we come across various phases of Greek culture, which are not without their likenesses in the modern mind [...]; and besides this, it is in itself full of interest and suggestion, to all for whom the ideas of the Greek religion have any real meaning in the modern world." (GS 81-82) Diverging from the conceptions of most nineteenth-century specialists of myths, who had established differences between the primitive myth-making minds and their own minds, Pater insists on the "resemblance in the earlier world to the thoughts that really occupy our own minds" (GS 112) and on the value of ancient myths for modern man.

The affinities between the minds of modern thinkers and the primitive myth-makers revolve around a universal poetical faculty: "in the application of these theories [the theory of 'comparative mythology,' or what is called the theory of 'animism'], the student of Greek religion must never forget that, after all, it is with poetry, not with systematic theological belief or dogma, that he has to do." (GS 112) Here, Pater is indebted to Romantic writers and poets. He thus insists on the imaginative and poetical faculties of such minds and on their closeness to nature. The making of the myth of Demeter was for example a poetical process: their poetical and religious temperament allowed the ancient Greeks to create "a systematised form of that sort of poetry (we may study it, for instance, either in Shelley or in Wordsworth), which also has its fancies of a spirit of the earth, or of the sky,—a personal intelligence abiding in them, the existence of which is assumed in every suggestion such poetry makes to us of a sympathy between the ways and aspects of outward nature and the moods of men." (GS 96-97) Likewise, he finds analogies between Romantic poetry and the Greek conception of the myth of Dionysus (an idea already present in his essay "Wordsworth" of 1874):

The student of the comparative science of religions finds in the religion of Dionysus one of many modes of that primitive tree-worship which, growing out of some universal instinctive belief that trees and flowers are indeed habitations of living spirits, is found almost everywhere in the earlier stages of civilisation, enshrined in legend or custom, often graceful enough, as if the delicate beauty of the object of worship had effectually taken hold on the fancy of the worshipper. Shelley's *Sensitive Plant* shows in what mists of poetical reverie such feeling may still float about a mind full of modern lights, the feeling we too have of a life in the green world, always ready to assert its claim over our sympathetic fancies. (GS 11)

Not only does he draw examples from Romantic poetry to illustrate this conception of the universal human poetical imagination, but he also writes in a highly poetical style about these myths—a way of enacting his aesthetic theories through his writing. Greek mythology can be studied as poetry and so can his own poetical evocation of the pastoral and elemental life of the primitive Greeks and their conception of the "spiritual form" of Dionysus. Pater therefore urges his reader to feel empathy with the visions of the ancient Greeks: for only the person of poetic temperament might understand their myths.

Pater de-historicizes this notion of the poetic imagination and insists on its trans-historical presence in cultural history. There is an echo here of his main thesis in *The Renaissance* of the renaissance of the "Greek spirit" in later times. For instance, the myth of Demeter gives him the opportunity to equate the genius of Giotto, William Blake or even Burne-Jones to that sensitiveness and impressiveness of the primitive Greeks, as

these fruits of individual genius are in part also a "survival" from a different age, with the whole mood of which this mode of expression was more congruous than it is with ours. But there are traces of the old temper in the man of today also; and through these we can understand that earlier time—a very poetical time, with the more highly gifted peoples—in which every impression men received of the action of powers without or within them suggested to them the presence of a soul or will, like their own—a person, with a living spirit, and senses, and hands, and feet; (GS 100)

The wording here reminds one of the call, in the "Conclusion", to "grasp at any exquisite passion, [...] 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" (R 189). For here the flux of impressions condenses into a fixed human image, and one finds a similar fragmenting of its physical, sensuous or spiritual components.

¹ Walter PATER: *Appreciations* (London: Macmillan, Library Edition, 1910) 247.

² For the prominent role of poetic imagination in Pater's analysis of the pattern of myths and his debt to the Romantic poets, among whom Wordsworth and Shelley, see Stefano EVANGELISTA: "'Outward Nature and the Moods of Men': Romantic Mythology in Pater's Essays on Dionysus and Demeter", in Laurel Brake, Lesley Higgins, Carolyn Williams (eds.): *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire* (Greensboro: ELT, 2002) 107-118.

The primitive myth-makers were highly impressible country-people who translated their impressions of nature and their deepest emotions into stories and images. Other imaginative minds, under impressions created by accumulated images and stories, later selected from and modified the myth. In his essay on Demeter, Pater establishes three phases of myth-making, and when he refers to the third phase of the myth, he uses words that recall the aesthetics of selection and discrimination of *The Renaissance*: “The myth has now entered on the third phase of its life, in which it becomes the property of those more elevated spirits, who, in the decline of the Greek religion, pick and choose and modify, with perfect freedom of mind, whatever in it may seem adapted to minister to their culture.” (GS 136-137). It was the same aesthetic process that was at work in the Botticelli’s art: “But the genius of which Botticelli is the type usurps the data before it as the exponent of ideas, moods, visions of its own; in this interest it plays fast and loose with those data, rejecting some and isolating others, and always combining them anew.” (R 42) Pater also had a great stock of stories (legends, poetical works and plays), images (statues, coins, vases) and contemporary erudite and scientific sources from which he can “pick and choose” indeed, sometimes modifying all these so as to bend his object to a larger project centred here around these two mythical figures.

In “A Study of Dionysus”, Pater explains that myths originally developed from a cult of nature which gave way to the more refined and “spiritual form” of the gods, by which expression Pater means all the associations, images and meanings linked to the idea of a god before he or she has acquired a human form. Pater conceived of three phases in the production of a myth. In the first oral “mystical” phase, the primitive mind responds to phenomena of the natural world; in the second, “literary” or “poetical” phase, the impressions become literary objects, and in the third, “ethical phase”, the myth is transformed into an abstract universal¹. The pattern of myth, then, is seen as a centripetal tendency to condense centrifugal impressions of nature into a human form:

Out of all these fancies comes the vine-growers’ god, the *spiritual form* of fire and dew. Beyond the famous representations of Dionysus in later art and poetry—the *Bacchanals* of Euripides, the statuary of the school of Praxiteles—a multitude of literary allusions and local customs carry us back to this world of vision unchecked by positive knowledge, in which the myth is begotten among a primitive people, as they wondered over the life of the thing their hands helped forward, till it became for them a kind of spirit, and their culture of it a kind of worship. Dionysus, as we see him in art and poetry, is the projected expression of the ways and dreams of this primitive people, brooded over and harmonised by the energetic Greek imagination; the religious imagination of the Greeks being, precisely, a unifying or identifying power, bringing together things naturally asunder, making, as it were, for the human body a soul of waters, for the human soul a body of flowers; welding into something like the identity of a human personality the whole range of man’s experiences of a given object, or series of objects—all their outward qualities, and the visible facts regarding them—all the hidden ordinances by which those facts and qualities hold of unseen forces, and have their roots in purely visionary places. (GS 28-29)

As in his essay “Winckelmann”, where he noted that the Greeks’ main achievement was their ability to impart form to objects and ideas, Pater here asserts that their power to condense and give shape to the varied apprehensions of the earth finds its ultimate stage in the “ethical” phase of the myth, which is that of sculpture—of the plastic representation of man. But there is here a duality in his thought: the multiple physical and sensuous impressions which are also part of the “ethical” phase, are dialectically counterbalanced by the tendency to give a contour to them. His vision of myths both resists and acknowledges the discourse on Hellenism. For he both devaluates and reappropriates the bright Hellenism he analysed in “Winckelmann”, in which he finally opposed the more complex and complete Romantic art to the Greek perfection. Indeed, his essays on Demeter and Dionysus show a dialectical movement towards the Winckelmannian idealization of Greek statues as well as towards the recognition of darker, more ambiguous and threatening aspects of Greek religion. Pater evinces yet another dual attitude towards the artistic embodiments of myth. The growing refinement of a myth implies a movement towards an ever more fixed and definite form which condenses and completes the myth. In fact, the tension between the multiple essence of myth and its embodiment in the human form is constitutive of the myth, and he insists on this polarity:

On the one hand, was the teeming, still fluid world, of old beliefs, as we see it reflected in the somewhat formless *theogony* of Hesiod; a world, the Titanic vastness of which is congruous with a certain sublimity of speech, when he has to speak, for instance, of motion or space; as the Greek language itself has a primitive copiousness and energy of words, for wind, fire, water, cold, sound—attesting a deep susceptibility to the impressions of those things—yet with edges, most often, melting into each other. On the other hand, there was that limiting, controlling tendency, identified with the Dorian influence in the history of the Greek mind, the spirit of a severe and wholly self-conscious intelligence; bent on impressing everywhere, in the products of the imagination, the definite, perfectly conceivable human form, as the only worthy subject of art; less in sympathy with the mystical genealogies of Hesiod, than with the heroes of Homer, ending in the entirely humanised religion of Apollo, the clearly understood humanity of the old Greek warriors in the marbles of Aegina. (GS 34-35)

¹ He explains this pattern in “Demeter and Persephone”: “In the story of Demeter, as in all Greek myths, we may trace the action of three different influences, which have moulded it with varying effects, in three successive phases of its development. There is first its half-conscious, instinctive, or mystical, phase, in which, under the form of an unwritten legend, living from mouth to mouth, and with details changing as it passes from place to place, there lie certain primitive impressions of the phenomena of the natural world. We may trace it next in its conscious, poetical or literary, phase, in which the poets become the depositaries of the vague instinctive product of the popular imagination, and handle it with a purely literary interest, fixing its outlines, and simplifying or developing its situations. Thirdly, the myth passes into the ethical phase, in which the persons and the incidents of the poetical narrative are realised as abstract symbols, because intensely characteristic examples, of moral or spiritual conditions.” (GS 91)

Still, Pater betrays a propensity to impose a limiting outline onto this mass of impressions, beliefs and words, as if the Dorian sensibility was stronger in him: he indeed privileges the plastic embodiment of those myths. But he imposes on the statues of Dionysus a particular discourse on the masculine body.

Pater's first descriptions of the god Dionysus have a marked fleshly and sensuous dimension: "all that the name of Dionysus recalled to the Greek mind, under a single imaginable form, an outward body of flesh presented to the senses, and comprehending, as its animating soul, a whole world of thoughts, surmises, greater and less experiences." (GS 10) When he imagines the nymphs of Naxos weaving a purple robe for the god's statue, saying for example that the ivy is "pressing the dark outline of its leaves close upon the firm, white, quite human flesh of the god's forehead" (GS 12-13), the evocation is almost physical and even tactile, as if Pater lingered on the forms and texture of the deity. Pater also describes his cult by using an adjective which ordinarily has physical connotations: the "graceful worship" of Dionysus (GS 13), "so graceful a faith" (GS 11). And he refers to Titian's and Tintoretto's representations of Bacchus in very sensuous and bodily terms, referring to a "fiery animal life", or to the "profound luxury of delight in the nearness to each other, and imminent embrace, of glorious bodily presences", as well as to the "consummate beauty of physical form" (GS 23).

His reference to "the delicate beauty of the object of worship" (GS 11) is consistent with the constant interest, in his works, for the male body. In this essay indeed, one finds the same predilection for male beauty as that expressed in the "Renaissance"—be it Winckelmann's contemplation of male statues or of his young friends, or the homoerotic aesthetics he discerns in the art and works of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo or Pico della Mirandola. For Pater's Apollinian and idealizing tendency leads him to linger on the sculptural form of Dionysus. At one point, he explains that signs of animality tend to disappear in sculpture—a tendency which here is accentuated by Pater's association of Dionysus with the Dorian god Apollo, for example through the themes of music and of divine inspiration. Discussing the wild followers of the god, Pater concentrates on a satyr by Praxiteles, whom he sees as another of those

dubious creatures, half-way between the animal and human kinds, speculating wistfully on their being, because not wholly understanding themselves and their place in nature [...]. In the later school of Attic sculpture they are treated with more and more of refinement, till in some happy moment Praxiteles conceived a model, often repeated, which concentrates this sentiment of true humour concerning them; a model of dainty natural ease in posture, but with the legs slightly crossed, as only lowly-bred gods are used to carry them, and with some puzzled trouble of youth, you might wish for a moment to smoothe away, puckering the forehead a little, between the pointed ears, on which the goodly hair of his animal strength grows low. Little by little, the signs of brute nature are subordinated, or disappear[.] (GS 16-17)

Pater does not specify that this statue is the naked *Leaning Satyr* in the Capitolian Museum in Rome. This is probably an intentional omission meant to reinscribe nudity into a text that is otherwise devoid of its direct description. Pater allows for the possibility to recall and imagine this nude sculptural beauty, but in an even more oblique way than in his essays on Winckelmann or on Greek statuary. The same attention is placed on a fragmented body, and Pater shows himself as much preoccupied by either the lack or the presence of "some trouble of youth" as he was in "Winckelmann", where he referred to the untroubled serenity of those statues of an unselfconscious male nakedness. One striking 'gesture', so to speak, is Pater's desire to alleviate this "trouble" by "smoothing it away" with his hand, as a sculptor would smoothe out a texture. Pater then urges the reader to mentally conceive of the physical embodiment of the god:

To illustrate this, think what the effect would be, if you could associate, by some trick of memory, a certain group of natural objects, in all their varied perspective, their changes of colour and tone in varying light and shade, with the being and image of an actual person. You travelled through a country of clear rivers and wide meadows, or of high windy places, or of lowly grass and willows, or of the *Lady of the Lake*; and all the complex impressions of these objects wound themselves, as a second animated body, new and more subtle, around the person of some one left there, so that they no longer come to recollection apart from each other. Now try to conceive the image of an actual person, in whom, somehow, all those impressions of the vine and its fruit, as the highest type of the life of the green sap, had become incorporate;—all the scents and colours of its flower and fruit, and something of its curling foliage; the chances of its growth; the enthusiasm, the easy flow of more choice expression, as its juices mount within one; for the image is eloquent, too, in word, gesture, and glancing of the eyes, which seem to be informed by some soul of the vine within it: as Wordsworth says,

Beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face—

so conceive an image into which the beauty, "born" of the vine, has passed; and you have the idea of Dionysus, as he appears, entirely fashioned at last by central Greek poetry and art[.] (GS 37-38)

Pater here again condenses impressions of natural objects into an actual being, and the description and style echo his Conclusion to *The Renaissance*, where the sensations and natural objects are subjected to the same aesthetics of the flux. One also finds a similar attention given to beauty and in particular to the beauty of the face which, in *The Renaissance*, is linked to the Platonic conception of the *Phaedrus*. Here, there are reminiscences of the conception of the ascension from the beauty of a man's face—whose contemplation provokes a Dionysiac fever—towards a higher Beauty. For, in the passage above, one may note the sensual, if not sexual, connotations ("its juices mount within").

However, the plastic incarnations of Dionysus which Pater chooses govern his reader's imaginative and creative act of memory and associations. For the examples he gives are either sensuous pictorial treatments of the god or beautiful sculptural nudes:

Michelangelo, in a work still remaining in Florence, in which he essayed with success to produce a thing which should pass with the critics for a piece of ancient sculpture, has represented him in the fulness, as it seems, of this

enthusiasm, an image of delighted, entire surrender to transporting dreams. And this is no subtle after-thought of a later age, but true to certain finer movements of old Greek sentiment, though it may seem to have waited for the hand of Michelangelo before it attained complete realisation. (*GS* 18-19)

Again, he is careful not to specify that this is Michelangelo's *Drunken Bacchus* of 1497—a precaution that suggests that through this evocation of a work of art he reinscribes the theme of androgyny into a text whilst suppressing it at the same time: Pater indeed chooses not to write about the feminine or androgynous elements mentioned by his sources.⁸ And there is also a faint allusion to the Winckelmannian theme of the blending of male and female characteristics precisely because he alludes to a statue which since Vasari's time had been critiqued—and berated—for its hermaphroditic qualities: besides its drunken attitude, its feminine belly had shocked numerous spectators.⁹ So once again, a theme dear to Pater but which had provoked much criticism in a recent past is hinted at within his text, not through the written sign, but via a present yet almost absent image.

Pater later says that a certain feminization of the god has occurred when the legend was imported from the country into the city¹⁰, a consequent femininity resulting, then, from urbanization:

He will soon forget that early country life, or remember it but as the dreamy background of his later existence. He will become, as always in later art and poetry, of dazzling whiteness; no longer dark with the air and sun, but [...] honey-pale, like the delicate people of the city, like the flesh of women, as those old vase-painters conceive of it, who leave their hands and faces untouched with the pencil on the white clay. The ruddy god of the vineyard, stained with wine-lees, or coarser colour, will hardly recognise his double, in the white, graceful, mournful figure, weeping, chastened, lifting up his arms in yearning affection towards his late-found mother, as we see him on a famous Etruscan mirror. (*GS* 40-41)

The reference to the whiteness and redness of the god is a recurring theme in Pater's works: the colour white refers to the Apollonian tendency, to which Pater here adds the theme of femininity, while the colour red relates to the Dionysiac impulse. In *The Renaissance*, Pater explains that the statues unearthed during the Renaissance function as tropes of cultural rebirth, and they are characterized by their whiteness and redness. Moreover, he often refers to the bodies—white and red—of the young men who herald a cultural, artistic or personal renaissance, be they historical figures (like Pico della Mirandola) or male fictional characters. The pairing of those two colours is a motif that points to this central polarity of the Romantic and the Classic, or of the Apollinian and the Dionysiac, to which he often adds an element of androgyny.

A strategy of allusiveness also characterizes the theme of the “enthusiasm” inspired by the god (as in the passage on Michelangelo's statue quoted above) which pertains to a homoerotic context. When he mentions one aspect of the god which links him to Apollo—his power of inspiration—Pater takes up the Platonic theme of the divine possession or *mania*:

[I]n this other phase of his being, in his relation to the reed, he fills [...] the place of Apollo; he is the inherent cause of music and poetry; he inspires; he explains the phenomena of enthusiasm, as distinguished by Plato in the *Phaedrus*, the secrets of possession by a higher and more energetic spirit than one's own, the gift of self-revelation, of passing out of oneself through words, tones, gestures. A winged Dionysus, venerated at Amyclae, was perhaps meant to represent him thus, as the god of enthusiasm, of the rising up on those spiritual wings, of which also we hear something in the *Phaedrus* of Plato. (*GS* 18)

It is the same “enthusiasm” as Winckelmann's (*R* 152). So here, Pater reasserts his personal reading of Plato's discourse on the contemplation of male beauty in the homosocial context of a banquet and he again fuses the erotic and the initiatory. What is more, he then inserts a vignette supposedly drawn from Plato's or Xenophon's *Symposium* but which is in fact his own invention¹¹:

The head of Ion leans, as they recline at the banquet, on the shoulder of Charmides; he mutters in his sleep of things seen therein, but awakes as the flute-players enter, whom Charmides has hired for his birthday supper. The soul of Callias, who sits on the other side of Charmides, flashes out; he counterfeits, with life-like gesture, the personal tricks of friend or foe; or the things he could never utter before, he finds words for now; the secrets of life are on his lips. It is in this loosening of the lips and heart, strictly, that Dionysus is the Deliverer, *Eleutherios*; and of such enthusiasm, or ecstasy, is, in a certain sense, an older patron than Apollo himself. (*GS* 19)

Pater thus imagines this scene—yet another striking example of his tendency to select and modify his sources for a particular purpose. He reinscribes the theme of the transporting and homoerotic rapture which figured so prominently in “Winckelmann” but which he wished to tackle cautiously from now on. The reference to the “loosening of the lips and heart” is characteristically Paterian, with its coalescence of mysticism and sensuousness. Dionysus is both the mystic Deliverer of the spirit and tongue as well as the liberator of the senses. One can potentially link this to Dowling's analysis of the subversion of the words “mystical” or “ethical” in Pater's pattern of the myths—a subversion meant to impose the role of the physical or sensuous element in early religious thought¹². Although the word “mystical” may evoke the religious, its etymological resonances are also

⁸ For his sources on that theme, see INMAN 172, 238-39. Another similar strategy characterized the publication of *The Renaissance*: Pater chose not to insert a single illustration in a text nevertheless devoted to art criticism; however, for the volume's second edition of 1877, he placed a vignette by Leonardo da Vinci on the frontispiece that represents an androgynous figure, thus placing his whole volume under the seal of androgyny.

⁹ See INMAN 248-49.

¹⁰ This is a nineteenth-century invention that Pater borrowed; see INMAN 263-64.

¹¹ INMAN 249-50.

¹² Linda DOWLING: “Walter Pater and Archaeology: the Reconciliation with Earth”, *Victorian Studies* 31:2 (1988), 209-231. See in particular 213-18.

those of the closed eyes and lips of the initiate and the trancelike stillness of the physical states of sexual ecstasy, or even of death.

Pater is particularly sensitive to the darker and more tragic aspects of the god's legend, among which the strong feeling of melancholy that (according to him) plays a role in his story and his representations¹⁰. Pater's privileging of this theme may have autobiographical overtones, in particular his identification with victimization. For Pater exhibits increasing awareness that the relevance to his own times of the "Greek spirit" which he had praised in *The Renaissance* was in fact impossible. This is probably why he chooses a painting of Bacchus by his friend Simeon Solomon to illustrate the idea of the god's melancholy. According to Pater, Dionysus was treated in the art of the Italian Renaissance as "always in his joy, as an embodiment of that glory of nature to which the Renaissance was a return" (GS 41), although those representations were sometimes tinged with the "impression of a melancholy and sorrowing Dionysus" (GS 42). But in Solomon's picture the melancholia is accentuated: "modern motives are clearer; and in a *Bacchus* by a young Hebrew painter, in the exhibition of the Royal Academy of 1868, there was a complete and very fascinating realisation of such a motive; the god of the bitterness of wine, 'of things too sweet'; the sea-water of the Lesbian grape become somewhat brackish in the cup." (GS 42). A Victorian treatment of the subject by an overtly homosexual artists is seen by Pater as less ambiguously sad, and the note of melancholy and sorrow here has hints of sinfulness and sexual deviance, as the words "brackish" and "Lesbian cup" suggest. Indeed, Solomon had been arrested in 1873 for "indecent exposure" and condemned to hard labour for sodomy; he was one of the first men who bore the brunt of the repression against homosexuals that was to break down Oscar Wilde and that could have ruined Pater as well.

Pater finds a continuity between this contemporary feeling of melancholy and its equivalent in Greek religion: it was specially incarnated in one avatar of the god, Dionysus Zagreus, whose name means "torn to pieces". Pater asks whether the Greek gods were already characterized by this feeling of melancholy¹¹:

Touched by the sentiment of this subtler, melancholy Dionysus, we may ask whether anything similar in feeling is to be actually found in the range of Greek ideas;—had some antitype of this fascinating figure any place in Greek religion? Yes; in a certain darker side of the double god of nature, obscured behind the brighter episodes of Thebes and Naxos, but never quite forgotten, something corresponding to this deeper, more refined idea, really existed—the conception of Dionysus Zagreus[.] (GS 42-43)

His answer lies in the existence of the cult of this sacrificial god who went through the pattern of suffering, dismemberment, death and resurrection and who seems to condense the theme of victimization. Furthermore, the legend of Dionysus Zagreus enables Pater to draw an analogy between Dionysus and Christ that revolves around that other aspect of the god—the suffering god who is "born again" (24) in the "Theban legend of Dionysus" (23). The association between Dionysus and Christ—Pater often evokes Dionysus's suffering and "sorrow" and his "mystical resurrection" (GS 43)¹²—takes on an ethical value:

If Dionysus, like Persephone, has his gloomy side, like her he has also a peculiar message for a certain number of refined minds, seeking, in the later days of Greek religion, such modifications of the old legend as may minister to ethical culture, to the perfecting of the moral nature. A type of second birth, from first to last, he opens, in his series of annual changes, for minds on the look-out for it, the hope of a possible analogy, between the resurrection of nature, and something else, as yet unrealised, reserved for human souls; and the beautiful, weeping creature, vexed by the wind, suffering, torn to pieces, and rejuvenescent again at last, like a tender shoot of living green out of the hardness and stony darkness of the earth, becomes an emblem or ideal of chastening and purification, and of final victory through suffering. (GS 49-50)

The fact that victory comes from suffering obviously associates this god with Christ: Pater wanted to insist that both religions believed in a resurrected god¹³. Still, he only refers to the "hope" for the "possible" equivalent to the "resurrection of nature" and the resurrection of the soul, which precludes any resolute adherence to Christianity. And he inscribes the belief in the immortality of the soul in a natural religion and a cult of nature, while conflating it with an aesthetics of male suffering. Pater also mentions that "this phase of the worship of Dionysus had its special development in the Orphic literature and mysteries" (GS 50). And the Greek mysteries evoke the medieval mysteries, an idea which is reinforced by Pater's assertion that the Orphic followers of the god remind one of the "mendicant orders in the Middle Ages" (GS 50). Their cult is that of "a tortured, persecuted, slain god—the suffering Dionysus" (GS 51). Rituals also point to this parallel between pagan cults and Christianity. Pater hints at the rite of mass: "It was in memory of [the rending to pieces of a divine child], that those who initiated into the Orphic mysteries tasted of the raw flesh of the sacrifice, and thereafter ate flesh

¹⁰ Pater wants to offer to "the modern student" the "complete physiognomy" of Dionysus, the "dual god of both summer and winter" (GS 43), characterized by his "gloomier elements" or his "darker side" (GS 45-46). He is both threatening and suffering, "the sorrowing Dionysus" subject to "melancholy" (GS 44) associated with infernal gods: "He is twofold then—a *Döppelgänger*; like Persephone, he belongs to two worlds, and has much in common with her, and a full share of those dark possibilities which, even apart from the story of the rape, belong to her. He is a Chthonian god, and, like all the children of the earth, has an element of sadness; like Hades himself, he is hollow and devouring, an eater of man's flesh." (GS 44) He is the Hunter, the wolf, and his followers make human sacrifices and rend to pieces King Pentheus—a story Pater related in his 1878 essay "The Bacchanals of Euripides" (GS 53-80).

¹¹ He already asserted in "Winckelmann" that Greek religion knew the feeling of sadness (R 159-163)

¹² He then picks up again this theme of "the double birth of the vine-god", who "is born once and again; his birth, first of fire, and afterwards of dew" (25-26).

¹³ For the continuation of this theme in *Marius the Epicurean*, see B.A. INMAN: "The Emergence of Pater's Marius Mentality 1874-77", *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* 27:2 (1984), 100-123.

no more” (*GS* 51). Notwithstanding the Christian figure of the divine child, Pater here associates Orphic practices with the Christian communion through this image of the ingestion of blood/wine and flesh/bread. Wine was already equated to the blood of Christ at the beginning of the essay:

Now, if the reader wishes to understand what the scope of the religion of Dionysus was to the Greeks who lived in it, all it represented to them by way of one clearly conceived yet complex symbol, let him reflect what the loss would be if all the effect and expression drawn from the imagery of the vine and the cup fell out of the whole body of existing poetry; how many fascinating trains of reflexion, what colour and substance would therewith have been deducted from it, filled as it is, apart from the more awful associations of the Christian ritual, apart from Galahad’s cup, with all the various symbolism of the fruit of the vine. (*GS* 10)

Pater thus seems to weave an evolution of myths and religions in which Christian symbols feed on pagan rituals—as if the Christian rite of the communion or the motif of the Holy Grail derived from that Greek cult of the vine and wine. For Pater clearly thinks that belief in the soul and immortality has naturally grown out of the early experience of human beings—out of those universal responses of man when faced with natural forces which he termed *animism*¹⁷.

In his essay “The Myth of Demeter and Persephone”, Pater stresses the Chthonian elements of this myth while subscribing to a similar idealizing impulse. And again, Pater “picks” and “modifies” in order to create his own myth, but here concentrating on certain elements that, far from reinscribing controversial thematics such as those associated with Dionysus, rather recall, instead, certain Victorian *topoi* of woman.

Pater takes up the idea that, like the beliefs and rituals of all human cultures, the Chthonic religion of Demeter arose from the relation between the primitive people and the earth; men’s impressions of the earth gave birth to the myth of the goddess Demeter: “And a large part of their experience—all, that is, that related to the earth in its changes, the growth and decay of all things born of it—was covered by the story of Demeter, the myth of the earth as a mother.” (*GS* 97). But what is significant about Pater’s explanation is that he links the earth and, in return, this female deity, to variability, danger, and decay; indeed,

they thought of the many-coloured earth as the garment of Demeter, as the great modern pantheist poet speaks of it as the “garment of God.” Its brooding fertility; the spring flowers breaking from its surface, the thinly disguised unhealthfulness of their heavy perfume, and of their chosen places of growth; the delicate, feminine, Prosperina-like motion of all growing things; its fruit, full of drowsy and poisonous, or fresh, reviving juices; its sinister caprices also, its droughts and sudden volcanic heats; the long delays of spring; its dumb sleep, so suddenly flung away; the sadness which insinuates itself into its languid luxuriance; all this grouped itself round the persons of Demeter and her circle. They could turn always to her, from the actual earth itself, in awful yet hopeful prayer, and a devout personal gratitude, and explain it through her, in its sorrow and its promise, its darkness and its helpfulness to man. (*GS* 97-98)

The changes affecting the earth are given a feminine character here, and so, woman is associated with the earth. Both are characterized by changeableness and duality. Since the earth is closely tied to a notion of femininity, womanhood is therefore associated with conflicting forces—richness, sullenness, instability, threat.

Demeter and her daughter Persephone are from the first characterized as dual goddesses locked in a pair, and this not only in the primitive, ‘mystical’ phase, but also in the ‘poetical’ phase represented by Homer’s work:

We have in [Homer], on the one hand, Demeter, as the perfectly fresh and blithe goddess of the fields, whose children, if she has them, must be as the perfectly discreet and peaceful, unravished Kore; on the other hand, we have Persephone, as the wholly terrible goddess of death, who brings to Ulysses the querulous shadows of the dead, and has the head of the gorgon Medusa in her keeping. And it is only when these two contrasted images have been brought into intimate relationship, only when Kore and Persephone have been identified, that the deeper mythology of Demeter begins. (*GS* 94-95)

The alternation of the seasons of summer and winter explains the duality as well as the interchangeability of the “the mother and the daughter” who, according to Pater, are “almost interchangeable” in the original myth (*GS* 108). The Chthonian character of these deities particularly attracts Pater—most of all Persephone’s “strange, dual being” (*GS* 95): “Homer, in the *Odyssey*, knows Persephone also, but not as Kore; only as the queen of the dead [...]—dreadful Persephone, the goddess of destruction and death [...]. She accomplishes men’s evil prayers; she is the mistress and manager of men’s shades, to which she can dispense a little more or less of life” (*GS* 94). The goddess of death is a mysterious woman, yet she conforms to a Romantic type. She almost announces those arch fatal women later cherished by Decadent or Symbolist literature and art. And the description of her face resonates with echoes of the description, in his *Renaissance* essay “Leonardo da Vinci”, of Mona Lisa, who had a “beauty, into which the soul with all its maladies has passed” (*R* 98): “Her shadowy eyes have gazed upon the fainter colouring of the under-world, and the tranquillity, born of it, has ‘passed into her face’” (*GS* 149). Pater evokes a sensible world of colours, sounds and sensations and uses a Wordsworthian idiom to convey the sense of a beauty that, however, partakes of the quietness of the underworld.

For Pater’s image of Persephone privileges the idea of death more than that of spring and rebirth. He is particularly touched by this image of a goddess bearing “decay” and “mystery” in her and he virtually turns her into a sort of Preraphaelite or *fin-de-siècle* icon. He evokes the legend of her descent into Hades—referring to a statue representing her and substituting her, *in passim*, to her mother Demeter— and adds that she is supposed to reconcile man with death:

¹⁷ He adopted the theory developed by Edward B. Tylor in his 1871 book *Primitive Culture* according to which religious systems originated in the human reason and developed from a natural religion, or ‘animism’; see INMAN (1990) 191-94.

[Persephone] is compact of sleep, and death, and flowers, but of narcotic flowers especially,—a *revenant*, who in the garden of Aidoneus has eaten of the pomegranate, and bears always the secret of decay in her, of return to the grave, in the mystery of those swallowed seeds; sometimes, in later work, holding in her hand the key of the great prison-house, but which unlocks all secrets also; (there, finally, or through oracles revealed in dreams:) sometimes, like Demeter, the poppy, emblem of sleep and death by its narcotic juices, of life and resurrection by its innumerable seeds, of the dreams, therefore, that may intervene between falling asleep and waking. Treated as it is in the Homeric hymn, and still more in this statue, the image of Persephone may be regarded as the result of many efforts to lift the old Chthonian gloom, still lingering on in heavier souls, concerning the grave, to connect it with impressions of dignity and beauty, and a certain sweetness even; it is meant to make men in love, or at least at peace, with death. (*GS* 148-49)

Pater seems eager here to render a deeply personal impression on death tinged with feelings of melancholy and beauty. To him, “the Greek Hades is, after all, but a quiet, twilight place” (*GS* 149). And quite revealingly, death and woman are linked. Pater studies some of the archaeological vestiges unearthed by C.T. Newton at Cnidus in 1858, among which a statuette of Persephone described as having “the air of a body bound about with grave-clothes”, whose “archaic hands and feet, and a certain stiffness in the folds of the drapery, give it something of a hieratic character” (*GS* 150). Such representations in Greek statuary of goddesses characterized by rigidity, shadows and introspection are particularly inspirational: “But quite of the school of Praxiteles is the general character of the composition; the graceful waving of the hair, the fine shadows of the little face, of the eyes and lips especially, like the shadows of a flower—a flower risen noiselessly from its dwelling in the dust—though still with that fulness or heaviness in the brow, as of sleepy people, which, in the delicate gradations of Greek sculpture, distinguish the infernal deities from their Olympian kindred” (*GS* 150). This, “to the modern observer”, or more probably to Pater, “may suggest a sort of kinship with the more chastened kind of Gothic work” (*GS* 150). The plastic embodiment of the female deity is therefore surrounded with feelings of doom, languor and melancholy. Still, he sometimes suggests that the goddess of death is also full of “a promise of life to come” (*GS* 93); there is indeed in her “a peculiar blending of those two contrasted aspects [...], death, resurrection, rejuvenescence”, which makes him Pater exclaim: “*Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in the dust!*” (*GS* 95)—a reference to Isaiah 26:6 that establishes a parallel between the idea of the resurrection of Persephone and the promise of the resurrection of the dead in the Bible. Paganism and Christianity are again associated in a very personal way.

But the interest for the Chthonian dimension of the myths of Demeter and Persephone collapses with the tendency to construct “a clearly-arrested outline, a tangible embodiment, which has solidified itself in the imagination of the people” (*GS* 102) and which, in turn, is highly problematical. Pater, on the one hand, insists on establishing a different view of Greek religion that accepts those unsavoury aspects that were generally ignored: “The worship of Demeter belongs to that older religion, nearer to the earth, which some have thought they could discern, behind the more definitely national mythology of Homer. She is the goddess of dark caves, and is not wholly free from monstrous form.” (*GS* 102) On the other hand, however, in his presentation of the third phase, Pater once again conforms to the idealizing and correcting tendency that is so typical of the Hellenism he had found too serene. When “the myth passes into the ethical phase, [...] the persons and the incidents of the poetical narrative are realised as abstract symbols, because intensely characteristic examples, of moral or spiritual conditions.” (*GS* 91) Consequently, as he puts it, “these strange persons—Demeter and Persephone—these marvellous incidents—the translation into Hades, the seeking of Demeter, the return of Persephone to her,—lend themselves to the elevation and correction of the sentiments of sorrow and awe, by the presentment to the senses and the imagination of an ideal expression of them.” (*GS* 92-93) Most of all, the contemplation of an ideal form leads to the elevation of the sentiments—an idea derived from Aristotle yet which Pater slightly alters. For, according to him, “ethical” pertains to right conduct only insofar as it is aesthetic and thus impacts the senses. And the third, “ethical” phase is precisely that of sculpture, which constitutes the perfect example of the Apollinian trend in Greek culture—the imposition of a form and an outline onto the formless and the centrifugal: “the myths of the Greek religion become parts of an ideal, visible embodiments of the susceptibilities and intuitions of the nobler kind of souls; and it is to this latest phase of mythological development that the highest Greek sculpture allies itself. Its function is to give visible aesthetic expression to the constituent parts of that ideal.” (*GS* 137) So, following the same process as that described in “A Study of Dionysus”, it is this specific aesthetic achievement, this culmination in the plastic embodiment of the myth, that is given prominence in Pater’s pattern of myth. Sculpture is ethical, form becomes associated with the marble of statues, and Pater again praises the serene and pure marmoreality he already admired when studying Winckelmann’s aesthetics. So Pater himself seems to subscribe to the idealizing wish to refine the gross or frightening elements of the myth and cult of Demeter:

For the myth of Demeter, like the Greek religion in general, had its unlovelier side, grotesque, unhellenic, unglorified by art, illustrated well enough by the description Pausanias gives us of his visit to the cave of the Black Demeter at Phigalia. In his time the image itself had vanished; but he tells us enough about it to enable us to realise its general characteristics, monstrous as the special legend with which it was connected, the black draperies, the horse’s head united to the woman’s body, with the carved reptiles creeping about it. If, with the thought of this gloomy image of our mother the earth, in our minds, we take up one of those coins which bear the image of Kore or Demeter, we shall better understand what the function of sculpture really was, in elevating and refining the religious conceptions of the Greeks. (*GS* 137-38)

Indeed, as Pater then remarks, sculpture has the power to purify and purge the image of the goddess from any wilder, darker or sadder elements that might perturb it: “The thought of Demeter is impressed here, with all the purity and proportion, the purged and dainty intelligence of the human countenance. The mystery of it is indeed

absent [...] But in his firm hold on the harmonies of the human face, the designer of this tranquil head of Demeter is on the one road to a command over the secrets of all imaginative pathos and mystery; though, in the perfect fairness and blitheness of his work, he might seem almost not to have known the incidents of her terrible story.” (GS 138-39). In the art of sculpture or of engraving, the purified, more serene and more joyful contour dispels all pathetic or awful impressions that her story might contain. Pater thus evacuates the darker aspects of the goddess thanks to a Hellenistic aesthetics that transposes these statues into the modern myth of Greek humanism and serenity: “In this living picture, we find still lingering on, at the foot of the beautiful Greek marbles, that phase of religious temper [...] which the art of sculpture, humanising and refining man’s conceptions of the unseen, tended constantly to do away. For the higher side of the Greek religion, thus humanised and refined by art, and elevated by it to the sense of beauty, is here also.” (GS 144)

However, unlike the statues of serene Greek athletes or male gods, characterized by a tranquil, bright Apollinian outline (but whose quietness and brightness, still, did not prevent the observer from feeling a certain Dionysiac fever), the representations of Demeter hold elements of fretfulness and tension, especially as he gradually reduces her to a particular image: “No nation, less aesthetically gifted than the Greeks, could have thus lightly thrown its mystical surmise and divination into images so clear and idyllic as those of the solemn goddess of the country, in whom the characteristics of the mother are expressed with so much tenderness” (GS 103). And in literature or sculpture, one precise image of Demeter stands out, according to Pater. Selecting from several literary versions of the myth, he translates a long passage drawn from the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. Strangely enough, he dwells on an episode, described as “an excellent example of the sentiment of pity in literature” (GS 114) although this version of the story does not contain it. Moreover, he does not deal with Homer’s version of the powerful goddess who can destroy the earth and who vies with the power of her brother Zeus in order to recover her daughter. Pater quotes from Ovid or Callimachus but only to retain scenes of pathos: episodes of her story that deal with her wanderings as an afflicted mother in search of her daughter or with her nursing of Demophoon, the child of her hosts. Pater thus makes her appear first of all as an object of pity. For what is important to him is to ascertain the idea that “Demeter cannot but seem the type of divine grief” (GS 93). When he turns to her representations in sculpture, he focuses on three statues found at Cnidus: one of Persephone, another of “Demeter enthroned” but, most of all, one described as “Demeter *Achaea*, Ceres *Deserta*, the *mater dolorosa* of the Greeks” (GS 144). He detects in it “a profound piteousness, an unrivalled pathos of expression” and “something of the pity of Michelangelo’s *mater dolorosa*, in the wasted form and marred countenance”. The unusual attitude of the goddess—she is “looking upwards”—induces Pater to associate her with the *Pietà*; indeed “the sorrows of her long wanderings seem to have passed into the marble” (GS 145) and he sees in this statue the “very type of the wandering woman”, “so human in her anguish” (GS 146). Pater asserts that any primitive element pertaining to the earth has disappeared from this image and that only a “humanised” sentiment has remained. But he merely reduces this to the pathetic and the sorrowful: “We have watched the growth of the merely personal sentiment in the story; and we may notice that, if this figure be indeed Demeter, then the conception of her has become wholly humanised; no trace of the primitive cosmical import of the myth, no colour or scent of the mystical earth, remains about it.” (GS 146) And when Demeter is represented as “enthroned as the glorified mother of all things”, Pater compares her to Leonardo da Vinci’s *Virgin of the Balances* and ascribes to her a “sentiment of maternity” which he, however, tinges with “a certain weight of over-thoughtfulness” (GS 147). So that Demeter is inseparable from an idea of maternity marked by pathos and dejection.

Pater creates his own selective myth of sorrow and motherhood for the purpose of reconciling the “worship of sorrow” found in both Greek and Christian religions. His own version of the ethical phase reinforces the theory that a similar religious temper was shared by all myth-makers, among whom he includes later artists or poets. This is why his Demeter recalls the Christian image of the Virgin. For example, Pater slightly alters Homer’s text in his translation of his Hymn when he says that Demeter does not wear a dark cloak but a “blue hood” (84) and a “blue robe” (86), blue being Mary’s colour. And he selects incidents that deal with Demeter’s maternal nursing functions and remind one of the iconography of the Madonna: “[the myth]’s subject is the weary woman, indeed, our Lady of Sorrows, the *mater dolorosa* of the ancient world, but with a certain latent reference, all through, to the mystical person of the earth. Her robe of dark blue is the raiment of her mourning, but also the blue robe of the earth in shadow, as we see it in Titian’s landscapes; her great age is the age of the immemorial earth; she becomes a nurse, therefore, holding Demophoon in her bosom” (GS 114). This analogy enables him to insist on the continuity between paganism and Christianity.

Another aspect of the goddess which Pater wishes to stress is the idea of domesticity. When evoking the remains of Cnidus, Pater gives a homely dimension to Demeter’s temple: he talks of it either as a “house” or a “small chapel” and insists on its having been “designed for private uses” (GS 141). In fact, his real aim is to “bring the every-day aspect of Greek religion home to us” (GS 142). Although he asserts other aspects of the goddess, among which the element of priesthood in her, it is this “domestic” character that touches him the most. “The conception of Demeter is throughout chiefly human, and even domestic, though never without a hieratic interest, because she is not a goddess only, but also a priestess.” (GS 148) This is why he ascribes any element of “awe” to her daughter Persephone or to the moon-goddess Hecate: “as sorrow is the characteristic sentiment of Demeter, so awe of Persephone” (GS 148). And in the conclusion to his essay, Pater again wonders about the relevance of those myths to contemporary man, while reasserting the feeling of domesticity and homeliness which he says he has found in them:

There is an attractiveness in these goddesses of the earth, akin to the influence of cool places, quiet houses, subdued light, tranquillising voices. What is there in this phase of ancient religion for us, at the present day? The myth of Demeter and Persephone, then, illustrates the power of the Greek religion as a religion of pure ideas—of conceptions, which having no link on historical fact, yet, because they arose naturally out of the spirit of man, and embodied, in adequate symbols, his deepest thoughts concerning the conditions of his physical and spiritual life, maintained their

hold through many changes, and are still not without a solemnising power even for the modern mind, which has once admitted them as recognised and habitual inhabitants; and, abiding thus for the elevation and purifying of our sentiments, long after the earlier and simpler races of their worshippers have passed away, they may be a pledge to us of the place in our culture, at once legitimate and possible, of the associations, the conceptions, the imagery, of Greek religious poetry in general, of the poetry of all religions. (*GS* 151)

Pater here weaves a narrative of continuity between Greek antiquity and European modernity in order to emphasize specific values. He takes up some of the themes already present in his “Study of Dionysus”, including the trans-historical relevance of myths, their lifting power over modern man and their poetical value. However, Pater seems to pander here to the Victorian *ethos* of domesticity and motherhood, to which one may add his predilection for the *topos* of the suffering woman, themes that are much opposed to those which he associated with Dionysus²⁸.

The aesthetic bias of his analysis of myth, which privileges the plastic, “ethical” phase of sculpture, is in line with the structuring theme, in his work, of the unearthing of statues or of bodies that function as metaphors of cultural rebirth. These corporeal figures exhumed from the earth are for Pater metaphors of the recovery of the spiritual and sensuous conditions of ancient Greece—the images of its cultural legacy to the modern world—and they are all masculine. However, Malley recently affirmed that “Pater’s protean Demeter emerges as a feminine trope for cultural continuity between modern Europe and ancient Greece, a trope that celebrates an empowered Demeter by placing her *in situ* within the domestic material culture she inhabited at Cnidus”²⁹. Thanks to these statues, Pater feminizes the trope of historical continuity. Yet, the aesthetic model of ideal beauty shown by the examples chosen by Pater is such that that cultural legacy is envisaged mainly through the idea of maternity and female sorrow—not to mention that of feminine gloom and threat. If Pater creates yet another nostalgic myth as was contemporary Hellenism—with his conception of a serene sculptural humanism rising out of the materials of the earth—his contribution to the “metanarrative of Hellenism” (Malley 105) is a highly gendered vision. For on the one hand, he uses the myth of Dionysus to strategically deploy an undercurrent transgressive discourse—the god who functions as the figure of cultural inheritance is embodied by a young, beautiful, androgynous man doomed to a horrid death³⁰. And yet, on the other hand, he appropriates the myth of Demeter and Persephone to introduce the figure of the sorrowful mother in his work—thereby (seemingly) espousing the regressive Victorian worship of the angel, or goddess, in the house.

One must revert to Pater’s pattern of cultural and religious evolution which originates in sensuous and physical experience: the birth of the religious spirit is indeed inseparable from the earth, which is also the basis—or mould—for cultural rebirth. Dowling talks here of Pater’s belief in “material immortality”³¹. In his “Conclusion”, he proposed a scientific, mechanical and physical philosophy of death; here, he places animism and natural religion as a possible alternative to that. In “Winckelmann”, he devalued Christianity whilst focusing on its pagan elements; now, he makes a parallel between the pagan and Christian religions which suggests the universality of values. Pater in fact now cautiously refrains from either adopting a staunch positivist doctrine or from conforming to an unequivocal Christian faith. The very notion of resurrection transmitted by those myths allows him to express his belief in material and cultural immortality and renaissance. Therefore, Pater can still put forth his former sensualist and aesthetic principles, which privileges a most controversial male figure—and this in a sometime coded way. But at the same time, he constructs another image of himself, no longer appearing as the unbelieving hedonist but as someone who has some sense of the religious spirit in him and who puts forward the consensual figure of the mother.

²⁸ For a diverging feminist reading of the myth of Demeter, see Lesley HIGGINS: “But Who Is ‘She’? Forms of Subjectivity in Walter Pater’s Writings”, *Nineteenth-Century Prose* 24:2 (Fall 1997), 37-65.

²⁹ Shawn MALLEY: “Disturbing Hellenism: Walter Pater, Charles Newton, and the Myth of Demeter and Persephone”, in L. Brake, L. Higgins, C. Williams (eds.): *Walter Pater: Transparencies of Desire. Op. cit.*, 90-106 (see 91).

³⁰ In his later fiction, and especially in the mythological portrait in which he stages male figures that are incarnations of Greek gods, Pater was to take up the theme of the beautiful man whose body is torn into pieces; Denys, Hyacinth, Carl, Emerald and Hippolytus are figures of change and cultural rebirth inspired from the legend of Zagreus, but their death reflects Pater’s sense of the impossibility of a continuity between the Greek and the modern mind. For the parallels between his studies of myths and his mythological portraits, see S. CONNOR: “Myth as Multiplicity in Walter Pater’s *Greek Studies* and ‘Denys L’Auxerrois’”, *Review of English Studies* 34 (1983), 28-42, or Maureen F. MORAN: “Pater’s Mythic Fiction: Gods in a Gilded Age”, in Laurel Brake and Ian Small (eds.): *Pater in the 1990s* (London & Greensboro: ELT Press, 1991) 169-188 and William F. SHUTER: *Rereading Walter Pater* (Cambridge Studies in 19th Century Literature, 1997).

³¹ She argues that Pater intends to “trace the moral life back to its source in the physical”, see DOWLING 200-21.